MEANINGS FOR CLOSENESS AND INTIMACY IN FRIENDSHIP

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ABSTRACT

Closeness and intimacy are fundamental, but poorly defined, concepts in the study of personal relationships. We sought to contribute to a more precise understanding of closeness and intimacy by first examining participants' meanings for closeness in friendships, and then by comparing meanings for closeness with participants' meanings for intimacy. In a self-report survey 270 college students were asked what made their same-sex and cross-sex friendships close and how closeness was expressed. Thirteen different meanings for closeness were derived. Individuals assigned an average of three meanings for closeness, with the most common being self-disclosure, support, shared interests and explicit expression of the value of the relationship. Native meanings for closeness differed relatively little across sexes and relational types. Respondents envisioned three possible relationships between closeness and intimacy. Just under half the respondents appeared to view them as equivalent terms, while the remaining respondents emphasized either qualitative or quantitative differences. The chief qualitative difference was that intimacy implied a romantic or sexual dimension to about one quarter of the respondents. Quantitative differences generally took the form of believing that an intimate relationship was a more intense form of a close relationship. Closeness appeared to be a richer, more inclusive term than intimacy. Respondents generated more meanings for it and thought of a greater variety of relationships as close. There were fewer sex differences in meanings for closeness than in meanings for intimacy.

KEY WORDS • closeness • friendship • intimacy • sex differences

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Closeness and intimacy are the two most common root terms in the study of personal relationships. Both concepts figure prominently in theories of relational development (e.g. Altman & Taylor, 1973; Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Kelley et al., 1983); are the subject of a host of measurement strategies and instruments (e.g. Berscheid et al., 1989; Dindia & Allen, 1992; Duck, 1991; Reis & Wheeber, 1991); and are focal points in discussions of gender and cultural difference (e.g. Jones & Dembo, 1989; Ting-Toomey, 1991; Wood, 1993). Yet the meaning of both concepts has remained elusive. Laments regarding the lack of consensus in the scholarly explication of closeness and intimacy, the unspecified relationship between scholarly definitions and laypersons' experience, and even the need to provide rigorous definitions of these terms stretch across the entire recent history of research on personal relationships (Berscheid et al., 1989; Monsour, 1992).

The goal of the present study is to contribute to a more precise understanding of closeness and intimacy by first examining participants' meanings for closeness in friendships, and then by comparing meanings for closeness to participants' meanings for intimacy. These latter comparisons involved several analyses focusing on sex differences in labeling relationships as intimate, on differences in participant meanings that go with differences in relational labeling, and on the differences between meanings for closeness in cross-sex friendships in our study and meanings for intimacy in a previous study by Monsour (1992).

It has become steadily more important to comprehend respondents' meanings for closeness and intimacy as the study of personal relationships has matured and its questions have become more precise. It is common, for example, to compare relationships that are labeled as close or intimate with those that are not. When differences in, say, language use or attribution processes are found, they are usually explained in terms of the effects of closeness or intimacy. But as Clark & Reis (1988) noted, the differences may actually be due to any number of other factors that distinguish the two groups of relationships. Use of different definitions of intimacy and closeness also make it difficult to compare studies (Helgeson et al., 1987). Moreover, without knowing participants' meanings it is difficult to interpret cultural differences in the expression of closeness and intimacy (Ting-Toomey, 1991). In short, without a way of categorizing participants' referents for these terms, it will be difficult to identify the processes that differentiate relationships and therefore to delineate the factors that produce systematic differences in behavior. All these needs are amplified by the increased variety of personal relationships brought about by changes in family structures, mobility and technology (Berscheid et al., 1989; Parks & Floyd, 1995).

Perhaps the most common approach to conceptualizing closeness is no approach at all. Berscheid et al.'s (1989: 64) claim still remains true today: 'Not only is there as yet no agreement about the merits or demerits of different close relationships classification schemes, but the matter is seldom discussed.' The term 'close relationship' often appears, for example, in titles of books or articles without explanation or definition
(e.g. Weber & Harvey, 1994). In such cases closeness is little more than a broad spatial metaphor for human affiliation.

Only somewhat more explicit are approaches that equate closeness with relational labels. Thus some relational types such as ‘best friend’ or ‘romantic partner’ are presumed to be close by definition. This approach suffers from a number of weaknesses including inconsistency in the way participants label their relationships, wide differences in the behaviors included in or subsumed by a given relational label, and little agreement among researchers as to where the line should be drawn between relational types that will be considered close and those that will not (Berscheid et al., 1989; Parks, 1976).

Approaches in which respondents simply rate closeness along a single scale anchored by phrases like ‘extremely close’ or ‘not close at all’ are also ambiguous. As Berscheid et al. (1989: 68) observed, ‘the yardstick the participant is using to make the discrimination is not yet known’. Although information about the participants’ meanings for closeness would alleviate this problem, we have not been able to locate any study in which native definitions for closeness were collected.

Still another approach has been to equate closeness with the level of positive affect or satisfaction. This approach has been critiqued extensively elsewhere (e.g. Kelley et al., 1983) and challenged by empirical findings. Studies of relationships that subjects designate as close, for example, do not reveal any consistent pattern of emotional expression. Negative emotions and positive emotions are both likely to be present (e.g. Berscheid et al., 1989), and to be simultaneously managed (Duck, 1994; Duck & Wood, 1995).

The final approach has been for researchers to provide a priori definitions for closeness. Perhaps the most widely adopted of these was articulated by Kelley et al. (1983) who defined a close relationship as one with a strong, frequent, varied and enduring pattern of interdependence. Increases in these four measures of interdependence would constitute increases in closeness by definition, although the wisdom of including longevity as a defining characteristic has been questioned in more recent work (Berscheid et al., 1989). While some researchers speculate that this definition captures native meanings (e.g. Clark & Reis, 1988), there are no data that address the correspondence between native and scholarly definitions.

