

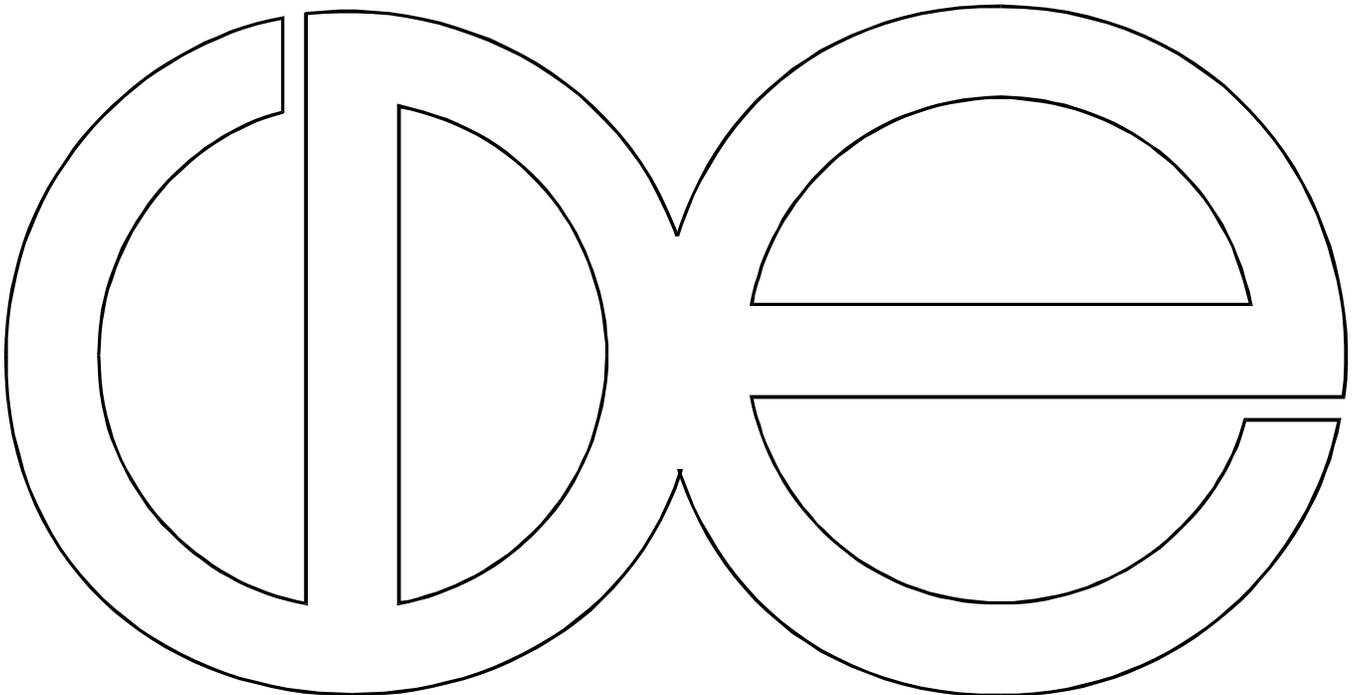
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**Exchanging Social Support with
Friends, Neighbors, and Coworkers**

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ABSTRACT

What is the structure of exchange of social support between mature adults and their friends, neighbors, and coworkers? What factors are associated with involvement with different types of exchange? In this paper, we address these questions with respect to four types of social support: (1) transportation, errands, or shopping; (2) housework, yard work, repairs, or other work around the house; (3) baby-sitting or child care; and, (4) advice. Most work on giving and receiving help has focused on family members. Less research has been done on assistance given to and received from friends or other non-family members.

Using the 1992/93 wave of the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study, we find that among people in their early 50s, 45 percent report that they exchange little social support with friends, neighbors, or coworkers. On the other hand, 25 percent frequently exchange advice with friends, neighbors, or coworkers. The remaining 30 percent can be classified as high exchangers, advice and transportation exchangers, or helpers. Using a multinomial logit model, we show that individuals who are unmarried, highly educated, and highly involved in club and/or church activities are the most likely to exchange social support with non-family members. Women are more likely to exchange advice only, and a combination of advice and transportation, than are men, while men are more likely than women to report providing assistance that is not reciprocated.

INTRODUCTION

Besides the important practical advantages of being in relationships, involvement in socially supportive relationships with friends and family can help keep life meaningful and interesting to people. The number and depth of these affiliations depends on many things, including people's family histories, patterns of residential mobility, work histories, and involvement in community activities. Middle-aged Americans are especially likely to have living parents, adult children, grandchildren, and coworkers, as well as friends and neighbors, all of whom may ask for, or provide, help with day-to-day activities. There is some concern about the pressures on middle-aged people who are sandwiched between (possibly dependent) parents and (possibly dependent) children (Eggebeen 1992; Spitze and Logan 1990). On the other hand, some researchers have found that, to some extent, giving help can be as rewarding as it is burdensome (Stevens 1992; Roberto and Scott 1984-85).

