

**WHICH TYPES OF TIES AND NETWORKS PROVIDE  
WHAT KINDS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT?**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This chapter describes the composition and structure of personal community networks. It concentrates on the score or so ties that are actively used, and especially on the half-dozen or so close, intimate ties. It integrates research findings from hundreds of scholars to discuss which types of ties and networks provide different kinds of social support.

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## THE NATURE OF THE ENTERPRISE

Forty years ago, sociologists lamented the retreat of kinship into isolated nuclear families. Thirty years ago, sociologists worried that communities had decayed under rapid urbanization or had been preserved only in quaint neighborhood villages. Twenty years ago, the social network was largely an ill-defined metaphor. Ten years ago, health care analysts were viewing social support as a broad potpourri of empathy and material aid, vaccinating relatives and friends against illness.

Sociology's claims and debates may be less grand now, but its analytic tools have sharpened and its data have proliferated. Analysts now have fuller knowledge of the supportive resources provided by community networks of friends, neighbors, relatives and workmates.

*My basic plan in this chapter is to integrate findings from studies of social networks, community, kinship and social support. I shall describe the characteristics of supportive ties and networks and examine the extent to which different types of networks -- and the ties within them -- provide various kinds of social support.* Fortunately, the findings of most studies are comparable enough to permit interweaving them into one account. Nevertheless, this account inevitably minimizes differences between subgroups of those receiving social support, e.g., nations and regions, social classes, age strata, women/men, married/not married.<sup>1</sup> It focuses on how relationships affect support and neglects the extensive research into the relationships between support and such social characteristics of network members as gender and socioeconomic status.

Social network analyses of *personal communities* look at how a person (or household) at the center of a network deals with the members of her/his egocentric universe. Investigators usually start by asking respondents to list their active or intimate relationships. By obtaining this list first, they avoid restricting their sample to kin, neighbors or supporters.

At the *relational* level of analysis, researchers study the *social characteristics* (gender, etc.) of these network members and of the respondents who are (by definition) the *focal persons* at the centers of these

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<sup>1</sup>*Scope Conditions:* To make matters manageable, this review considers only relatively active relationships stretching beyond the household, putting aside the domestic support routinely exchanged among household members. It concentrates on that mythical category, *people in general*. Where necessary, it uses as a baseline, the networks of white, northern-European ethnicity, employed, once (and still) married North American, middle-aged (sub)urban women and men. Such persons remain the modal North American category. Hence this review does not extend to populations at greater risk -- e.g., the frail elderly, the disabled, single mothers, isolated minorities -- nor does it consider the extensive body of social psychological work using university students as an (atypical) convenience sample. In keeping with the general thrust of research, this review relies principally on respondents' reports of support they have received. Such perceived support correlates both with well-being and with more observational data on support actually received (Gottlieb and Selby 1990).

networks. They also study the characteristics of the *ties* between focal persons and network members, for example, frequency of contact, intimacy, kinship role. Although they often identify *links* between network members (other than focal persons), they usually do not study them in detail.

At the *network* level of analysis, researchers look at the *composition* of the networks (e.g., median frequency of contact, the percent who are kin) and the *structure* of these networks (e.g., density of interconnections among network members). In studying social support at both the relational and network levels of analysis, the most common aims are to identify how which types of ties and networks provide what kinds of social support -- i.e., the *contents* of network ties.

What is so different about this approach from the claims of past decades? *Social network analysis* has gone from propounding a sensitizing metaphor to developing concepts and tools for data collection and analysis (Wellman 1988b). *Community* analysts now realize that neighborhood solidarities are just one type of community. They study supportive, companionable ties with kith and kin even when they are scattered in space and fragmented in structure (reviewed in Wellman 1988a). "The community" (or, for that matter, "the social network") in such cases is largely a matter of how analysts define ties and where they draw boundaries. *Kinship* analysts have gone beyond defending the existence of relationships to describing the nature of contemporary families (Wellman 1990). Although most social support analysts have concentrated on well-funded research into the health-giving *consequences* of social support, a number have looked at the *causes* and *correlates* of social support -- the concern of this paper. Analysts have realized that not all community ties are supportive, and that different types of ties systematically provide different kinds of support (Lin, Dean and Ensel 1986; House, Landis and Umberson 1988; Gottlieb and Selby 1990; Wellman and Wortley 1990).

## NETWORKS

### Network Size

Social networks have fuzzy boundaries. Friends, neighbors, workmates and even kin come and go, their definition and importance varying by the hour, day and year. There is the "Bob and Carol and Ted and Alice problem" (Mazursky 1969): Ties to a married couple can function as one relation or two. Indeed, there is no such thing as *the network*: analysts must specify inclusion criteria. For example, our research group studies only those co-workers whose social relations continue after work as community ties.

The broadest possible personal network of direct relations contains all those whom a person can currently deal with on an informal basis. Yet one rarely acquires relations through random encounters in cafes or on the streets. Rather, social and physical *foci* such as kinship groups or the neighborhood streetcorner bring people together under auspices conducive for interaction (Feld 1982).

The average North American has about 1,500 informal ties (people who are mutually recognized enough to sustain a conversation; Bernard and Killworth 1990). However, community and social support studies have looked only at a small percentage of these ties. At the most, they analyze the score or so of

*active* ties that provide significant sociability and much of the social support that people receive.<sup>2</sup> There is some indication that men (Burda, Vaux and Schill 1984; Wellman forthcoming) and residents of large urban areas have somewhat smaller active networks (Oxley, Barrera and Sadalla 1981; Fischer 1982b; Bernard and Killworth 1990).

Most network studies have looked at even smaller subsets of network members: either socially-close *intimates* or those in *frequent contact*. About 25% of the active ties, 4 to 7 ties, are distinctively close and supportive *intimates*. Usually about half of the intimates are kin and the other half friends. Neighbors and workmates are rarely intimates, but they do comprise most of the 10 or so active ties that are in frequent contact with the focal person (Walker 1977; Kazak and Wilcox 1984; Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988; Milardo 1989). However, the few immediate kin who are in frequent contact usually also are intimates.