Existing conceptualizations of closeness, therefore, suffer from a variety of difficulties that might be partly rectified by greater knowledge about the manner in which relational participants themselves define the term. Thus we first wanted to know (RQ1) what meanings people in same- and cross-sex friendships had for ‘closeness’. Previous researchers have found sex differences in ratings of closeness as well as for expectations in cross- and same-sex friendships (e.g. Berscheid et al., 1989; Parks, 1976). We asked (RQ2) if people perceived that same- and cross-sex friendships were close in different ways and, if they did, what they perceived the differences to be.

Approaches to conceptualizing intimacy have paralleled those for conceptualizing closeness. Some researchers have maintained that intimacy is
too complex to define (e.g. Davis, 1973). Others have relied on relational labels, or single-item indicators (e.g. Duck, 1991; Reis & Wheeler, 1991). Others have provided definitions for intimacy. Most of these definitions center on self-disclosure as a necessary, often sufficient, requirement for intimacy (Jourard, 1971). In early works intimacy was defined rather narrowly in terms of the exclusive sharing of activity and information (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Later researchers have treated intimacy as a broader term, but have generally retained an emphasis on verbal self-disclosure (e.g. Clark & Reis, 1988). For example, Reis and his colleagues have conceptualized intimacy as ‘a process in which one person expresses important self-relevant feelings and information to another, and as a result of the other’s response comes to feel known, validated (i.e., obtains confirmation of his or her world view and personal worth), and cared for’ (Clark & Reis, 1988: 628). Put another way, ‘intimacy involves feeling understood, validated, cared for, and closely connected with another person’ (Reis & Shaver, 1988: 385).

In the last decade traditional approaches to intimacy have been augmented by a series of studies on participant meanings. Helgeson et al. (1987), for example, asked subjects to describe times when they had felt particularly intimate with a member of the same sex and a member of the opposite sex. These native descriptions were then grouped into prototypical categories using cluster analysis. Although the results generally supported the importance of verbal self-disclosure, they also pointed to other components of intimacy. These included physical and sexual contact, sharing activities, and experiencing and expressing appreciation, affection or warmth. Respondents in another study described a specific ‘intimate experience’ (Register & Henley, 1992). Seven characteristics of intimacy were identified. These included the notion that intimacy was conveyed without words, involved full sensory engagement over time, strong body awareness, an opening of physical boundaries, and a sense of a personally transforming destiny. As useful as they were, these studies were limited because of the small samples and because it was not always clear what kind of relationships the respondents were describing.

These problems were addressed in a recent study by Monsour (1992) in which subjects were asked to report what intimacy meant to them and how it was expressed in same- and opposite-sex (platonic) friendships. An initial 24-category typology was winnowed out to seven when categories used by less than 10 percent of the subjects were eliminated. The most frequent meaning for intimacy was self-disclosure. Monsour interpreted self-disclosure broadly, including any revelation of information one participant was unlikely to know about the other as well as all general references to ‘sharing’ thoughts or feelings. The next most frequently used category was emotional expressiveness. This category included references to expressions of ‘emotional closeness, warmth, affection, caring, and compassion’. It was distinguished from self-disclosure by virtue of dealing with information that was already known rather than information being disclosed for the first time. References to intimacy in which the goal was
‘being there for one another’ or to ‘show concern’ or ‘give support’ made up a third important category: unconditional support. Other categories covered references to trust and to ‘doing things together’ in the form of shared activities. The remaining categories included physical contact to cover instances in which intimacy was experienced or expressed through non-sexual touching and sexual contact, an infrequent category, to cover sexual contact in otherwise generally platonic relationships. Monsour’s study pertains to the present study in two ways: it provides a successful model for examining native definitions and its results provide a point of comparison for native definitions of closeness and intimacy.

Closeness and intimacy are such fundamental and interrelated terms that their comparison is a tool for making our understanding of each more precise. Efforts to compare meanings for the terms are also essential because there is ambiguity and disagreement in the literature about how the terms are related. Some writers (e.g. Wood, 1993) appear to use them almost interchangeably, and other researchers use the terms together as part of the same research protocols (Berscheid et al., 1989). Still others suggest that intimacy is a narrower term and should be used only to describe relationships that ‘typically or frequently’ display the combination of self-expression and response that they define as intimacy (Clark & Reis, 1988). Although some researchers assert the everyday usage of the terms is the same, the question of whether people really view the terms as synonymous has yet to be addressed. Thus we wanted to know if the meanings associated with closeness differed in relationships that were labeled as both close and intimate and those that were labeled as close, but not intimate (RQ3). We also believed that the relationship between closeness and intimacy would be illuminated by the native distinctions people drew between the terms. Thus we asked what reasons people gave when explaining why they considered a friendship to be close, but not intimate (RQ4).

The comparison of native definitions of closeness and intimacy also provides a tool for examining sex and gender differences in personal relationships and for speaking to the unfolding debate regarding ideological influences in the study of personal relationships. Although ideological influences in the study of personal relationships have been recognized for some time (e.g. Parks, 1982), they have only recently become widely recognized and debated. Chief among these debates is the debate surrounding the feminization of intimacy.

The feminine model of intimacy has roots extending at least as far back as Parsons & Bales’s (1955) characterization of men’s interpersonal behavior as instrumental and women’s interpersonal behavior as affective. By the early 1980s it was generally assumed that men’s behavior emphasized shared instrumental activities, while women’s behavior prioritized disclosure and talk about feelings (for reviews see Swain, 1989; Wood, 1993; Wood & Inman, 1993). Men’s behavior in personal relationships was routinely judged to be less intimate because of its supposedly lower levels of verbal self-disclosure and emotional support (e.g. Griffin & Sparks, 1990; Hays, 1984).
The actual empirical support for such sharp sex differences in interpersonal behavior has always been scant (see Canary & Hause, 1993; Dindia & Allen, 1992; Duck & Wright, 1993). While there are differences, researchers have generally exaggerated their importance and magnitude (Wright, 1988). With the rise of cultural feminism and the popularity of works like Gilligan’s (1982) study of sex differences in moral judgment, stereotypically feminine ways of relating became magnified and valorized (e.g. Parks, 1995; Tavris, 1992). By the mid-1980s popular and academic writers argued either implicitly or explicitly that only women were capable of genuine intimacy (e.g. Belenky et al., 1986). Male ways of expressing intimacy were devalued. In what Swain (1989) called the ‘male deficit approach’ men are judged to be inexpressive, threatened by, unskilled at, or just plain incapable of ‘real intimacy’ and are thus doomed to poor quality relationships (e.g. Williams, 1985).