There are many different types of help that members of family or friendship groups exchange with one another. It may be short-term help, like mowing the yard when a person has the flu, or it may be long term help, like swapping rides to the grocery store every other week. People may exchange financial help (in the form of a gift or loan), emotional help (e.g., advice), or physical/instrumental help (e.g., work around the house, baby-sitting, or transportation).¹

Many researchers have explored the act of exchanging help or social support² with relatives (Spitze and Logan 1992; Markides, Boldt, and Ray 1986), especially parents (Eggebeen and Hogan 1990; Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg, 1993; Horowitz 1985; Walker and Pratt 1991). Less research has examined exchanging help with friends, neighbors, or coworkers (Hochschild 1982; Adams 1985-86). But non-familial relationships are important and distinct parts of people's social support networks and are therefore worthy of our research attention (Seeman and Berkman

1988; Litwak and Szelenyi 1969). Both qualitative and quantitative research have indicated that although family members are important to the social networks of adults, friendships are also important and are, in fact, more strongly related to well-being (see Adams and Blieszner 1989; Matthews 1986; Peters and Kaiser 1985).

Exchanges between friends are probably more important now than ever in American society. This is because of the extensive mobility of individuals away from other family members. That is, for many individuals in our society, a friend or neighbor is likely to be more accessible in time of need, or their needs are likely to be more readily apparent than are the needs of family members. For those who are geographically cut off from family members, friends provide some of the richest relationships available to them. There are, however, different social norms attached to exchanging help with friends, neighbors, and/or coworkers than there are to exchanging help with family members (Seeman and Berkman 1988; Cantor 1979; Penning 1990). The existence of these different sets of norms suggests that the exchanges of social support involving family and those involving friends should probably be studied as distinct phenomena.

In this paper, we examine the structure of exchange of social support with friends, neighbors, and co-workers. And, we look at the way in which an individual's family and work commitments, and his or her social involvement, influence these exchanges.

BACKGROUND

The exchange of support is important for the actual support which individuals receive, for the pleasure that individuals receive from contact with other people, and for the sense of personal satisfaction associated with their ability to provide help to others. Family members are important parts of this exchange, but research shows that friends also play an important role (Griffith 1985).

The Role of Support in Well-being

The size and depth of friendship networks are important throughout the life course. Stephens et al. (1978) found that informal social support networks are related to many other important indicators of mental health and quality of life. Other researchers have found that it is the intimate friend who is particularly important to psychological health, especially during a crisis (Lowenthal and Haven 1968). Friendships among older women help them to maintain physical health and mental health and also contribute to continued psychological growth (Lowenthal and Haven 1968; Eisenberg 1979; Lynch 1977; Adams 1985-86; Peters and Kaiser 1985). And, contact with neighbors and friends has more impact on widows' positive morale than contact with children (Arling 1976).

Conversely, the absence of contact with friends may have undesirable consequences. The number of friendships is a more powerful determinant of loneliness than is the absence of a partner. Quite simply, friendships seem to guard against loneliness (Dykstra 1995). Exchanging help with friends, neighbors, and/or coworkers is a clear sign of involvement in friendships and social networks. Exchanging instrumental support contributes significantly to life satisfaction (Stevens 1992).

Stephens et al. (1978) found that the extent of informal support is directly linked to most areas of a person's life; those persons who have high informal support are more likely to be actively involved with children and friends and to be emotionally healthier. Litwak and Szelenyi (1969) showed that people rely on family, friends, and neighbors for different kinds of help. Support from family is preferable to support from friends and neighbors, and support from friends and neighbors is preferable to support from formal organizations (Cantor 1979; Penning 1990).

Adams (1985-86) found that emotionally close local friends are more likely than other friends to help with most tasks; close friends who live farther away are very important, but are unlikely to give help.

Reciprocity is an important aspect of all adult relationships and particularly of close friendships (Longino and Lipman 1985). Receiving instrumental support from non-family members is often part of the reciprocity involved in these relationships. Reciprocal relationships can include both similar and complementary exchanges (Lewittes 1989)--people do not necessarily give the same type of help to a friend as they receive from that friend. Older people perceive more reciprocity in expressive or emotional support than in instrumental support (Stevens 1992). Weiss and Lowenthal (1975) found that at all ages, women value reciprocity more highly than men, and women in the “pre-retirement stage” value reciprocity more than do younger women.

Several researchers have found that the ability to reciprocate help with friends is strongly related to morale. Roberto and Scott (1984-85) found a significant difference in the morale of older women according to the equity of helping behaviors; women who give more help than they receive have a higher mean morale score than do those who receive more than they give. The need for assistance has been shown to have a much smaller negative effect on morale than the inability to reciprocate (Lee 1988).

Family Commitments

Little research has specifically examined the factors associated with exchanging instrumental social support with friends. One set of factors that is probably very important is the extent and nature of commitments to one's own nuclear family. Much of the discussion of the effects of families on social involvement outside the family has focused on women. Some researchers argue that being married integrates women into larger networks, particularly with kin, and provides opportunities and resources for giving and receiving care (Fischer 1982; Olicker 1989). Others view marriage as a socially isolating and "greedy institution" (Coser and Coser 1974). Women's time and energy are focused on caring for those inside their immediate household, which limits their opportunities and resources for interacting with and helping those outside of it (Altegart 1985; Coser and Coser 1974; Gerstel 1988). Those who are unmarried, on the other hand, need more assistance from others; and, they have more time and energy to provide assistance to others.