### **Size and Support**

Larger networks tend to provide more support (Burt 1987; Wellman, et al. 1987; Seeman and Berkman 1988; Fischer, et al. 1989), and especially so for women (Stokes and Wilson 1984; Sarason, Sarason and Shearin 1986). The greater supportiveness of larger networks might be thought to be obvious in that the sheer weight of numbers in larger networks should produce more people willing and able to be supportive. However, a well-documented psychological research tradition in "bystander intervention" has shown that strangers are less apt to intervene when they are in larger crowds.<sup>3</sup> The difference, though, is that networks are *not* composed of strangers. However weak the direct connection, all persons are indirectly connected at one remove because of their mutual tie to the person at the center of the network. Presumably, larger networks are more gregarious, more communicative and, hence, more supportive.

Indeed, our research group (Wellman, et al. 1987) has found the opposite of bystander apathy in the second East York study: A higher proportion of the members of larger active and intimate networks provide most kinds of support. To some extent, this finding is obvious: the more potential supporters, the more actual support. But it does discount the opposite possibility, that quality will outweigh quantity. We are not finding any indication that the members of smaller networks will be more supportive in compensation for their smaller numbers. To the contrary, it seems as if a higher proportion of the members of larger networks are supportive. One possible explanation is that these are more positively-functioning networks, with size and supportiveness appearing together.

There may be a point of diminishing returns between the number of network members and the provision of social support. Stokes (1983) has found a curvilinear relationship between the number of

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<sup>2</sup>The mean number of such ties found by researchers varies between 14 and 23. See Fischer (1982b); Riley and Cochran (1985); Willmott (1986; 1987); Erickson, Radkewycz and Nosanchuk (1988); Wellman, Carrington and Hall (1988); Milardo (1989); Bernard and Killworth (1990); Ohtani (1991).

<sup>3</sup>Latané and Darley (1970, 1976); Darley and Batson (1973); Hacker, Ho and Urquhart-Ross (1974); Schwartz and Gottlieb (1980); Gillis and Hagan (1982).

confidants in a network and satisfaction with social support. Note that two or three confidants are a tiny fraction of a person's overall network, even when consideration is limited to active ties.) Moreover, although larger networks may provide more support, they may not provide more satisfactory support: One study of Boston women found that larger networks provide more interpersonal problems as well as more support (Riley and Eckenrode 1986). Another study of Americans aged 50+ found that the quality of support rather than the quantity had a greater effect on well-being (Antonucci and Akiyama 1987; Israel and Antonucci 1987).

## Density and Clustering

The density of active and intimate networks ranges between 0.3 and 0.5: only about one-third to one-half of the possible direct links between active or intimate network members actually exist.<sup>4</sup> For example, in a situation where there are five intimates and four ties between these intimates, network density equals .40 if the ties to the focal person are not taken into account but rises to .67 if they are taken into account. These are not the solidary networks that (perhaps unreliable) tradition suggests our grandparents experienced.

Analyses of the relationship between density and support ultimately hark back to Durkheim's contention (1897) that social integration promotes mental health. By extension, persons who are socially integrated -- as members of dense networks -- should experience less stress and receive more support to cope with what stress they do experience (Thoits 1982; Pescosolido and Georgianna 1989).

Yet there is little consistent evidence about the relationship between network density and social support.<sup>5</sup> The usual, untested, assumption is that the greater connectivity of densely-knit networks would lead to greater internal communication and coordination, and that this in turn would lead to the provision of more -- and more nuanced -- social support. However, one study found that women were more apt to receive satisfying support from low-density networks (Hirsch 1980), while another study found that divorcees more easily adjusted to divorce in low-density networks (Wilcox 1981). Low density eases normative pressure and enables people to have access to aid from more -- and more diverse -- social circles.

Our own East York research suggests that the effects of density are contingent on the kinds of support provided. Large services -- such as emergency or chronic health care -- tend to be provided more widely in high-density (and predominantly kin) networks. However, there is no significant relationship between network density and the provision of emotional aid and small services. Like Hirsch, we find that low density networks provide more companionship. This is in keeping with the few links that friends have with other network members (hence, networks containing a high proportion of friends tend to be low density) and that friends are more likely than kin to be companions (Wellman, et al. 1987).

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<sup>4</sup> *Confidants*: 0.41 (calculated from Laumann 1973, Table 6.1). *Intimates*: 0.33 (Wellman 1979) and 0.44 (Fischer 1982b); *active* network members 0.33 (Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988). These data follow the customary practice of excluding in their calculations the always-present ties between respondents and network members. Those studies report higher densities include such ties (Shulman 1972; Kazak and Wilcox 1984) or include household members as network members (Oliver 1984 analyzing Blacks in Los Angeles; Marsden 1987 analyzing national U.S. data).

<sup>5</sup> For example, the most influential study in this area (Berkman and Syme 1979; Berkman and Breslow 1983) infers the existence of social integration from rather weak indicators, such as marriage, belonging to groups, and vague reports of many social contacts.

Perhaps it is not density that is conducive to support, but connectivity: some sort of linkage among network members. This is the import of Burt's (1987) finding in a national U.S. sample that expressed happiness is strongly linked to network members not being isolated from each other.