These ideological positions have implications for the empirical relationship between closeness and intimacy. If the concept of intimacy has indeed become feminized, there should be sex differences in the willingness to label a close relationship as ‘intimate’. Thus, women should be more likely than men to describe their close cross- and same-sex friendships as ‘intimate’ (H1). More specifically, men should be more likely to label their close cross-sex friendships as ‘intimate’ than their close same-sex friendships (H2). Because sex differences in intimacy in friendships may be more strongly correlated with gender role than with biological sex (Jones & Dembo, 1989), we also examined gender role differences in intimacy labeling. We hypothesized that those who adopt a more masculine gender role orientation should be less likely to describe their close cross- and same-sex friendships as ‘intimate’ (H3). Conversely, those who adopt a more feminine gender-role orientation should be more likely to describe their close cross- and same-sex friendships as ‘intimate’ (H4).

If intimacy has become feminized, descriptions of intimacy should also be narrower and contain sharper sex differences than descriptions based on a less ‘gendered’ term like closeness. One way to evaluate this speculation is to compare our findings on closeness to Monsour’s (1992) findings on intimacy. Although the comparison is tentative, the studies do parallel one another and there is heuristic value in comparing them. We believe that describing relationships in terms of closeness will generate a greater number of categories than will describing relationships in terms of intimacy (H5). Respondents of both sexes also should use a greater number of categories to describe closeness in their cross- and same-sex friends than will those who are describing intimacy in their cross- and same-sex friendships (H6). Finally, there should be fewer sex differences in descriptions of closeness than in descriptions of intimacy in cross- and same-sex friendships (H7).

**Method**

*Respondents* were 270 students at a university on the west coast of the USA. There were slightly more females (56%) than males (44%) in the sample. Ages
ranged from 17 to 55, but just over 80 percent of the respondents were between 18 and 21 years of age ($M = 20.96$ years, $SD = 6.79$). Most subjects described themselves as single and not dating anyone steadily (56%) or as single but dating someone steadily (38%). The remaining subjects were either married or cohabiting (4%) or were divorced or separated (2%). (10 students did not specify sex.)

Respondents were randomly assigned to report either on a same-sex or an opposite-sex (platonic) friendship. The duration of these relationships varied widely from less than a month to over 20 years ($M = 45.39$ months, $SD = 44.02$). More relationships, however, were of shorter than longer duration: 41 percent were two years or less in duration and an additional 35 percent were of 2 to 5 years in duration. The relationships generally involved frequent contact. Respondents reported that they had communicated with the friend on an average of almost 6 out of the previous 14 days ($M = 5.63$, $SD = 4.68$) and that they had spent approximately 16 percent of their free time during the last 2 weeks with the friend ($M = 15.95\%$, $SD = 20.53$). Respondents were evenly split over whether they labeled their friendship as intimate (48.7%) or non-intimate (51.3%).

Data were collected with a survey. Respondents were instructed to report either on a same-sex or opposite-sex friendship. Following Monsour (1992), subjects were asked to report on a ‘good’ friend, rather than on a casual acquaintance or a best friend.

Meanings for closeness were gathered with two open-ended questions: (1) ‘What does being “close” in this friendship mean to you?’ and (2) ‘In what ways, if any, does closeness differ in your same- and opposite-sex (platonic) friendships?’ Subjects were also asked to indicate whether they would use the term ‘intimate’ to describe their target friendships. Subjects who indicated they would not label their friendship as intimate were also asked to describe exactly why they would not use the term ‘intimate’ to describe the relationship. Finally, subjects were asked to complete the Bem Sex Role Inventory (Bem, 1974).

Because we thought that meanings for ‘closeness’ and ‘intimacy’ might differ in qualitative ways, as well as quantitative ways, we adopted a grounded theory perspective and developed a new coding scheme rather than coding our open-ended data using Monsour’s (1992) previous typology for intimacy. Coding schemes were also developed for differences in closeness between same-sex and opposite-sex friendships and for the reasons respondents gave for not labeling some close friendships as intimate. In each case the development of the coding scheme was done by coders who were blind to the specific research questions and hypotheses.

A review of approximately half of the questionnaires generated a typology of 15 different meanings for closeness. Following Monsour, the final analyses included only those categories which were used by at least 10 percent of the respondents in one or more friendship types, a procedure that reduced the number of categories from 15 to 13. A subset (15%) of the questionnaires was then coded independently by two coders to establish reliability. The average interrater reliability ($kappa$) across the 13 categories was .75, with individual $kappas$ ranging from .50 to 1.00. The categories are listed and briefly described in Table 1.

A second open-ended question asked subjects to describe the ways, if any, in which closeness differed in their same-sex and opposite-sex friendships. An
initial typology of 13 categories was developed from a review of approximately half of the surveys. Only five categories, however, were used by more than 10 percent of the respondents. These final five categories were tested for reliability with a subset (15%) of the total sample. The interrater reliabilities ranged from .30 to 1.00, while the average kappa across categories was .77. The categories themselves are presented in Table 2.

The final open-ended material was generated by respondents who said that their friendship was close, but not intimate. Categories of reasons were identified in a review of half of the surveys. A total of six categories was identified, although only three were used by more than 10 percent of the respondents. Because this part of the study was more exploratory, all six types of reasons were retained for their potential heuristic value. The average interrater reliability across these categories was .93, with individual kappas ranging from .83 to 1.00. The categories are listed and described in Table 3.

Results

Meanings for closeness ran the gamut of communicative behaviors, affects, interpersonal states and structural characteristics. Table 1 presents our typology of closeness definitions as well as the proportion of the total sample, men, women, same-sex friends, and opposite-sex friends citing each definition. The frequency of definitional usage is compared by sex and relational type using the z-test for proportional differences, and significant comparisons are noted below.