Much of the research on differences in social support between married and unmarried women has focused on widows. Roberto and Scott (1984-85), comparing older married women to older widowed women, found no significant differences in the number of close friends respondents reported. Only 8.2 percent of this sample of women indicated that they did not have a close friend. Indeed, it appears that widows interact at least as much, if not more, with friends than do married women (Altegart 1985; Atchley 1972; Essex and Nam 1987; Ferraro and Barresi 1982; Petrowsky 1976; Waite and Harrison 1992). Controlling for other social characteristics, widows spend more time with and give more instrumental help to more friends than do married women (Gallagher and Gerstel 1993).

Widows also rely on their friends for emotional and instrumental support more so than married women (Roberto and Scott 1984-85; Roberto and Scott 1986). Roberto and Scott's

(1984-85) data suggests that the widow relies on her friends for help in areas that may have been previously handled by her husband (providing transportation and making household repairs). Interestingly Lopata (1973) finds that widows are a significant source of emotional and practical support for friends who are themselves recently widowed. Little research has addressed the level of social integration of married men versus widowers.

Social Involvement

A second set of factors that will be associated with the exchange of social support is formal social involvement. The extent to which people participate in formal organizations, such as clubs and churches, is one indicator of the extent of a person's friendship circle. Stephens et al. (1978) confirmed this when they found that frequency of church attendance and extent of organizational membership are clearly and strongly related to informal social support. The larger the number of clubs and organizations to which the person belonged, the higher the reported level of informal social support. Likewise, the greater the frequency of religious service attendance, the higher the level of informal social support.

Mature adults generally meet their friends in one of several places: in their neighborhood, in social organizations, or at work. Adams (1985-86) found that age-segregated housing was related to the development of close friendships. When Roberto and Scott (1984-85) asked elderly married or widowed women how they met their close friends, married women responded that they were neighbors (24 percent), they met at work (22 percent), or they met through church (19 percent). Widowed women met their friends most often as neighbors or through church (25 percent each), and 13 percent met their friends through work.

Personal Characteristics

(1) Age

In addition to an individual's family commitment and social involvement, other personal characteristics will affect an individual's exchange of social support. Age is one such factor. Antonucci and Akiyama (1987b) found that older people reported that they were less likely to provide support to others (also see Depner and Ingersoll-Dayton 1985). However, Antonucci and Akiyama (1987b) found that there is no significant age difference in the size of people's social networks or in the number of people from whom they received support. In their study of four generations, Weiss and Lowenthal (1975) found that from high school to middle age, people have fewer and fewer interactions with friends, but that there is an upsurge in involvement with friends in the pre-retirement years. Unfortunately, our data do not permit us to examine the association between age and the exchange of social support. This is because all of our respondents are the same age.

(2) Gender

Previous research suggests that gender is associated with the exchange of social support. Gender differences in social networks, friendships, and social supports are well-established in the literature (Antonucci and Akiyama 1987a; Barnett et al. 1987; Buhrke and Fuqua 1987; Chapman 1989; Dykstra 1989; Griffith 1985; Gutmann 1987; Huyck 1989; Rossi 1985; Rubinstein 1986; Troll 1988; Vaux 1985; Wright 1989). Compared to men, women tend to have more people in their networks, to have more diverse types of relationships with people in their networks, to have more frequent contact with their network members, and to receive varied types of support from multiple sources (Antonucci 1990:213). Among college students, men are less interested in

intimate communications within friendships than are women (Caldwell and Peplau 1982).

Lifetime continuity of friendships is more common for women than for men (Roberto and Kimboko 1989).

(3) Education

Past research suggests that education is associated with the exchange of social support with both friends and family members (Amato, 1993; Eggebeen and Hogan, 1990; Penning, 1990). Although the results are sometimes conflicting, in general the pattern is that the exchange of social support increases with education. This may be because individuals with higher levels of education have access to more stable personal relationships. Stability in employment is higher for those with higher levels of education, so the highly educated may have more stable relationships with coworkers and friends made through employment. Research, however, suggests that educational differences in access to social support explain little of the educational differences in subjective quality of life (Ross and VanWilligen, 1997).

(4) Income

Previous research has generated conflicting results regarding the relationship between income and the exchange of social support. Using cross-tabulations, Stevens (1992) found that income and giving social support were significantly related. Gallagher and Gerstel (1993) found that income was positively associated with the number of friends helped, but this association became insignificant when other variables were introduced into the analysis.

The relationship between income and the exchange of social support is in need of further research. There are reasons, for example, to expect that poor people are more likely than better

off people to exchange social support with their friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Poorer people need to have many strategies for surviving on their minimal budgets, and exchanging instrumental support with friends is one way that people stretch their dollars. It is also possible, on the other hand, that people with more monetary resources may have more leisure time available to help friends, neighbors, and coworkers. These effects may cancel one another out in analyses, which could explain other researchers' findings that income has no effect on the amount of social support a person gives.