## RELATIONSHIPS

### Tie Strength

Does the strength of a relationship make a difference in getting interpersonal support? The question fits well with recent "personal relationship" research identifying three related characteristics of strong ties:

- A sense of the relationship being *intimate* and special, with a *voluntary* investment in the tie and a desire for *companionship* with the tie partner.
- An interest in being together as much as possible through *frequent interactions* in *multiple social contexts* over a long period.
- A sense of mutuality in the relationship, with the partner's needs known and *supported*.<sup>6</sup>

Intimacy (perceived social closeness) has been the most studied dimension of tie strength, with multiplexity and voluntariness considered much less often. (The literature on intimacy tends to assume that all intimate ties are voluntary and multiplex.) Unfortunately, social psychological studies of intimate "personal relationships" have focused on a restricted set of strong ties: "interpersonal attraction" between intimate spouses and lovers. This has led to the comparative neglect of analyses of intimacy among friends and relatives in community networks (Huston and Levinger 1978; Berscheid and Walster 1978; see the reviews in Backman 1981; Duck 1988).

By contrast, sociological analyses of friendship have focused on non-romantic community ties between consenting adults. Since Aristotle (c335 BCE), friendship analysts have argued that voluntary relationships are reliable and flexible purveyors of a wide range of supportive resources.<sup>7</sup> Although their analyses have usually used the rubric of "friendship," their principal concern is with *voluntary* ties -- to either friends or relatives. Hence these analyses are nicely congruent with recent studies in another field: community studies depicting how friendship has supplanted local neighborly ties (reviewed in Craven and Wellman 1973; Wellman and Leighton 1979; Wellman 1988a).

Several network analysts have argued that *multiplexity* -- having many role relations connecting two network members -- is a key characteristic of strong ties. They argue that network members with multiplex ties should have stronger, more supportive ties because they have detailed knowledge of each

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<sup>6</sup> Perlman and Fehr (1987); Duck (1983); Argyle and Henderson (1984); Maxwell (1985); Waring (1985); Blumstein and Kollock (1988); Reis and Shaver (1988); Berscheid, Snyder and Omoto (1989).

<sup>7</sup> Cohen (1962); Lazarsfeld and Merton (1964); Paine (1969); Kurth (1970); Suttles (1970); Allan (1979, 1989); Ben-Porath (1980); Marsden and Campbell (1984); Argyle and Henderson (1985); Wiseman (1986); Cheal (1988); Tausig and Michello (1988)



other's needs and multiple claims on each other's attention (Mitchell 1969; Verbrugge 1977; Mitchell 1987; Ferrand 1989). The only dissenting voice has been Granovetter's "strength of weak ties" argument. Its contrary contention has been that weak ties (low in intimacy, voluntariness and multiplexity) provide better connections to different social milieus because they usually connect socially dissimilar persons (Granovetter 1973, 1982; Skvoretz and Fararo 1986). Hence such "bridging" ties should provide good access to supportive information and services.

### **Tie Strength and Support**

There has been almost no research comparing the supportiveness of intimates to the supportiveness of the other 1,500 or so ties in a person's network (but see Erickson and Nosanchuk 1985). Personal relationship analysts argue that the strength of a tie is associated with the support that network members give one another (Wiseman 1986; Duck 1986; Perlman and Fehr 1987). Intimates may feel an urge, obligation or pressure to help each other. Reciprocally, recipients may come to regard as intimates those network members who routinely help them (Kadushin 1981). Indeed, many of the respondents in the second East York study partially define intimacy in terms of exchanging social support (Leighton 1986).

Even Granovetter notes that "strong ties have greater motivation to be of assistance and are typically more easily available" (1982, p. 113; see also Reis and Shaver's review 1988). However, most studies of social support have looked only at strong, intimate ties, trying to discriminate between degrees of intimacy *within* a person's half-dozen or so most intimate ties (see the reviews in Marsden and Campbell 1984; Hobfoll and Stokes 1988; Reis and Shaver 1988). The first East York study (Wellman 1979), Fischer's (1982b) California study, and Burt's (1986) U.S. national analysis used large-sample data to show that among intimates, stronger, more intimate ties provided more support than somewhat less intimate ones. The second East York study found that most strong ties (that is, those that had at least two of the characteristics of intimacy, voluntariness and multiplexity) provided either small services or emotional aid, or both. This was true regardless of whether the strong tie was with friends or immediate kin. Moreover, only strong friendship ties -- but not strong kinship ties -- were the most important sources of companionship (Wellman and Wortley 1990).

Focusing on another dimension of tie strength, Hirsch (1980) found multiplex friendships to be significantly associated with better social support (and mental health). In a study about a much different form of supportive resource exchange, Shelley, Bernard and Killworth (1990) used a Florida sample to study flows of information: news between "close" persons took an average of 12 days to travel while news between persons "not close" took 43 days, and news between acquaintances took 47 days.

Despite the clear relationship between tie strength and social support, it is not synonymous with social support. The regression coefficients between strength and support are not so high as to suggest an underlying identity, and the differentiated nature of support means that some strong relationships are supportive in one way but not in another. Indeed, some people consciously avoid burdening network members with request for support. They fear that because some strong ties will not provide certain kinds of support, requests for aid would disrupt the relationships (Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988).

## Kinship

Most available kin are members of personal community networks. The stronger the relationship used to define a network (intimate tie, active tie, etc.), the higher the proportion of network members who are kin. Kin comprise at least 30% of the active ties compared with less than 10% of all ties and 2% of all potentially-available ties. Thus a much higher percentage of available kin than nonkin are *actively* involved in network relations. Nevertheless, a substantial minority of North Americans have few kin in their active networks (Reiss and Oliveri 1983; Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988).

Not all types of kin are equally represented. Most active kin relations come from the small number of available *immediate kin* (parents, adult children, siblings, including in-laws). Most immediate kin are intimates, and almost all intimate kin are immediate kin: usually equal numbers of parents (or adult children, depending on age) and siblings. Several studies report that an immediate kin is usually the socially-closest member of a network.<sup>8</sup>

By contrast, *extended kin* tend to be (non-intimate) active network members or have even weaker ties. They make up only 6% of all intimates in our second "East York" study of Torontonians (Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988).

