

C Preparing to read

NOTES ON THE READING

“The Friendship Bond,” a report on the *Psychology Today* friendship questionnaire, commands attention because it reports answers from a large number (40,000) of respondents. The writing style is somewhat scientific in that the author reports the results of her research by giving us the statistics to support the conclusions she makes. To help us understand the reasons for her research, she presents the theories about friendship, that is, what social critics believe about friendship in the United States. Be careful to make a distinction between this theory and the writer’s findings; her data, or information, may contradict or disagree with the theory.

PREVIEWING THE VOCABULARY

Before reading, preview the vocabulary in context. Read these key sentences based on the selection, and choose the best meanings for the underlined words.

- 1 Unlike marriage or the ties that bind parents and children, friendship appears to be a unique form of bonding.
 - a. responsibility
 - b. relationship by law
 - c. feeling that brings people together
- 2 Social critics expect people to be dissatisfied with their friendships; the research gives cold comfort to the critics, however.
 - a. is ignored by the critics
 - b. shows the critic are correct
 - c. is unwelcome news to the critics
- 3 Unlike other social roles we play as citizens and employees, friendship has its own rationale: to enhance feelings of warmth, trust, love, and affection between two people.
 - a. improve
 - b. decrease
 - c. eliminate
- 4 Social critics have pointed to the dislocation and isolation that they think grows out of the high mobility rate among Americans and a loss of community supports.
 - a. trouble using a map
 - b. disregard for traditions
 - c. feeling that life is out of order

- 5 Sociologists have described the impersonality and anomie of life in modern cities, where increasing numbers of people choose to live alone.
 - a. feelings of hopelessness and loneliness
 - b. chances for more friends
 - c. opportunities for more to do
- 6 Because increasing numbers of people choose to live alone, critics have written a good deal about a trend toward self-indulgence and lack of commitment in our society.
 - a. talking to oneself / people to talk to
 - b. feeling very lonely all the time / close families
 - c. doing whatever one wants / willingness to give time, energy
- 7 These questions provide clues as to whether people today find deficits in their friendships. Researchers looked for signs of dissatisfaction with the quality of people's friendships, but found few.
 - a. surprises
 - b. lack of something necessary
 - c. conflicts with family obligations
- 8 When asked, for example, whether they felt that many of their friendships are not completely reciprocal, almost 60 percent answered no. Most obviously feel they get as much as they give in their relationships.
 - a. unequal
 - b. advantageous
 - c. giving and receiving in return
- 9 Helping out a friend and turning to a friend for help presuppose a certain amount of trust.
 - a. imagine
 - b. require; assume
 - c. make unnecessary
- 10 Social psychologists have proposed a link between trust and liking that seems to fit the data.
 - a. a connection
 - b. an impossible combination
 - c. a theory that proves the existence of something
- 11 The rules of friendship involve the right to ask for help; presumably, the obligation to help a friend is implicitly acknowledged.
 - a. not usually true
 - b. sometimes impossible to do
 - c. understood without discussion

- 12 Only 10 percent of the sample said they thought a friend should help another commit suicide if the friend wanted to but was too feeble to do it alone.
- weak
 - crazy
 - emotional
- 13 In short, there is no striking contradiction between people's descriptions of actual friendships and their beliefs about friendship in general.
- agreement
 - relationship
 - lack of agreement



Follow-up Check and discuss your answers in pairs or with the class.

D Reading for overall meaning

Read the selection at a quick but comfortable pace. Then answer this question:

Is the idea of friendship alive and well, or is friendship in trouble according to the study? Explain.

The Friendship Bond

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Mary Brown Parlee

More than 40,000 readers told us what they looked for in close friendships, what they expected of friends, what they were willing to give in return, and how satisfied they were with the quality of their friendships. The results give cold comfort to social critics.

Friendship appears to be a unique form of human bonding. Unlike marriage 5 or the ties that bind parents and children, it is not defined or regulated by law. Unlike other social roles that we are expected to play—as citizens, employees, members of professional societies and other organizations—it has its own subjective rationale, which is to enhance feelings of warmth, trust, love, and affection between two people. 10

The questionnaire on friendship appeared in the March issue of *Psychology Today*. The findings confirm that issues of trust and betrayal are central to friendship. They also suggest that our readers do not look for friends only among those who are most like them, but find many who differ in race, sexual preference, religion, and ethnic background. Arguably the most important 15 conclusion that emerges from the data, however, is not something that we found—but what we did not.