(5) Employment

Researchers have found both that employment impedes the growth of deep friendships (Blau 1973), and that work friendships are an integral part of the sense of meaning provided by employment (Lewittes 1989). Szinovacz (1983) reported that women often do not continue their work friendships after retirement—further research is required to see whether this has changed significantly in the past two decades. Gallagher and Gerstel (1993) find that current employment is a significant predictor (at the $p \leq 0.10$ level) of the total number of friends helped, but not a predictor of helping family members or of hours spent helping kith or kin.

(6) Health

Health is another variable with effects that may cancel each other out. Those in poor health are probably in greater need of assistance from others, but perhaps not in a position to

provide instrumental help to others. On the other hand, those in poor health may seek reciprocal exchange relationships that enable them to meet some of their personal needs.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Previous research suggests that people systematically engage in the exchange of social support with friends, neighbors, and coworkers, and that family commitments, social involvement, and personal characteristics influence involvement in this exchange. This leads us to four major sets of research questions.

(1) What is the structure of exchange of social support between friends, neighbors, and co-workers?

Research on the structure of exchange of social support across generations within the family found that roughly 1/2 of the people in the study did not routinely exchange in giving or receiving relationships with their parents, and that only about 1 in 10 were engaged in extensive exchange relationships (Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg, 1993). There has been much less research on the exchange of social support with friends, neighbors, and co-workers. However, we expect to find that most people are engaged in the exchange of some type of social support, but that relatively few are involved in extensive exchange relationships. We focus on exchanging help with (1) transportation, errands, or shopping; (2) housework, yard work, repairs, or other work around the house; (3) baby-sitting or child care; and (4) advice.³

(2) Do family commitments promote or inhibit exchange?

The literature provides conflicting arguments regarding the effects of family

commitments on exchange with friends, neighbors, and coworkers. On the one hand, marriage and/or the presence of children may draw an individual's time and attention, leaving less time to be involved in the exchange of social support with non-family members. Unmarried individuals may exchange social support more frequently than married individuals because unmarried people have a greater need for social support from friends, neighbors, and coworkers. The presence of a parent in the home may mean that the individual has less time to spend outside the home. On the other hand, the presence of young children in the home may lead an individual to be involved in car-pooling and the exchange of other forms of help with friends, neighbors, or coworkers.

(3) How do other forms of social involvement influence the exchange of social support?

Some individuals are simply more involved in their social worlds than are others. Involvement in clubs and churches expands the network of acquaintances with which an individual may exchange social support. People who are more involved in formal social organizations probably have more friends and are more likely to be in a position where they know about specific types of help that their friends need. Therefore, we hypothesize that people who participate in formal social organizations will be more likely to give instrumental help to friends, neighbors, or coworkers.

(4) How is gender associated with the exchange of social support?

Previous research suggests that women are more likely to exchange advice than are men, but provides little evidence that other forms of social support differ between men and women. The

types of instrumental help given probably also differ by gender, but the wording of the questions in our data precludes testing this hypothesis. For example, although helping with housework is probably more common for women, the “housework” question also asks about yard work, repairs, and other work around the house, which may be more likely to be done by men. Helping with “transportation” may be related to car-pooling to work, which is done by both men and women. Women are probably more likely to give help with baby sitting and child care.

DATA

The data come from the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study (WLS). The WLS collected its first wave of data in 1957 from a random sample of 10,317 men and women who graduated from Wisconsin high schools in that year. Most of these individuals were born in 1939. The survey collected data from the original respondents in 1975 and 1992/93 as well. The 1992/93 wave included telephone interviews with 8493 (82 percent) of the 10,317 respondents who were first interviewed as high school seniors in 1957. In addition, 6875 respondents also answered the mailed questionnaire in 1992/3 and responded to the instrumental help-giving questions. This is the group that we used in our analyses. Most respondents were 52 or 53 years old when interviewed in 1992/93.

The WLS’s large sample size, interesting sample age (early 50s), and measures of many relevant variables make it a good data set for the analysis of the exchange of social support. A major drawback of using the WLS is that it is only representative of White Americans who are currently in their mid-fifties and who graduated from a Wisconsin high school. We are not able to measure differences in social support systems by race⁴ or age. On the other hand, the WLS is an

excellent data set to use for understanding the lives of middle-aged White American high school graduates.

VARIABLES AND MEASURES

Table 1 lists the variables, their measures, and the means and standard deviations of each variable. The WLS has measured many different kinds of social support over the years, but in this analysis, we focus on the 1992/93 wave of the survey. We focus on the factors that are associated with exchanging advice or instrumental support—help with day-to-day activities—with friends, neighbors, and coworkers.

[Insert Table 1 about here.]

Exchanging help with friends, neighbors, and/or coworkers

The 1992/93 WLS mail questionnaire asked respondents about giving and receiving several kinds of unpaid help. The respondent was asked, for example, “During the past month did anyone need help with transportation, errands, or shopping?” If the respondent said yes, then they were asked “During the past month have you given help with transportation, errands, or shopping to friends, neighbors, or coworkers?” These questions were also asked about advice; housework, yard work, repairs, or other work around the house; and, baby sitting or child care. Note that the questionnaire did not ask separate questions about friends versus neighbors versus coworkers; they are grouped together in each question. Separate, parallel questions were asked about help respondents may have given to relatives.