While some people have large clusters of kin near at hand, the more common pattern is to maintain intensive relations with a small set of immediate kin: densely-connected, but residentially-dispersed. Together with approximately equal numbers of friends -- also residentially dispersed but less densely-connected than immediate kin -- these ties make up the core of personal community networks. More latent relations with extended kin remain in place, to be activated for specialized needs, family get-togethers, or on migration (Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988; Wellman 1988; Wellman and Tindall forthcoming).

Kin are usually the only densely-connected members of active and intimate networks. The interconnections of kinship both constrain and promote interactions. The constraints come from the limited number of kin available to be network members. At the same time, kinship connectivity fosters contact -- and even frequent contact -- with many persons whom they otherwise would not meet (Heiskanen 1969; McLanahan, Wedemeyer and Adelberg 1981; Johnson 1982; Gillespie, Krannich and Leffler 1985). For example, the first East York study finds that while 59% of all possible intimate links between kin actually exist, only 19% of all possible links between friends actually exist (Wellman, et al. forthcoming). Kin predominate in high-density networks while friends predominate in low-density networks (see also Shulman 1972; Kazak and Wilcox 1984; Oliver 1984; Wellman and Wortley 1989). It is probably for this reason that a Florida study found that news travelled between kin network members in an average of 4.9 days but took an average of 18.5 days to travel between friends (Shelley, Bernard and Killworth 1990).

The high density of kinship relations can lead to inbreeding. Just as information flows rapidly between kin, networks predominantly composed of kinfolk are less apt to acquire information from the

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<sup>8</sup> Shulman (1972); Wellman (1979); Johnson and Leslie (1982); Hoyt and Babchuk (1983); Wellman, Carrington and Hall (1988); see Burt (1986), Oliver (1986) for conflicting results.

outside. Thus kin are less open than friends to getting new information about health care, they are more reluctant to send sick persons to doctors and hospitals (Salloway and Dillon 1973), and even more reluctant to send them to alternative, non-medical practitioners such as teachers of the Alexander technique for controlling low back pain (Wellman 1991).

### **Kinship and Support**

Kin have the densely-knit relations useful for coordinating action, be it supportive, sociable or controlling. Such coordination may be especially efficacious when kinfolk are also linked to the friends and neighbors of the person in need of support (Coe, et al. 1984). They are quicker to mobilize care for sick relations, and adult children often take turns giving care to ailing parents (Soldo, Wolf and Agree 1986).

Most North Americans and British distinguish sharply between kith and kin and distinguish among types of kin (Allan 1979; Farber 1966, 1981; Argyle and Henderson 1985; Willmott 1987). They feel they should have strong ties with their *immediate kin* -- parents, adult children, siblings and in-laws -- and that bonds between parents and adult children should be especially supportive.<sup>9</sup> They further distinguish between mutual *concern* between parents and adult children and mutual *interest* between siblings (Adams 1968; Fischer 1982a, 1982b). They have lesser expectations for supportive relations with extended kin: grandparents, uncles, aunts, and cousins (Leyton 1975; Coombs 1980; Farber 1981; Cheal 1988).

Unfortunately, there have been few comparisons of support from different types of kin and friends. Most existing studies have focused on informal care for the aged and are limited in generalizability to other populations (see reviews in Antonucci 1990; Dykstra 1990). Thus Crohan and Antonucci (1989) suggest that people are more apt to be dissatisfied with unsupportive friends than unsupportive kin. Several more general studies of kinship have argued the continuing importance of kinship by showing that most (immediate) kin are supportive. Although such studies do not present detailed comparisons of kin and friends, they do suggest that kin and kith differ in the quality and quantity of support they provide.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, several studies (albeit of undergraduates and the elderly) suggest that Americans prefer to get emotional and instrumental help from parents and adult children in preference to friends, siblings, neighbors, extended kin agencies and acquaintances -- in that order.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Firth, Hubert and Forge (1969); Moge (1977, 1991); Farber (1981); Antonucci (1985); Fischer (1986); Mangen, Bengston and Landry (1988); Steinmetz (1988); Stone (1988).

<sup>10</sup> Ball, et al. (1980); Warren (1981); Young, Giles and Plantz (1982); O'Connell (1984); Dressler (1985); Essock-Vitale and McGuire (1985); Wagner (1987); Gerstel (1988); Chatters, Taylor and Neighbors (1989); Milic (1991).

<sup>11</sup> Mancini and Simon (1984); Stephens and Norris-Baker (1984); Peters, et al. (1987); Tausig and Michello (1988).

Our research group used hierarchical cluster analysis in the second East York study to see if kin enact distinct supportive roles in personal community networks (Wellman and Wortley 1989). We compared the tendency of 20 different kinship and non-kinship roles to provide emotional aid, services, companionship, financial aid, and job/housing information. We found that kin differ from kith in the patterns of support. Moreover, there are three distinct types of kinship roles: *parent-adult child*, *sibling* and *extended kin*, as well as roles of *friendship*, *neighbor* and *workmate*. Affines (in-laws) behave like consanguines (see also the review in Goetting 1990). Because much support effectively goes to the household rather than to the focal person, kin often feel they are supporting their own blood relatives.

### **Parent-Adult Child.**

The bond between parent and adult child is the most supportive of all intimate and active ties, providing high levels of both material and emotional support. Such ties are so broadly supportive that weaker, but still active, relations are usually almost as supportive as intimate relations. Parents and adult children are the most likely network members to give each other gifts, emotional support, child care, care for family illness, help with major home maintenance, and financial aid to buy a house or provide care for illness and infirmity.<sup>12</sup> For example, 84% of the active parent/child relationships in the second East York study provide some kind of emotional aid and 39% provide some major services. By contrast, the percentages for all active ties are 62% and 16% respectively (Wellman and Wortley 1990).