The predominant definition of closeness was self-disclosure. Over two-thirds (71%) of the respondents cited self-disclosure as a defining characteristic of closeness in their friendship, and it was mentioned nearly twice as often as the next most frequently used category (Table 1). Although self-disclosure was the most frequently given definition for closeness by both sexes, women used it more often than men (76.2% vs 63.7%, z = 2.16, p < .05).

The next most frequently cited definition of closeness involved the provision of help and support. This category included both emotional and instrumental support as well as generalized statements regarding supportiveness. Just over one third of the total sample (37.2%) drew on this definition. Women, however, were more likely to use this definition than men (44.9% vs 27.4%, z = 2.57, p < .05). A related category involved giving specific advice and perspective on matters of interest. While this category was not used frequently (9.6%) in the total sample, it was cited over four times more often by women than by men (14.3% vs 3.5%, z = 2.75, p < .01).

Many respondents, though a minority (30.7%), characterized closeness in terms of shared interests and activities. These descriptions included shared activities such as hobbies or sports, shared political and spiritual concerns, shared attitudes and preferences, as well as common backgrounds. Men were somewhat more likely than women (34.5% vs 27.9%) to define closeness in this way, but the difference was non-significant.

A larger sex difference emerged in the next category, relational expression. Respondents using this category said that they knew their friendship was close because they explicitly expressed that fact to one another using words or nonverbal expressions. Just under one-third of the total sample (30.3%) drew on this definition, but women cited it nearly twice as often as men (37.4% vs 21.2%, z = 2.67, p < .01). Feelings of caring, warmth, liking and affection do
not, of course, need to be explicitly expressed in order to contribute to closeness. These generalized affective states were contained in our 'global affect' category, which was used in 13.0 percent of the respondents. Men and women did not differ in their use of this category.

Nearly a quarter of the respondents (22.6%) characterized closeness in terms of the simple comfort and ease of interaction they share with their friends. Men and women cited this definition with almost equal frequency (24.8% vs 20.4%).

Four types of definitions involved specific judgments made about the other or the relationship. These were trust (20.3%), acceptance (19.2%), understanding (11.9%) and respect (6.5%).

The remaining definitions of closeness involved more structural features of friendships. Some respondents (13.4%) defined closeness in terms of the frequency of interaction with their friends. Others (10.0%) cited the simple length of duration of their friendship as a basis of closeness. There were no significant sex differences in the use of these categories.

We also determined if meanings for closeness varied according to the sex configuration of the friendship. This research question was addressed in two ways. First, we compared the frequency of usage for each definition of closeness by relational type (same-sex or opposite-sex), using the z-test for proportional differences. The overall pattern, indicated in Table 1, was one of striking similarity. Significant differences emerged in only two definitions of closeness. Opposite-sex friends were significantly more likely to cite the provision of advice and perspective as a meaning for closeness than were same-sex friends (13.4% vs 6.0%, z = 1.76, p < .05). Same-sex friends were more likely to say that mutual respect was a meaning for closeness than were friends of the opposite sex (9.7% vs 3.1%, z = 1.76, p < .05).

Participants also described the ways, if any, that closeness differed in their same- and opposite-sex (platonic) friendships. Responses were coded into 13 categories, only five of which were used by at least 10 percent of the respondents (Table 2).

Over a third (35.4%) of respondents reported that it was simply easier to relate to same-sex friends than opposite-sex friends. Responses in this category indicated that same-sex friendships were inherently closer or that subjects simply felt more comfortable around their friends of the same sex. This category was used by 42.2% of women and 26.9% of men, a difference that is significant (z = 2.47, p < .05). The opposite reasoning was also expressed, though less often (14.0%), when respondents said that it was inherently easier to relate to opposite-sex friends. This response was given by 13.3 percent of women and 14.8 percent of men, a non-significant difference (z = .82, NS).

The second most popular response was that subjects discussed different things with their same- and opposite-sex friends. This category was used by 33.3 percent of the respondents. Responses in the next category indicated that closeness was different because opposite-sex friends must deal with sexual issues that do not confront same-sex friends. This category was cited by 17.3 percent of participants, with most responses suggesting that same-sex friendships were closer because they were not 'tainted' by the possibility of turning romantic. Although both of these categories were cited more often by women, there were no significant sex differences in their use. Finally, 8.2 percent of our respondents indicated that closeness differed because they undertook different activities with their same- and opposite-sex friends. This response was signifi-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total (N = 270)</th>
<th>Male (n = 113)</th>
<th>Female (n = 147)</th>
<th>Same-sex friend (n = 134)</th>
<th>Cross-sex friend (n = 127)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-disclosure:</strong> references to talking, disclosing, ‘telling each other everything’, sharing, or the ability to do these things.</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>76.2*</td>
<td>65.7</td>
<td>76.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Help and support:</strong> references to emotional support, instrumental support, ‘helping each other out’, ‘being there for each other’, or providing other helpful services.</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>44.9*</td>
<td>40.3</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shared interests:</strong> references to common backgrounds, interests, tastes, values, beliefs, or activities.</td>
<td>30.7</td>
<td>34.5</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>35.8</td>
<td>25.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relational expression:</strong> references to the explicit verbal or non-verbal expression of closeness or of the value of the relationships.</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>21.2</td>
<td>37.4**</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>33.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Comfort and ease:</strong> references to getting along well, having fun together, being comfortable around each other, interacting easily.</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>20.9</td>
<td>24.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trust:</strong> references to trusting or confiding in each other, sharing or keeping secrets.</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>22.4</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>20.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Acceptance:</strong> references to being mutually accepting, non-judgmental, no need to impress other.</td>
<td>19.2</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>21.8</td>
<td>20.1</td>
<td>18.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frequent interaction:</strong> references to closeness as a product of the amount or frequency of relational interaction.</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Global affect:</strong> references to closeness as a generalized affective state, such as warmth, caring, liking or loving.</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>15.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TABLE 1 (continued)

Understanding: references to special insight, empathy or understanding.
Length of relationship: references to relational duration.
Advice and perspective: references to giving good advice, sharing viewpoints, valuing each other’s opinions.
Respect: references to mutual respect or admiration.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Same-sex friend</th>
<th>Cross-sex friend</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N = 243)</td>
<td>(n = 108)</td>
<td>(n = 135)</td>
<td>(n = 124)</td>
<td>(n = 119)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

11.9  12.4  11.6  9.7  14.2
10.0  7.1  12.2  9.7  10.2
9.6  3.5  14.3**  6.0  13.4*
6.5  5.3  7.5  9.7  3.1*

* z-test significant at \(p < .05\); ** z-test significant at \(p < .01\).