To assess receipt of social support, the WLS mail questionnaire asked the respondent if they needed advice, or help with transportation, work around the house, or baby sitting in the past month, and if anyone was available to give that help. Then, in questions closely paralleling those

about the respondent giving instrumental social support, the instrument asked about receiving social support from friends, neighbors, or coworkers in the past month.

The descriptive statistics in Table 1 show that giving and receiving advice are the most frequent types of exchange in which the respondents are involved. Over 1/2 of the respondents report that they have given advice to a friend in the past month, while over 40 percent report that they received advice. The least frequent type of exchange is giving or receiving help with child care. This may very well be due to the age of the respondents, and the limited need for child care that they and their peers would have. The figures in Table 1 also show that the respondents report giving more help than they report receiving for each type of help.

Family Commitments

Our measures of family commitments are marital status, whether or not a parent resides with the respondent, and whether or not a child resides with the respondent. While the WLS collected detailed marital histories for each of the respondents, we focus on their current marital status in this paper. We coded respondents' current marital statuses as a series of four dummy variables: (1) currently married (83 percent of the sample); (2) currently separated or divorced (11 percent); (3) widowed, not married (2 percent); and (4) single, never married (4 percent). We also coded a fifth dummy variable coded as 1 for the 20 people who did not respond to the marital history question. Although women are much more likely to be widowed than are men, there are so few widows in the sample that the data do not support an interaction between sex and widowhood.

Only two percent of respondents were co-resident with their mother or father in 1992/3. Eleven percent had a child 17 or under at home, and 29% had a child 18 or over living at home.

Social Involvement

The social integration variables, also taken from the mailed questionnaire, measure the respondent's membership and level of involvement in 19 types of clubs or churches on a zero to four scale: "not involved", "very little", "some", "quite a bit", and "a great deal." For our analyses, we created a scale of formal social integration that is a sum of the respondent's scores on these 19 questions. The average score on this variable is 7; the standard deviation of this variable is large, which means that there is a wide variety of levels of formal social involvement among WLS respondents. We then took the natural log of this count variable so that its distribution would be normal. We include a dummy variable to indicate those individuals who have no club or church involvement; 12 percent of the sample are in this category. Only a small fraction of the sample refused to answer this question.

Gender

In our analyses, we coded a sex dummy variable to equal 1 if the respondent is female. Fifty-four percent of WLS respondents in the 1992/3 wave were female. This gender imbalance in the sample is in part due to gender differentials in mortality and perhaps to gender differences in response rates.

Education

All of the WLS respondents finished high school since this was a requirement for inclusion in the sample. Over 1/2 have less than one year of college, and 14 percent have four years of college or more.

Self-Reported Physical Health

Respondents were asked to report their physical health at the time of the interview. Almost 90 percent reported they had good or excellent health.

Per-Capita Household Income

The total income for the respondent's entire household in the past 12 months is bottom-coded at -\$14,400 and top-coded at \$300,000. The number of people in a household ranged from 1 to 12. To compute per-capita household income, we divided the total household income for each respondent by the number of people in their household; this variable has a mean of \$26,918 and a large standard deviation. For the logistic regression models, I added \$100 to this value and took the natural log of the sum. Non-responses were assigned the mean value and marked with a dummy variable.

Current Employment

We coded a dummy variable equal to 1 if the respondent was among the 85 percent of respondents currently employed at the time of the survey.

METHODS

Latent Class Analysis of the Structure of Social Support

We use latent class analysis to examine the structure of exchange of social support. As shown in Table 1, we are working with eight questions about giving and receiving help. The

purpose of using latent class models is to determine the principles of the relationships between the respondents and their friends, neighbors, and coworkers that underlie the observed responses to these eight questions. The cross-classification of these eight variables yields 256 cells with each respondent assigned to a single cell. Latent class models (Clogg, 1995; Hogan, Eggebeen, and Clogg, 1993; McCutcheon, 1987) can then be used to determine the minimum number of latent classes needed to represent the association among items.

The latent class model characterizes a categorical latent variable (X) that represents the underlying types of relationships with friends, neighbors, or coworkers. We refer to the eight items as $A, B, C, D, E, F, G,$ and H whose levels are indexed by i, j, k, l, m, n, o and $p,$ respectively. Let $\pi_{ij\dots p}$ denote the probability that a respondent is in cell (i, j, \dots, p) of the cross-classification of the eight items. The latent class model with T latent classes is, then,

$$\pi_{ij\dots p} = \sum_{T=1}^T \pi_X(t) \pi_{A|X=t}(i) \pi_{B|X=t}(j) \dots \pi_{H|X=t}(p), \quad (1)$$

where $\pi_X(t)$ is the probability that $X = t$, $\pi_{A|X=t}(i)$ is the conditional probability that item A takes on level i , given that latent variable X is at level t ; the other conditional probabilities are defined similarly. The model assumes that the items are mutually independent given X .

Respondents are assigned to latent classes using estimates of the model parameters to calculate the probability that latent variable X takes on level t given the observed items are at particular levels. Each respondent is assigned to the latent class that is modal for his or her response pattern. One can use likelihood ratio and BIC statistics to determine how many latent classes are needed to fit the data. Once individuals are assigned to a latent class, the set of latent classes can be used as an independent or dependent variable in multivariate analyses. In our

analyses, we use the set of latent classes as the dependent variable, and we examine factors that are associated with belonging to a specific latent class.