Despite the support that parents and adult children provide, most do not share convivial companionship (Wellman and Wortley 1989). Thus loneliness among the American elderly is reduced through interaction with friends and neighbors but not with children (Taylor and Chatters 1986; Lee and Ishii-Kuntz 1987). Mothers and daughters often expect much support from each other, take its provision for granted, but complain when it is not given. Fathers and sons, who expect less, have fewer strains in their relationships.<sup>13</sup>

*Mother-daughter* ties are especially supportive, building upon shared concerns about (grand)children and domestic tranquillity.<sup>14</sup> At least two studies suggest that such bonds are stronger among Black Americans than White Americans, compensating in part for a lack of financial resources (Stack 1974; Hogan, Hao and Parish 1990). The coming of grandchildren may well transform lifetime mother-daughter conflicts to cooperative efforts by domestic co-workers (see the review in Troll 1987).

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<sup>12</sup> Sussman and Burchinal (1962); Johnson (1977); Moge (1977); Pitrou (1977); Horwitz (1978); Unger and Powell (1980); Fischer (1982a, 1982b); Hoyt and Babchuk (1983); Antonucci (1985); Litwak (1985); Riley and Cochran (1985); Taylor (1985; 1986); Arsenault (1986); Willmott (1987); Cheal (1988); Connidis (1989); Radoeva (1988); Retherford, Hildreth and Goldsmith (1988); Mancini and Bleiszner (1989); Wellman and Wortley (1989); Dykstra (1990).

<sup>13</sup> Rosenblatt, Johnson and Anderson (1981); Marshall, Rosenthal and Daciuk (1987).

<sup>14</sup> Wood, Traupmann and Hay (1984); De Anda (1984); De Anda and Becerra (1984); Belsky and Rovine (1984); Binns and Mars (1984); Fischer (1986); Brown, et al. (1986); Willmott (1987).

Indeed, these strong bonds are the foundation of informal care for the elderly (Connidis 1989; Crohan and Antonucci 1989).

### **Siblings.**

*Sisters and brothers* give each other much support, but not as much as do parents and adult children. Unlike parent/child relations, there is much variation in the supportiveness of siblings: Intimate siblings exchange much more support than siblings with weaker ties. When there are more than two siblings, only some may form supportive bonds.<sup>15</sup> The second East York study found siblings (and siblings in-law) to make up about one-fifth of the active network members who provide emotional aid, financial aid, services, or companionship (Wellman and Wortley 1989). Because East Yorkers have more siblings than parents (or adult children), siblings provide them with more emotional and material aid even though each sibling is less likely to be supportive than each parent.

Siblings usually have shared histories, life-cycle positions and similar concerns. Indeed, siblings behaved more like friends in our study than like other kin (Wellman and Wortley 1989). Siblings are as likely as friends to do things together and to provide emotional support, more likely to provide large services and help around the household, but less likely to discuss ideas or help each other outside of their households (Wellman and Wortley 1989). Auhagen's (1990) West Berlin study suggests that sibling ties to be somewhat more instrumental than friendship ties and friendship ties somewhat more emotionally supportive and companionate.<sup>16</sup>

### **Extended Kin.**

Extended kin have roles that are distinct from other kin and friends. In the second East York study, even those few extended kin who have active relationships are about one-half as likely as active immediate kin to provide each kind of support. For example, 29% of these extended kin provide minor emotional aid compared with about 60% of the immediate kin (Wellman and Wortley 1989). The combination of low numbers of active ties, weaker relations, and low likelihood of support means that extended kin are a negligible source of aid for most routine, chronic or acute problems.<sup>17</sup>

The exception to the usual non-supportiveness of extended kin are in those situations such as migration or finding jobs where weak ties have a comparative advantage because of social and spatial

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<sup>15</sup> Johnson (1982); Cheal (1988); O'Bryant (1988); Wellman and Wortley (1989); Bedford (1990).

<sup>16</sup> Wellman and Wortley (1989); see also McLanahan, Wedemeyer and Adelberg (1981); Johnson (1982); Gullestad (1984); Farber and Smith (1985).

<sup>17</sup> Similar results are reported in Dressler's (1985) study of southern Black Americans; Fischer's northern California study (1982a, 1982b); Leigh's (1982) South Carolina study; Lopata's Chicago study of widows (1978); Spanier and Hanson's study of maritally separated Americans (1981). See also Ungar and Powell's review (1980).

dispersion. Kinship ties -- even formerly latent ones -- often help migrants to obtain jobs, houses, spouses and local lore.<sup>18</sup>

## Friends

Most of the active -- and even intimate -- network members with whom people socialize are friends and not kin (Hays 1988). Friends and neighbors make up nearly half of most active and intimate networks and usually comprise nearly half of the ties providing each kind of support. Friends themselves (not counting neighbors or sociable workmates) make up about 25% of the active ties in networks and about 40% of the intimate ties (Wellman 1979; Fischer 1982b, 1982c; Willmott 1987; Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988; Wellman and Wortley 1990). Although most friends provide somewhat less variety and quantity of support than do parents and adult children, they are as likely as siblings to provide support and much more likely to do so than extended kin. Moreover, many of those people who do not have active kinship ties have one or two intimate friends who act like immediate kin by reliably providing a wide range of social support.

Because friends tend to be the most similar of network members in personal characteristics and values, they tend to be effective in handling nontechnical tasks that require precise matching of norms and roles. They are the preeminent sources of companionship in the networks, both because of their large numbers and because of their propensity to be sociable. Moreover, active and intimate friends (but not weaker acquaintances) are important sources of emotional and instrumental aid.<sup>19</sup>

Many friendship ties are discrete, voluntary relationships that function outside of groups. There is some evidence that the voluntariness of this relationship appeals to the recipients of support from friends because these recipients feel they have a bit more control over the relationship (than comparatively involuntary kinship ties) and because they perceive the support as more freely offered (Hobfoll, Nadler and Leiberman 1986; Wright 1989).