TABLE 2
Comparisons by gender and relationship type for how closeness differs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total ((N = 243))</th>
<th>Male ((n = 108))</th>
<th>Female ((n = 135))</th>
<th>Same-sex friend ((n = 124))</th>
<th>Cross-sex friend ((n = 119))</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ease of relating to same sex: indications that subjects feel closer to their same-sex friends, feel better understood by them, find it more difficult to get close to friends of the opposite sex.</td>
<td>35.4 26.9 42.2*</td>
<td>35.5 35.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discuss different things: references to talking about different issues with same-sex and cross-sex friends.</td>
<td>33.3 30.6 35.6</td>
<td>29.0 37.8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual issues: references to cross-sex friendships being affected by issues of flirting, sexual attraction, or sexual interaction in ways that same-sex friendships usually are not.</td>
<td>17.3 13.9 20.0</td>
<td>18.5 16.0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ease of relating to opposite sex: indications that subjects feel closer to their opposite-sex friends, feel better understood by them, find it more difficult to get close to friends of the same sex.</td>
<td>14.0 14.8 13.3</td>
<td>10.5 17.6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Different activities: references to doing different types of activities with same-sex and cross-sex friends.</td>
<td>8.2 13.9 3.7**</td>
<td>8.1 8.4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* z-test significant at \(p < .05\); ** z-test significant at \(p < .01\).
cantly more popular among men than among women (13.9% vs 3.7%, \( z = 2.91, p < .01 \)).

We asked respondents to indicate whether they would use the word ‘intimate’ to describe the close friendship on which they were reporting. Overall, respondents were almost evenly split as to whether they would (48.7%) or would not (51.3%) call their friendship intimate. The question of whether meanings for closeness would differ between relationships that respondents had labeled as intimate and those that had not been labeled as intimate was also addressed.

Significant differences emerged in four categories. Those who described their friendship as intimate were more likely to define closeness as a function of the length of their relationship than were those who described their friendship as close but not intimate (14.8% vs 5.3%, \( \chi^2 = 6.47, \) d.f. = 1, \( p = .01 \)). Relational expression was also a more common meaning for closeness in friendships described as intimate than in those that were described as not intimate (41.4% vs 18.3%, \( \chi^2 = 16.52, \) d.f. = 1, \( p < .0001 \)). Similarly, respondents who said their friendships were intimate were more likely to define closeness as mutual acceptance (24.2% vs 13.7%, \( \chi^2 = 4.63, \) d.f. = 1, \( p < .05 \)), and as global affect (17.2% vs 8.4%, \( \chi^2 = 4.50, \) d.f. = 1, \( p < .05 \)), than were those whose friendships were described as close but not intimate.

We also asked those who indicated their friendship was not intimate to explain why it was not intimate. When responses were analyzed, six categories emerged and all were retained (Table 3). Frequency of usage was compared for men and women, and same- and opposite-sex friends, but no significant differences were identified.

Over half (50.4%) of those who said their friendships were not intimate indicated that they reserved the term ‘intimacy’ for sexual or romantic relationships. Many suggested that their friendship could be intimate only if there were a sexual component to it; they felt the term ‘intimacy’ was inappropriate for a platonic relationship.

In the next most popular category, 26.7 percent of the respondents indicated that theirs was not an intimate friendship because they did not engage in sufficiently deep, personal and frequent self-disclosure. In a related category, 25.9 percent of respondents defined intimacy as a graduated state of closeness. Their friendships were close, but were simply not close enough to be considered intimate.

The remaining three categories were used with substantially less frequency. Around 6 percent of respondents indicated that their friendships were not intimate because they did not engage in non-sexual physically affectionate behaviors, such as hugging. Nearly the same number (5.2%) reported that they were not intimate with their target friend because they did not see or interact with that person frequently enough. Still fewer (2.2%) indicated that they do not expect intimacy from their target friendships because their intimacy needs are met by others in their lives.

Our first hypothesis proposed that women would be more likely than men to describe their friendships as ‘intimate’. Although more women than men labeled their friendships as ‘intimate’ (56.4% vs 43.6%), this difference was not significant (\( \chi^2 = .44, \) d.f. = 1, NS) and the hypothesis was not supported. We also hypothesized that men would be more likely to label their close cross-sex friendships than their close same-sex friendships as ‘intimate’. Men were more likely to label their cross-sex friendships than their same-sex friendships
TABLE 3
Comparisons by gender and relationship type for why friendship is not intimate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total (N = 135)</th>
<th>Male (n = 61)</th>
<th>Female (n = 74)</th>
<th>Same-sex friend (n = 70)</th>
<th>Cross-sex friend (n = 65)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy = sex or romance:</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>50.8</td>
<td>49.3</td>
<td>52.9</td>
<td>47.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited self-disclosure:</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>19.7</td>
<td>32.9</td>
<td>25.7</td>
<td>27.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not close enough:</td>
<td>25.9</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>27.4</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No non-sexual physical affection:</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interaction not frequent enough:</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>2.9</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intimacy needs met elsewhere:</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

as intimate, but the difference was not significant (56.0% vs 44.0%, $\chi^2 = .10$, d.f. = 1, NS) and hypothesis two was not supported.