Social critics have pointed to the dislocation and isolation that they think grows out of the high mobility rate among Americans and a loss of community

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supports. Ever since the work of sociologist Emile Durkheim, they have 20 described the impersonality and anomie of life in modern cities, where increasing numbers of people choose to live alone. They have written a good deal about a trend toward self-indulgence and lack of commitment in our society, which could very well lead to tensions in friendships just as it may be contributing to the divorce rate among married couples. 25

In the questionnaire responses, we looked for signs of dissatisfaction with the quality of people's friendships, but we found few. Do people confide in their friends these days? Do they tend to turn to them in times of emotional crises? Do friends become more important as one gets older? Turned around, all of these questions provide clues as to whether people today find deficits in their 30 friendships. Most of the responses to our survey strongly suggest they do not. When asked, for example, whether they felt that many of their friendships are not completely reciprocal, almost 60 percent answered no. At least among our readers and others like them, friendship in America appears to be in sound health. 35

When we asked our readers to tell us what qualities they believe to be important in a friend, they valued, above all, loyalty and the ability to keep confidences. Warmth, affection, and supportiveness were also high on the list, while external characteristics such as age, income, and occupation, were not. Again, in the letters commenting on friendship in general, similar themes recurred: 40 typical words and phrases were *trust, honesty, accepts me even when he doesn't totally approve, supportive, and understanding*.

Some insights into what holds friendships together can be gained from looking at what drives them apart. When asked about reasons for a friendship's cooling off or ending, readers gave as the two most important reasons feeling 45 betrayed by a friend, and discovering that a friend had very different views on issues the respondent felt were important. The questionnaire answers thus confirm what many readers said explicitly in their comments: in a satisfying friendship, trust and feeling accepted are two of the most essential components. 50

Activities of Friendship

Given the importance of trust, it is not surprising that "had an intimate talk" is the activity most or second-most frequently mentioned by both men and women as something they have done with friends in the past month. Two other items high on the list of activities also presuppose a certain amount of trust and 55 involvement: helping out a friend and turning to a friend for help.

Social psychologists have proposed a link between trust and liking that seems to fit these friendship data. The theory suggests that trust encourages self-disclosure (revealing aspects of yourself that are both precious and vulnerable). If self-disclosure meets with continued acceptance (not necessarily the 60 same as approval of the feelings or actions), liking and affection deepen—as

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well as trust. In this theory, self-disclosure and trust must be reciprocated in order for the relationship to deepen.

Rules of Friendship

In addition to inquiring about actual activities, we asked some specific questions about what people would or would not do with friends, both in general and in certain hypothetical situations. We wanted our survey to give us an idea of some of the “rules” that govern, or perhaps define, behavior between friends. 65


As both theory and the data suggest, one rule of friendship is that friends confide in each other, sharing intimate aspects of their personal lives and feelings. Perhaps most significantly, bad as well as good news can be shared. Even though in our society, one’s success is often equated with success at work, 89 percent of our sample said they would tell a close friend about a failure at work. 70

Furthermore, over two-thirds (68 percent) said that if they had a terminal illness, they would tell a friend. Eighty-seven percent of the respondents say they talk with friends about sexual activities (60 percent discussing activities in general, 27 percent in detail). 75

Our respondents clearly indicated that in some situations, the rules of friendship involve the right to ask for help (presumably the obligation to help a friend is also implicitly acknowledged). When asked who they would turn to first in a crisis, over half (51 percent) said they would turn to friends before family. This was true for all subgroups, even though older people in the sample said they tend to rely more on family and professional counselors in a crisis than do the younger age groups, and a higher proportion of men than women said they go it alone. 80 85

Yet friendship has limits. Only 10 percent of the sample said they thought a friend should help another commit suicide if the friend wanted to but was too feeble to do it alone (41 percent said no and 36 percent were opposed to suicide.)

In short, there are no striking contradictions between people’s descriptions of actual friendships, their beliefs about friendship in general, and their perception of the rules that apply to these relationships. This consistency, and the enthusiastic descriptions of friends and friendship we received, suggest that our readers are satisfied with their friendships, even though 67 percent of the respondents also acknowledge feeling lonely “sometimes” or “often.” 90 95

 **Follow-up** Now answer this question:

Is the idea of friendship alive and well, or is friendship in trouble according to the study? Explain.

E Reading for more detail

Read the article a second time. Use the questions below to read for more detail and to bring your experience to the reading.

- 1 Why did social critics expect people to be dissatisfied with their friendships? In what way were the critics' expectations wrong?
- 2 What five qualities did people say were most important to them in a friend? Would you list the same five qualities? In the same order?
- 3 What are the two reasons given for ending a friendship? Which of the two reasons makes more sense to you?
- 4 What three activities are most characteristic among friends in this survey? What role does trust play in these activities?
- 5 What two rules of friendship do the respondents mention? Do you follow the same rules with your friends?
- 6 What limits do the respondents put on friendship? Can you be good friends with someone and say no to him or her?
- 7 *Key words* Make a list of six words or expressions that you feel are important to the reading. Be ready to explain what each word means and why it is important.



Follow-up Compare and discuss your answers in pairs, small groups, or as a class.