Multinomial Logit Models

We use multinomial logit models to examine the factors that are associated with the exchange of social support (Maddala, 1983). One cannot know in advance how many latent classes will be necessary to characterize the exchange of social support, but the multinomial logit model is appropriate if more than two classes are involved. If we have m classes, then let P_1, P_2, \dots, P_m represent the probabilities of being in each of the m latent classes. Let x represent the vector of independent variables to be used in the analysis, and β represent a vector of coefficients indicating the effects of these variables. Then,

$$P_j = \exp(\mathbf{b}_j x) / D \quad (j = 1, 2, \dots, m-1)$$

and $P_m = 1/D$ (2)

where

$$D = 1 + \sum_{j=1}^{m-1} \exp(\mathbf{b}_j x)$$

We use maximum likelihood methods to estimate \mathbf{b}_j , the effects of the independent variables on being in each of the $m-1$ latent classes relative to m .

RESULTS

The Structure of Exchange with Friends, Neighbors, and Coworkers

Table 2 contains the fit statistics for alternative latent class models of exchanging help with friends, neighbors, and coworkers. We present three basic measures of the goodness of fit. The

first test involves comparing the likelihood ratio Chi-Squared statistics for models with different numbers of latent classes. Column 2 gives these statistics for each model; column 3 gives the degrees of freedom for each model, and column 4 gives the probability that the difference between the model in that row and the preceding model is due to chance. The fourth column of numbers presents the index of dissimilarity, in this situation, the percentage of cases that are incorrectly classified by the model. The final column gives the BIC statistic for each model. The BIC statistic takes into account both the goodness of fit of the model and its parsimony.

[Insert Table 2 about here.]

These results show that a model with two latent classes represents an improvement over the independence model by both a Chi-Squared test ($4449.2 - 1236 = 3213.2$ with 9 degrees of freedom) and by the BIC statistic, which is -866.8. The index of dissimilarity shows that a two latent class model classifies approximately 13 percent of the cases incorrectly.

As the remainder of the figures in Table 2 show, each subsequent model represents an improvement over the previous model according to the Chi-Squared test. However, the 5 latent class model is a better choice according to the BIC statistic. We opted for the 5 class model because of the BIC statistic, because it is more parsimonious, and because this model classified only 3.5 percent of the cases incorrectly.

Table 3 contains the five latent classes, named at the top of each column, and the conditional probabilities of positive item responses given membership in the latent class. The proportion of the sample that is in each latent class appears at the bottom of each column.

[Insert Table 3 about here.]

The latent class with the largest proportion of the sample is the low exchange group, which contains approximately 45 percent of the sample. These individuals exchange little social

support with others. For example, only 21 percent of this group reported giving advice and 12 percent reported receiving advice. This compares to 57 percent and 42 percent in the overall sample (see Table 1).

The second latent class listed in Table 3, and the second largest as well, is the group of people who exchange advice, but little else. This group contains 25 percent of the sample. Almost everyone in this group reports giving advice and almost 3/4 report receiving advice. The third class, approximately 7 percent of the sample, contains the high exchangers. These individuals report extensive amounts of giving and receiving help with transportation, work around the house, and advice. Relative to the overall sample and to the members of the other latent classes, these individuals also report giving a sizable amount of help with child care; approximately 5 percent report having received help with child care.

The fourth latent class consists of individuals who exchange a good deal of help with transportation and advice. We considered calling this the car-pooling class, but we are not certain that this is the mechanism that leads to these exchanges. The final class, approximately 17 percent of the sample, consists of people who report giving extensive amounts of each type help, but receiving very little. We call these people “helpers.”

Family Commitments and the Exchange of Social Support

First, let us examine the effects of family responsibilities and commitments on the exchange of social support. The results for marital status show that individuals who are separated or divorced are more likely to exchange social support than are those who are currently married. In fact, comparing the coefficients within each column for the marital status categories shows that individuals who are currently separated or divorced are more likely than any other marital status

group to be involved in each of the four types of systematic exchange of social support. If we look at these effects in a different way, and compare the coefficients for currently separated or divorced across columns, we see that these individuals are most likely to be high exchangers, and also very likely to be advice and transportation exchangers.

[Insert Table 4 about here.]

Those who are currently widowed are more likely to be high exchangers and next to be advice and transportation exchangers. They do not differ from the currently married in the likelihood of being advice exchangers or helpers. Those who are single and never married are most likely to be high exchangers, followed by advice and transportation exchangers, and then advice exchangers. They do not differ significantly from the currently married in the likelihood of being helpers.

As a group, the results for marital status suggest that married individuals are less involved in the exchange of social support with friends, neighbors and co-workers than are unmarried individuals. The group that seems to be most involved in the exchange of social support--those who are currently separated or divorced--are the most likely of the marital status groups to be involved in high exchange relationships.