Hypotheses three and four examined whether gender-role orientations might be linked to labeling friendships as intimate. These hypotheses were not supported. People who labeled their friendship as ‘intimate’ did not differ from those who did not in terms of either Bem’s (1974) masculine gender-role scale ($t = .17$, d.f. = 258, NS) or her feminine gender-role scale ($t = 1.62$, d.f. = 254, NS). Recent criticisms of the Bem scale (Wood, 1995) raise the possibility
that these results might reflect scale limitations as much as a true lack of gender role differences in labeling intimacy.

Hypotheses five through seven addressed the relationship between meanings for closeness and meanings for intimacy. Analyses involved direct comparison of our findings with those presented by Monsour (1992).

Specifically, we hypothesized that a typology of definitions of closeness would contain more categories than a typology of definitions of intimacy. Testing this hypothesis involved a comparison of our typology with Monsour's (1992) typology of intimacy definitions. Although Monsour's typology began with 27 categories, only seven were used by 10 percent or more of the respondents in any subgroup. When we applied this same criterion of usage to our typology, we found that 13 categories were used by 10 percent or more of the respondents in any subgroup. Thus our fifth hypothesis was supported: a typology of relational bonds based on closeness yielded almost twice as many categories as one based on intimacy.

Hypothesis six proposed that respondents would use a greater number of categories (i.e. report a greater number of meanings) if they were describing 'closeness' in their friendships than if they were describing 'intimacy'. Table 4 presents the distributions and descriptive statistics for the number of meanings for closeness. Overall, our respondents provided just over three meanings for closeness ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.29$).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of meanings</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>MCSF</th>
<th>MSSF</th>
<th>FCSF</th>
<th>FSSF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Six</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seven</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>2.71</td>
<td>2.61</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SD</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1.11</td>
<td>1.34</td>
<td>1.22</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Total $N = 260$; $n$ for males $= 113$; $n$ for females $= 147$; MCSF = males in cross-sex friendships ($n = 62$); MSSF = males in same-sex friendships ($n = 51$); FCSF = females in cross-sex friendships ($n = 64$); FSSF = females in same-sex friendships ($n = 83$).

The results contained in Table 4 can be compared directly with the results provided by Monsour (1992: 284) in his Table 1 (see Table 5). Both tables show the distributions of definitions, ours for closeness, his for intimacy. Because Monsour's table provides distributions for the numbers of definitions respondents provided, we were able to reconstruct his raw data, combine it with ours, and directly test our sixth hypothesis. We found that respondents provided more definitions of closeness in our data ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 1.29$) than
they did for intimacy in Monsour’s data \((M = 2.30, \text{SD} = 1.15\)). This difference was significant \((t = 7.58, \text{d.f.} = 568, p < .0001\)). We also tested for differences in the number of meanings provided for each of the four subgroups within the samples of the two studies: same-sex male, same-sex female, cross-

### Table 5

**Distribution of meanings for intimacy provided in Monsour’s (1992) Table 1 (%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of meanings</th>
<th>MCSF</th>
<th>MSSF</th>
<th>FCSF</th>
<th>FSSF</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>33.0</td>
<td>41.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>32.0</td>
<td>37.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>26.0</td>
<td>23.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>11.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Five</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>6.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. MCSF = males in cross-sex friendships \((n = 50)\); MSSF = males in same-sex friendships \((n = 48)\); FCSF = females in cross-sex friendships \((n = 104)\); FSSF = females in same-sex friendships \((n = 108)\).*

sex male and cross-sex female. One-tailed \(t\)-tests were used for each comparison. We found that men reporting on same-sex friendships drew on more definitions of closeness \((M = 2.60, \text{SD} = 96)\) than definitions of intimacy \((M = 1.96, \text{SD} = 1.01)\). This difference between reports of closeness and intimacy was significant \((t = 3.29, \text{d.f.} = 97, p < .0001)\). Women reporting on same-sex friendships also provided more definitions of closeness \((M = 3.30, \text{SD} = 1.27)\) than intimacy \((M = 2.39, \text{SD} = 1.13)\), \((t = 5.26, \text{d.f.} = 189, p < .0001)\). Men reporting on cross-sex friendships provided more definitions for closeness \((M = 2.74, \text{SD} = 1.21)\) than for intimacy \((M = 2.30, \text{SD} = 1.24)\), \((t = 1.87, \text{d.f.} = 109, p < .05)\). Similarly, women reporting on cross-sex friendships provided more definitions for closeness \((M = 3.50, \text{SD} = 1.44)\) than for intimacy \((M = 2.38, \text{SD} = 1.16)\), \((t = 5.57, \text{d.f.} = 166, p < .0001)\). Our sixth hypothesis was therefore supported in both the overall sample and in each of the four combinations of sex and relational type. Although the absolute numerical differences were not large, they were all statistically significant and, moreover, the effect sizes (Cohen, 1977) for these differences were generally medium to large, ranging from just over one third to nearly a whole standard deviation and averaging approximately two-thirds of a standard deviation (mean \(d = .64)\). People who were asked to define their friendships in terms of closeness provided a greater number of definitions than did people who were asked to define their friendships in terms of intimacy.