For better or worse, friendship is more problematic than kinship. It is usually a sparsely-knit relationship, without committed group support. Its voluntary nature means that it must be maintained

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<sup>18</sup> The literature on kinship aid for migration is vast, for both the Western and the Third worlds. See, for example, Mitchell (1956, 1961); Tilly and Brown (1967); Mayer with Mayer (1974); Anderson (1974); Roberts (1978); Graves and Graves (1980); Williams (1981); Segalen 1985 and Grieco (1987). The classic article on the maintenance of kinship ties over long distances is Litwak (1960).

<sup>19</sup> Chappell (1983); Argyle and Henderson (1984); Duck and Miell (1986); Hays (1988); Litwak and Messeri (1989); Litwak Messeri and Silverstein (1990); Adams (1990).

constantly and support must be reciprocated.<sup>20</sup> Hence when friends are not helpful, the relationship often ends for lack of group support. Knowing this, many East Yorkers report that they carefully limit the claims they make on friends (and some kin) for aid. It is not that friends are unsupportive when asked, but that people often do not feel confident that they can ask their friends for aid. There are similar reports for the United States (Crohan and Antonucci 1989) and the United Kingdom (Allan 1989). Moreover, the amount and kind of support that friends give varies substantially (Allan 1989; Adams 1990; Blieszner 1990; Wellman and Wortley 1989).

## Neighbors

Despite the extent to which contemporary relationships have overcome the friction of space, proximity still has some importance (see the discussion of proximity below). Although most active ties are non-local, it is noteworthy that typically 10-25% are locally based even though people can potentially find active ties in the metropolitan area, region or beyond. While some of these local ties are to kin (usually immediate kin) and intimate friends who -- not coincidentally -- happen to live near-by, most local ties are with network members regarded as "neighbors."

By contrast with friendships, neighboring ties are often less voluntary, especially when they are between women staying home to raise children and husbands (Wellman 1985). Most neighboring ties are rather weak, neither intimate nor active. North Americans typically know approximately a dozen neighbors well enough to speak with (usually on the street), but they typically have only zero or one intimates who are neighbors, and one other who is an active, but not intimate, tie (Keller 1968; Gates, Stevens and Wellman 1973; Hunter and Riger 1986). Although less than 20% of all active ties are with neighbors, the ready availability of neighbors means they loom large in daily life. They are the network members who are most encountered: The second East York study found that neighbors comprise 40%-50% of those active network members spoken with at least three times per week (Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988).

The proximity of neighbors fosters frequent contact, densely-knit connections, mutual awareness of problems, and easy delivery of aid (Ericksen and Yancey 1976). Women, with their primary responsibility for homemaking, tend to be more involved than men with their neighbors. Neighbors are a principal source of routine companionship and aid for minding children, homes and spouses. They are the prime providers of minor goods and services -- from the proverbial cup of sugar to looking after a neighbor's child in the case of serious illness. By contrast, more residentially distant network members usually provide intangible forms of support -- companionship, emotional support, financial aid -- over the telephone or through get-togethers.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Litwak and Szelenyi (1969); Paine (1969, 1974); Allan (1979, 1989); Leyton (1974); Kadushin (1981); Perlman and Fehr (1987); Duck (1983); Argyle and Henderson (1984); Blumstein and Kollock (1988); Hays (1988); Berscheid, Snyder and Omoto (1989).

<sup>21</sup> Young and Willmott (1957); Gans (1967); Keller (1968); Litwak and Szelenyi (1969); Gates, Stevens and Wellman (1973); Wekerle (1976); Martineau (1977); Evans and Northwood (1979); Fischer (1979); Luxton (1980); Merry

Several less-mobile groups rely especially on local ties: children, the elderly, the ill and disabled, people staying home to raise children, immigrants not speaking the region's language.<sup>22</sup> A pattern of high neighboring is more apt to occur in neighborhoods with a stable population, room for kin to settle nearby, and jobs available locally. It is especially likely to occur in neighborhoods with many poor residents who speak a different language or who are less-mobile manual workers (Willmott 1986).

An indirect function of many socially supportive ties is to provide a sense of identification, self-worth and of social belonging (Weiss 1974, 1987). Neighbors provide an important variant: a sense of belonging to a place. Moreover, American data suggests that those people with substantial neighboring relations have a greater sense of security in their home and concomitantly, less fear of local crime. Socially diverse neighboring ties link people to the information and resources of other social circles.<sup>23</sup> In Kansas City, relatively-weak neighborhood ties interconnect different ethnic groups and reduce intergroup tensions (Greenbaum and Greenbaum 1985). In New York City, those who are most able to move -- high-status, educated folks -- say they are the most committed to their neighborhood (Kadushin and Jones 1990). Being socially integrated into a neighborhood -- through marriage, child-rearing or home-owning -- fosters neighboring just as it may foster ties with people outside of the neighborhood (Campbell and Lee 1989).

## **Proximity and Contact**

### **Proximity**

Despite the continued importance of neighboring, active ties are usually dispersed ties. About three-quarters of active ties in East York (and San Francisco) extend beyond the neighborhood, one-third extend beyond the metropolitan area, and one-fifth stretch over 100 miles (Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988; see also Fischer 1982a, 1982b). For example, Floridians searched for information from network members who lived an average of 198 miles apart (Shelley, Bernard and Killworth 1990). Kinship ties are especially able to endure over long distances because their densely-knit structures and normative obligations encourage contact (Webber 1964; Litwak and Szelenyi 1969; Wellman and Leighton 1979; Wellman and Tindall forthcoming).

Intimate ties are even less likely than active ties to be local. For example, about seven-eighths of the intimate ties of East Yorkers live outside of their neighborhood, while one-quarter live outside the

(.continued)

(1981); Fischer (1982b); Gullestad (1984); Ahlbrandt (1984); Greenbaum and Greenbaum (1985); Wellman (1985); Schuster (1985); Unger and Wandersman (1985); Hunter and Riger (1986); Willmott (1987); Wellman and Wortley (1990).