Although the effects of having a co-resident parent are all negative, only the effect on being in the helpers group relative to the low exchange group is significant. The effect of having a co-resident child differs depending on the age of the child. Those with at least one co-resident child who is 17 or under are more likely to be in the advice and transportation exchange group than are those who do not have a child who is 17 or under. This conforms with the notion that these people may be involved in car-pooling networks. On the other hand, the effects of having an adult child at home are all negative, but only the effect on being an advice exchanger relative to

a low exchanger is significant. It is possible that adult children at home provide someone with whom the respondent can exchange advice, or that they are especially needy, taking time and energy away from exchange with non-family members.

Social Involvement and the Exchange of Social Support

The results for the effects of club or church involvement are equally striking. The likelihood of belonging to each of the latent classes of exchange relative to belonging to the low exchange group increases with the log of the club/church involvement score. And, those individuals who have no club or church involvement are less likely to be involved in the systematic exchange of social support than are those who have at least some involvement. These results suggest that club and/or church involvement expands the opportunities for the exchange of social support. Further, individuals who are involved in clubs and/or churches are also probably more likely to be involved in other types of activities that bring them into contact with potential friends.

Personal Characteristics and the Exchange of Social Support

Women are more likely than men to be advice and advice and transportation exchangers, while men are more likely than women to be helpers. This is consistent with previous work that suggests that women are more likely to give and receive advice. We do not know whether the gender difference in the likelihood of being a helper is due to actual differences in behavior, or to the perception among men that they give more help than they receive.

The effects of education are also very striking. The likelihood of being an advice exchanger, a high exchanger, or an advice and transportation exchanger relative to being a low

exchanger increases consistently with education. The most highly educated are the most likely to be involved in these types of exchange.

The effects of income are consistent with the view that low income individuals are more likely to exchange social support than are high income individuals. The likelihood of being a high exchanger relative to a low exchanger decreases as income rises, and the likelihood of being a helper relative to a low exchanger decreases as income rises.

The results for health indicate that those who are in excellent or good health are less likely to be high exchangers or advice and transportation exchangers than people who are in worse health. This suggests that being less healthy leads one to be more likely to be involved in the extensive exchange of social support, or in the exchange of rides and conversation. It could be that individuals in poor health accept rides and help with chores, and compensate by providing advice and conversation. Our data and results, unfortunately, do not contain the information necessary to demonstrate this definitively.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of these analyses tell us several things about exchanging help with friends, neighbors, and coworkers. Many WLS respondents give help to, and receive help from, people other than relatives, especially with advice and transportation. Approximately 45 percent, however, exchange little instrumental help with friends. The norms of reciprocity appear to be powerful in the lives of the respondents. Almost 40 percent of the sample report involvement in reciprocal exchange relationships. On the other hand, 17 percent report giving much more help than they receive. This may be an issue of subjective perception, or it may be that people in their

50s are especially likely to have the resources and ability to give help, while some of their friends, neighbors, and coworkers may not be in such a privileged position. It may also be an issue of people giving socially acceptable answers; in our society, it is much more acceptable to give than to receive help.

The results regarding family commitments and their relationship with the exchange of social support suggest that unmarried individuals, especially those who are divorced or separated, are more likely to be involved in the exchange of social support than are married individuals. This may be because marriage is a selfish institution as suggested by Coser and Coser (1974), or it could be because unmarried individuals must rely on friends, neighbors, coworkers for social support that others receive in their marriages.

Formal memberships in clubs and churches are very strong predictors of giving and receiving social support. Perhaps people who are more involved with formal and informal socializing have personality characteristics that make them more likely to help others. It may also be that sociable people have more friends, and thus have more opportunities to exchange social support. Given that helping has been shown to be good for a person's mental health, people who are socially integrated probably have higher morale and lower levels of loneliness than do others.

In contrast to the stereotype that women are more likely to exchange social support than men, we found that the gender differences were a bit more complicated. Women are more likely than men to exchange advice, and to exchange advice and transportation assistance. Men, on the other hand, are more likely than women to be helpers. Men and women do not differ in the likelihood of being high exchangers. Additional research is needed to better understand the relationships between different types of helping and gender.

The relationships of the socioeconomic status variables, education and income, deserve further research. The likelihood of being involved in most types of social exchange increases significantly with education. The likelihood of being a high exchanger or a helper, however, varies inversely with income. The exchange of social support seems to be one of the few outcomes in the social world in which the effects of income and education are quite different.

Perhaps the most significant feature of the results is that they illustrate the systematic nature of the exchange of social support with friends, neighbors, or coworkers among middle-aged adults. These results suggest that the majority of middle-aged adults are involved in patterns of exchange of social support with non-family members that can be described in a sociologically meaningful fashion, and that these patterns of exchange vary with the family situation, social involvement, gender, and socioeconomic status of the individual.

Our results do, however, have some limitations. First, the sample is limited in that it contains individuals in a small age range who are high school graduates of one state, and who are racially homogeneous. This makes us cautious about generalizing from the results, and prohibits the analysis of variations with age, race, and ethnicity. Second, the data on giving and receiving social support have some limitations. One of the most obvious limitations is the generic nature of the questions about help around the house. Gender differences, for example, in giving help with yard work and housework probably exist. Third, most of the variables are probably exogenous to social support, i.e., they affect the exchange of social support but the exchange of social support does not affect them. This may not, however, be true of social involvement. That is, those who are more likely to exchange social support may also be those who are more likely to be socially involved. So, social involvement may be merely associated with the exchange of social support rather than promoting greater exchange of social support.