Finally, we hypothesized that there would be fewer sex differences in descriptions of closeness than in descriptions of intimacy. When we compared the percentages of people using each category of our closeness typology across each of the four combinations of sex and relationship type (see Table 6), only five of the 52 tests (9.6%) revealed significant differences. Two of these were in the category of ‘help and support’. Men cited help and support as a definition of closeness more often in their same-sex friendships (37.3%) than in their cross-sex friendships (19.4%), \(z = 2.00, < .05\). Interestingly, women were much more likely to cite help and support as a meaning for closeness in their
**TABLE 6**
Comparisons by relationship type for definitions of closeness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>MSSF (n = 51)</th>
<th>MCSF (n = 62)</th>
<th>FSSF (n = 83)</th>
<th>FCSF (n = 64)</th>
<th>MCSF (n = 62)</th>
<th>FCSF (n = 64)</th>
<th>MSSF (n = 51)</th>
<th>FSSF (n = 83)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Self disclosure</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>71.1</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>82.8</td>
<td>56.9</td>
<td>71.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help and support</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>*19.4</td>
<td>42.4</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>**48.4</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>42.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shared interests</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>30.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relational expression</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>25.8</td>
<td>40.6</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>*34.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort and ease</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>29.0</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>17.7</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>21.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>25.3</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>19.4</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>25.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent interaction</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>19.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Global affect</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of relationship</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>10.9</td>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advice and perspective</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>8.4</td>
<td>*21.9</td>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>**21.9</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>3.2</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* *-test significant at p < .05; **-test significant at p < .01.
cross-sex friendships than were men (48.4% vs 19.4%, \( z = 3.63, p < .01 \)). Women viewed relational expression as a basis for closeness more often in their same-sex friendships than did men in their same-sex friendships (34.9% vs 15.7%, \( z = 2.38, p < .05 \)). The remaining differences were all centered in the 'advice and perspective' category. Women used this category more often to describe their cross-sex friendships than their same-sex friendship (21.9% vs 8.4%, \( z = 2.33, p < .05 \)). Finally, women used this category more often to describe their cross-sex friendships than did men to describe their cross-sex friendships (21.9% vs 4.8%, \( z = 2.83, p < .01 \)).

A comparison of these results with Monsour's Table 2 (1992: 286) reveals that there were more significant sex differences in his typology of intimacy categories than in our typology of closeness categories. While 38.1 percent (8 of 21) of his sex difference tests were significant, only 9.6 percent (5 of 52) of ours were. In other words, approximately four times as many sex differences emerged in comparisons of the intimacy categories as in comparisons of the closeness categories. Thus, hypothesis seven was supported.

**Discussion**

Theoretical statements about personal relationships can be only as precise as the concepts they contain. Fundamental terms like closeness and intimacy have suffered from a lack of conceptual specification. Our first goal, therefore, was to provide a framework for thinking about native definitions of closeness. Equipped with a grounded typology of meanings for closeness, we could then compare closeness and intimacy and explore sex and gender differences in the use and meaning of these terms.

We were able to identify 13 common native definitions for closeness in friendship. Self-disclosure was by far the most common referent for closeness. It was used by over 70 percent of the respondents, almost twice as often as the next most frequent meaning. Three other meanings were used by one third or nearly one third of the respondents. These were the provision of help and support, the sharing of interests and characteristics, and the explicit communication of feelings of closeness. Along with the less frequently used categories, these meanings speak to several of the ambiguities in previous approaches to closeness. The fact that most native meanings fell into a rather small number of categories implies that there is some consensus in native definitions of closeness in friendship and that there is no need to leave the term either undefined or limited to an unspecified spatial metaphor. These categories provide the 'yardstick' that previous researchers have found missing in global measures of closeness (Berscheid et al., 1989). They also provide a tool for categorizing the meanings that people associate with closeness across different relational types. Our study was restricted to friendship, but it would be useful to examine meanings for closeness in a wider range of relationships.

The grounded typology developed in this study also provides a reference point for evaluating definitions of closeness developed by previous theorists. Closeness has, for example, sometimes been defined in terms of a
pattern of strong, frequent, varied and enduring interdependence (Kelley et al., 1983; Berscheid et al. 1989). Although there is certainly no requirement that this definition match native definitions, some researchers (e.g. Clark & Reis, 1988) have assumed that it would be mirrored in respondents' meanings for closeness. The results of this study did not generally support that belief. Frequency and longevity did appear among the native definitions for closeness, but each dimension was used by only about 10 percent of our respondents. Relational breadth or variety did not appear among our definitions. Nor did our respondents equate closeness with interdependence in any direct fashion. Instead, they tended to focus on factors that at best might be considered indirect indicators of interdependence, such as shared interests, trust, ease of interaction and acceptance.

Native meanings for closeness differed relatively little across the sexes and friendship types. Sex differences were found for only four of the 13 meanings. Women were more likely than men to define closeness in terms of self-disclosure, the ease or comfort of interaction, the provision of help and support, and the provision of advice and perspective. Same-sex and cross-sex friendships differed on only two of the less frequently used dimensions of the closeness typology. Closeness in same-sex friendships was more likely to be defined in terms of respect, while closeness in cross-sex friendships was more likely to be defined in terms of providing advice and perspective.

One way to compare the concepts of closeness and intimacy is to compare the meanings for closeness derived from this study with the meanings for intimacy that emerged in a parallel study by Monsour (1992). Definitions of closeness in this study encompassed nearly all of the themes that emerged in Monsour's study of intimacy. Self-disclosure, for example, was the most commonly reported definition in both studies. Emotional expressiveness also emerged as a meaning for both terms. It was reflected in at least two of our categories for definitions of closeness (‘relational expression’ and ‘global affect’). Supportiveness and trust also emerged as essential features of both closeness and intimacy.

In spite of these similarities, there were also striking differences between definitions of intimacy and closeness. The definitions of intimacy identified by Monsour (1992), for instance, contained themes emphasizing the importance of physical and sexual contact, while these specific definitions were absent when people were asked to provide definitions of closeness. Acceptance, understanding and the provision of advice and perspective emerged as separate categories in definitions of closeness, but not in definitions of intimacy. Moreover, asking people to define relational bonds in terms of closeness uncovered the importance of two more structural factors that did not emerge in Monsour's study of intimacy. These were the sheer frequency of interaction and the simple length or duration of the relationship. Thus, while closeness and intimacy share conceptual space, native definitions for closeness appear to include a richer, more varied set of meanings.

This richness, as well as the varying levels of abstraction in respondents'
comments, created challenges for the development of a workable coding scheme. Several different schemes, using different numbers of categories, were attempted before a reliable solution was obtained. We do not know if these same problems arose in the development of a typology for intimacy, but the presence of a number of special coding rules in Monsour’s (1992) description suggests they might have. The relative practicality of the two typologies might be assessed by applying them both to the same set of data.