<sup>22</sup> Gans (1962); Stack (1974); Warren (1981); Gullestad (1984); Litwak (1985); Taylor (1986); Campbell and Lee (1989).

<sup>23</sup> Suttles (1968, 1972); Riger and Lavrakas (1981); Warren (1981); Unger and Wandersman (1982, 1983, 1985); Ahlbrandt (1984); Wireman (1984); Bulmer (1986); Silverman (1986); Kadushin and Jones (1990).



Toronto metropolitan area (Wellman 1979; Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988). Thus North Americans must rely on cars, planes and phones to maintain active and intimate ties. This quick access by car and phone means that the metropolitan area, and not the neighborhood, is often the effective limit on supplying goods and services.<sup>24</sup> Thus the second East York study found that the percentage of network members supplying goods and services did not decrease substantially over 50 kilometers. What did change was the type of services provided. As noted above, neighbors were an important source of childminding and quick loans of goods and services (Wellman and Wortley 1990).

Even poor Americans, presumably with less access to cars and planes, have many long-distance ties. For example, about half of the intimates of Black Los Angelesños live outside of their neighborhoods and over 10% live outside of the metropolitan area (Oliver 1986). Americans with good access to cars, planes and phones get support from long-distance ties more easily than Hungarians who must rely on public transit (Litwak and Szelenyi 1969).

Kinship relations reflect these broad tendencies. Most active and intimate kinship ties extend beyond the neighborhood but remain in the same metropolitan area.<sup>25</sup> However, kinship ties withstand separation better than friendship ties. The norms and structures that link kin -- especially immediate kin -- help them to be active and intimate network members even at a distance. For example, about one-half of the active kin of the residents of the San Francisco Bay area live more than one hour's drive away while less than one-quarter of their active friends live that far apart (Fischer 1982a).

The second East York study shows similar findings, with 50% of immediate kin and 56% of extended kin living more than 30 miles away compared with only 32% of friends living so far apart. A lower percentage of intimates than active network members live so far apart. Both the first and second East York studies show that about 30%-40% of immediate kin, extended kin and friends live outside of the metropolitan area (Wellman 1990). This is because residential moves weaken once-intimate relationships. The ties remain active but they are no longer intimate (Tindall and Wellman 1989).

To be sure, distance reduces contact. Few network members now live near enough to make daily visits. For example, East Yorkers have frequent contact (3x/week or more) with only one kin by telephone or in person. The biggest decline in contact occurs when the tie extends beyond the metropolitan area, more than about one hour's drive, or 30 miles (Wellman 1979; Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988). Relations with kin are less sensitive to long distances than are relations with friends.<sup>26</sup> For example, the second East York study reports that 26% of active friends living more than 30 miles

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<sup>24</sup> Litwak and Szelenyi (1969); Fischer, et al. (1977); Fischer (1979, 1982a, 1982b); Abrams (1984); Greider and Krannich (1985); Bulmer (1986); Wellman (1990); Wellman and Wortley (1990).

<sup>25</sup> Adams (1968); Firth, Hubert and Forge (1969); Klatzky (1971); Ball, et al. (1976); Fischer (1982a, 1982b); Johnson (1982); Oliver (1986).

<sup>26</sup> Adams (1968); Klatzky (1971); Ball, et al. (1976); Clark and Gordon (1979); Fischer (1982a, 1982b); Leigh (1982); Helweg (1985); Willmott (1986). Oliver (1986).

away are seen at least monthly, compared with 55% of active immediate kin and 46% of active extended kin. The telephone compensates for distance, especially for immediate kin. Seventy-two percent of the intimate immediate kin living outside of metropolitan Toronto talk on the telephone at least monthly, compared with 56% of extended kin and 50% of friends (Wellman 1990; Wellman and Tindall forthcoming).

### **Contact**

Most people have contact at least once a week with 20-40% of their active network members: either in person or by telephone. Almost all have weekly contact with at least one intimate. Network members with similar ages, marital status, gender and socioeconomic status have the most frequent contact (Verbrugge 1979). Not only do "birds of a feather flock together," differential sorting tends to place such similar people in the same neighborhoods, workplaces, churches and other organizations. At the other extreme, about one-third of all kinfolk are in touch less than once month. Such contact is usually only for ritual occasions arranged by kinkeepers, such as birthdays, Christmas, and family get-togethers.<sup>27</sup>

Frequency of contact is a function of social closeness (intimate, active, latent), spatial closeness (same neighborhood, metropolitan area), and kinship closeness (immediate vs. extended kin). Immediate kin have more contact than extended kin, and contact with immediate kin diminishes less with greater distances than does contact with extended kin (Adams 1968; Klatzky 1971; Leigh 1982; Gaunt 1988).

Although people usually are in frequent contact with immediate kin, most people have more friendship ties than kinship ties. Hence, they routinely see more friends than kin. For example, south Londoners meet a mean of 3.1 friends socially in a week but only 2.6 kin. Moreover, three-quarters of the active relations whom East Yorkers contact at least three times per week are neither kin nor friends -- but neighbors and coworkers (Wellman, Carrington and Hall 1988).

### **Proximity, Contact and Support**

Some analysts argue that the more contact between network members, the more supportive the relationship. They suggest that frequent contact encourages the provision of support by fostering shared values, increasing mutual awareness of needs and resources, mitigating feelings of loneliness, encouraging reciprocal rounds of support, and facilitating the delivery of aid (Homans 1961; Hammer 1983; Galaskiewicz 1985).