When we compared close relationships that were and were not labeled as intimate by their participants and probed the reasons respondents gave for saying that their friendship was close but not intimate, we found that our respondents did not envision the relationship between closeness and intimacy in just one way. About half (48.7%) of our respondents labeled their friendships as both close and intimate and thus appeared to draw no distinction between the terms. The remaining half, however, did draw a distinction. Two themes were represented in these distinctions. One was qualitative. For about one quarter of the total sample, the concept of intimacy implied a romantic or sexual component that simple closeness did not. This finding supported earlier speculation that native definitions of intimacy may equate intimacy with sexual interaction (Swain, 1989). It might also warn future researchers that asking subjects to report on intimate relationships may yield a sample biased toward sexual or romantic relationships. The other theme was quantitative. A particular close relationship was not intimate because it did not have enough of something. That ‘something’ was itself quite varied, including self-disclosure, acceptance, global affect, relational expression and simple duration.

A number of commentators have argued that the concept of intimacy has become ‘feminized’ as stereotypically feminine ways of being intimate have become the yardstick by which intimacy is measured (e.g. Cancian, 1987; Parks, 1995; Swain, 1989; Tavris, 1992; Wood, 1993; Wood & Inman, 1993). If this reasoning were correct, we hypothesized, then there should be sex and gender differences in both the willingness to label a relationship as intimate and in the types of relationships labeled as intimate. However, we found no support for hypotheses suggesting that women or those with a feminine gender role identification would label their friendship as ‘intimate’ more often than men or people with a more masculine gender role identification. Nor did it appear to matter whether the friendship being described was same-sex or cross-sex. Men, for instance, were just as likely to label a same-sex friendship as ‘intimate’ as they were a cross-sex friendship. These findings suggest that men and women are equally likely to label their friendship as ‘intimate’, at least within the confines of an anonymous and confidential survey. It would be useful to examine relational labeling in live interactive settings to see if a different set of results might be obtained in a more public setting. It might be that men and women do not differ in terms of their private labeling, but do differ in terms of their willingness to say that a friendship is intimate in a public, interactive setting.

Our final approach to unraveling the relationship between closeness and intimacy was more speculative. We had hypothesized that, perhaps as the
result of ideological influences, the concept of intimacy had become narrower than the concept of closeness. This hypothesis could not be tested directly with our data, but could nonetheless be tentatively addressed by comparing the characteristics of our typology for closeness with Monsour’s (1992) parallel typology for intimacy. Comparing typologies may strike some as controversial, although instrument comparisons are common, especially in meta-analyses (Rosenthal, 1984). We further defend the practice on heuristic grounds. It is commonly understood that defining a concept involves comparisons to related concepts (e.g. Stinchcombe, 1968). When the concepts being compared involve categories, it is also essential that the categories and their performance be directly compared. Thus our comparison with Monsour’s typology is a necessary part of the larger process of concept explication.

We found that, as hypothesized, closeness generated a larger, richer set of categories. Using the same rules for inclusion and examining the same types of relationships as Monsour, we found that asking people to characterize relational bonds in terms of closeness yielded almost twice as many categories as asking people to characterize those same bonds in terms of intimacy. It could be, of course, that this result either reflected a researcher bias toward creating more categories, or reflected the fact that one typology used finer distinctions than the other. Although these are possibilities, the categories in the typology for closeness were developed without the knowledge that their number would be compared with the number in Monsour’s typology for intimacy. While there are distinctions in Monsour’s typology that do not appear in ours, the reverse is also true. Monsour’s typology combines some categories that we distinguish. There is little reason to believe that the two systems are at substantially different levels of abstraction or that one uses finer categories than the other. Thus it is unlikely that the comparative richness of definitions of closeness can be entirely attributed to methodological differences.

Closeness proved to be a richer concept in another important way. People reported a greater number of definitions for closeness than they did for intimacy. By reconstructing Monsour’s data on the number of definitions respondents gave for intimacy, we were able to do direct statistical comparisons with the number of definitions respondents gave for closeness in our study. We found not only that respondents gave significantly more definitions for closeness overall, but also that they gave significantly more definitions of closeness than for intimacy in each of the four friendship types studied.

Definitions of closeness were also less subject to sex differences than definitions of intimacy. Like Monsour (1992), we tested for sex differences in the use of definitions across the various friendship types. Just under 10 percent (9.6%) of our comparisons yielded sex differences, while nearly 40 percent (38.1%) of Monsour’s tests revealed sex differences. In other words, men and women differed far more in their descriptions of intimacy than they did in their descriptions of closeness.

In addition to providing a typology of meanings for closeness that can
be explored in future research, the results of this study both support and challenge current approaches to conceptualizing the relationship between closeness and intimacy. The importance of self-disclosure was supported when it emerged as the most common meaning both for closeness in our study and for intimacy in Monsour's study. Although there were parallels between the meanings for closeness and intimacy, the differences suggested that closeness and intimacy were not equivalent in the eyes of a majority of the respondents. The reasons behind these differences, as we have noted, were both qualitative and quantitative. The results of this study therefore question the wisdom of treating closeness and intimacy as synonymous terms in future research. Closeness appears to be a broader, more inclusive term. People generate more meanings for it and think of a greater variety of relationships as close. Although we did not seek to resolve claims about the 'feminization of intimacy' directly, our results did indicate that people see far more gender differences in meanings for intimacy than they do in meanings for closeness. Intimacy will be a more appropriate root term for researchers who wish to explore gender differences and a less appropriate one for researchers who are less concerned with gender differences.

At a practical or clinical level the abstract meanings identified in this study, as well as those identified in Monsour's (1992) study, could be used to help particular relational partners explore the way they interpret and express their own specific relational bonds. What matters most, of course, is the interplay in meaning and expression between relational participants themselves (Duck, 1994). Differences between the partners at this level, whether based on gender or some other factor, may subtly propel relational partners into a spiral of misunderstanding and conflict (Wood, 1993). By helping to uncover the range of meanings for closeness, we hope that the results of this study will therefore contribute not only to a better theoretical understanding of the relationship between closeness and intimacy, but also to practical efforts to help relational participants discover the dynamics of meanings in their own personal relationships.

REFERENCES


Parks & Floyd: Closeness and intimacy in friendship