Despite planes and cars, it is not surprising that proximity and frequent face-to-face contact remain correlated.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Adams (1968); Heiskanen (1969); Lüschen (1972); Shanas (1973); Ball, et al. (1976); Pitrou (1977); Johnson (1982); Tsai and Sigelman (1982); Palisi (1985); Feiring and Coates (1987); Willmott (1987). For infrequent contact at rituals, see also Rosenblatt, Johnson and Anderson (1981); Caplow (1982); Lüschen, et al. (1972).

<sup>28</sup> See the reviews in Keller (1968); Olson (1982); Unger and Wandersman (1985); Bulmer (1986); Hunter and Riger (1986); Silverman (1986).

The second East York study shows that physical access fosters relationships: Fully 23% of the respondents' active network members live within one mile. Moreover, respondents have more frequent contact with those network members who live nearby -- both face-to-face and by telephone.

The second East York study does not show much association between the frequency of face-to-face contact and the strength of a relationship, (Wellman and Wortley 1990; see also Mitchell 1987). Respondents are rarely in contact with more than three active network members three times per week or more. Most frequent contact is with weaker ties whom the respondents encounter -- less voluntarily -- in workplaces, neighborhoods and kinship groups.

The supportive effects of contact should operate independently of the strength of relationships (Marsden and Campbell 1984). However, Homans (1950, 1961) links the two, arguing that frequent contact develops strong *and* supportive ties. Some recent research bolsters his suggestion that it is frequent contact with *strong* ties -- and not with all ties -- which fosters support (Rook 1984; Israel and Antonucci 1987; Jones 1982; Kessler and McLeod 1985; Seeman and Berkman 1988).

The second East York study shows that one important kind of social support, the provision of goods and services, is positively related to physical access, either through frequent contact or residential proximity (Wellman and Wortley 1990). Physical access makes it easier for network members to deliver services even when their relationship is not strong. For example, almost all neighbors who are active network members exchange small services. However, physical access is not related to other dimensions of support. Network members are better able to provide companionship, emotional aid and financial aid over greater distances as giving such help less often requires that the network member deliver such aid through face-to-face contact.

Telephone contact is usually more of a voluntary act than is face-to-face contact, at least on the part of the caller, and frequent telephone contact to be significantly correlated with the strength of a relationship as well as with the frequency of face to face contact. Yet relationships with frequent *telephone contact* are not more likely to provide social support. Rather, telephone contact is a universal social lubricant that enables network members to keep connected -- and supportive -- even over large distances (Wellman and Tindall forthcoming). Hence, frequent contact is related more to overall life-satisfaction more than to the delivery of supportive services among elderly Americans (Mancini, et al. 1980).

## CONCLUSION

The transmutation of "community" into "social network" is more than a linguistic trick.

***It demystifies the concept of social support and allows it to be transformed into the concept of supportive resources.*** This means that the support people send and receive can be studied within the context of all the tangible and intangible things they exchange with others.

***It deconstructs the single, global concept of social support.*** It allows the types of supportive resources provided to be discovered empirically and analysed theoretically.

***It situates support within a network rather than treating it as only the property of a tie between two persons.*** This allows the study of social support as phenomena embedded within the power,

influence and communication channels of the social network, rather than as phenomena dependent on the interpersonal attraction of two persons who may or may not like each other (see Duck and Meill's 1986 critique; see also Rogers and Kincaid 1981; Wellman 1981; Hall and Wellman 1985).

***It relates variations in the quality, quantity and reciprocity of the support these ties provide to a person's location in social divisions of labor.*** By accepting that network members often have access to different kinds and quantities of resources, the network approach handles unequal relationships routinely. This enables analysts to conceptualize support processes in terms of the hierarchical, and sometimes stratified, nature of large-scale social systems in a manner analogous to that currently used to explain the social class basis of differential infant mortality. For example, Wellman (1985) has found that men doing paid work, women doing both paid work and domestic work, and women only doing domestic work have networks with quite different compositions, structures -- and supportiveness.

***It encourages the analysis of supportive ties within the context of the broader set of ties with household and personal community members that usually constitute an active social network.*** For example, it is not likely that having five emotionally supportive ties has the same implications for a person who only has five active network ties as it does for another person who has ten additional non-supportive ties. Such non-supporters are palpably present in the networks despite their lack of assistance: They are linked to the focal person and the support-givers and can influence their activities in several ways -- from providing coordinating links to discouraging supportive activity through the example of their unhelpfulness, to acting as social controllers in the network by demanding conformity and restricting behavioral alternatives (e.g., Liu and Duff 1972). Non-supporters are often indirect sources of supportive resources through their ties with other members of their networks. This has been the case in searches for information about (illegal) abortionists (Lee 1969), medical non-medical caregivers for low back pain (Wellman 1991), illicit drugs (Tepperman 1975), and jobs Granovetter (1974, 1982).

***It provides concepts and techniques to analyze how the composition of social networks affect the provision of support.*** For example, is the support provided by sons to aged mothers contingent on the absence of daughters.

***It allows analysts to consider which ties in a network are supportive without assuming that support is only available from solidary groups or specific types of people.*** The assumption that all supportive ties are integrated in one densely-knit neighborhood or kinship group goes against the empirical reality of segmented networks active in the worlds of work, neighborhood, kinship, leisure, etc. Rather than looking to see if what they find measures up to the traditional ideal of densely-knit, tightly-bounded, broadly-based solidarities, analysts can evaluate the ways in which alternative types of networks affect the availability of social support to community members.

***It permits the analysis of social networks as complex, differentiated structures and not as uniform, unitary wholes.*** Networks vary internally in their clustering and density just as galaxies are lumpy clusters within the universe. Analysts can investigate how the structure of both the overall social network and of its component parts affects the flow of resources.

***It links the study of social networks to the study of large-scale phenomena.*** For example, this allows analysts to see how the need for different kinds of social support -- and its provision -- is affected by whether the large-scale social system functions as a market economy where many resources are bought or as a centrally-planned state where many resources are distributed by institutions to loyal members.

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