In future research we hope to examine the association between social involvement and the exchange of social support more thoroughly. Further, we hope to examine the association between social involvement, the exchange of social support with family, and the exchange of social support with friends, neighbors, or coworkers on the one hand, and perceptions of life satisfaction. Although it is useful to describe the patterns of exchange and their association with other sociologically important characteristics of individuals, we are also interested in the role of these exchanges in the overall quality of life for the individuals who are involved and not involved in exchange.

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ENDNOTES

¹ More involved help which includes intensive daily care is called “care-giving” in the literature and probably has different correlates and determinants than do other forms of help.

² Kahn (1979:85) offers a definition of social support: “interpersonal transactions that include one or more of the following: the expression of positive affect of one person toward another; the affirmation or endorsement of another person’s behaviors, perceptions, or expressed views; the giving of symbolic or material aid to another.”

³ In the remainder of the paper, we often refer to the types of help as simply “advice,” “transportation”, “help around the house”, and “baby sitting” as shorthand. Similarly, we occasionally refer to friends, neighbors and coworkers simply as “friends.”

⁴ The only measure of race in any wave of the WLS is a 1975 question that asked the respondent his or her father’s nationality.

Table 1

Variable Construction and Descriptive Statistics

Description of Variable	Specific Variable(s)	Values	Mean	Std. Dev.
Social Support	1. Gave help with transportation ^a	0/1, 1=yes	0.299	
	2. Received help with transportation ^a	0/1, 1=yes	0.116	
	3. Gave help with work around the house ^b	0/1, 1=yes	0.176	
	4. Received help with work around the house ^b	0/1, 1=yes	0.101	
	5. Gave help with child care ^c	0/1, 1=yes	0.056	
	6. Received help with child care ^c	0/1, 1=yes	0.009	
	7. Gave help with advice ^d	0/1, 1=yes	0.570	
	8. Received help with advice ^d	0/1, 1=yes	0.416	
Gender	1. Female	0/1, 1=female	0.536	
Education	1. Less than one year of college or refused	0/1, 1=yes	0.566	
	2. 1-3 years of college	0/1, 1=yes	0.158	
	3. 4 years of college or bachelor's degree	0/1, 1=yes	0.137	
	4. More than 4 years of college or master's or higher degree	0/1, 1=yes	0.139	
Physical Health	1. R is in good or excellent health at the present time	0/1, 1=yes	0.884	
Log of per-capita household income + \$100	1. Transformation of per capita household income	4.6 - 12.6	10.134	0.622
	2. Incomplete info. on household income (excl. from lncpcinc)	0/1, 1=yes	0.314	
Marital History	1. Currently married	0/1, 1=yes	0.830	
	2. Currently separated or divorced	0/1, 1=yes	0.105	
	3. Widowed, not married	0/1, 1=yes	0.022	
	4. Single, never married	0/1, 1=yes	0.042	
	5. Current marital state not ascertained/refused	0/1, 1=yes	0.002	
Employment Status	1. R is currently employed	0/1, 1=yes	0.850	
Co-resident Parent	1. R's mother or father lives with R		0.021	
Co-resident Child	1. There is a co-resident child aged 0-17	0/1, 1=yes	0.112	
	2. There is a co-resident child aged 18+	0/1, 1=yes	0.293	
Club or Church Involvement	1. Log of total involvement in clubs & churches	0 - 3.76	1.836	0.728
	2. No club or church involvement	0/1, 1=yes	0.118	
	3. Club & church involvement not ascertained or refused	0/1, 1=yes	0.009	

^a Has given (received) any help with transportation, errands, or shopping to (from) friends, neighbors, or coworkers in the past month.

^b Has given (received) any help with housework, yard work, repairs, or other work around the house to (from) friends, neighbors, or coworkers in the past month.

^c Has given (received) any help with babysitting or child care to (from) friends, neighbors, or coworkers in the past month.

^d Has given (received) any help with advice, encouragement, moral or emotional support to (from) friends, neighbors, or coworkers in the past month.

Note: Data are the 1992/3 Wisconsin Longitudinal Study (WLS). The statistics are shown for the analysis sample only (n=6875) which is comprised of people who answered the 1992/3 phone survey, the 1992/3 mail survey, and the mail survey questions on exchanging social support with friends, neighbors, or coworkers.

Table 2

Fit Statistics for Alternative Latent Class Models of
Exchanging Help with Friends, Neighbors, and Coworkers

Number of Latent Classes	Likelihood Ratio χ^2	<i>df</i>	<i>P</i> value	Index of Dissimilarity	<i>BIC</i>
1 (independence)	4449.2	247	--	0.292	2159.1
2	1236.0	238	0.000	0.133	-866.8
3	592.4	229	0.000	0.070	-1430.9
4	397.2	220	0.000	0.046	-1546.6
5	291.9	212	0.000	0.035	-1581.3
6	233.5	205	0.000	0.028	-1577.8

Table 3

Conditional Probabilities of Positive Item Responses for Each Latent Class
for Dimensions of Help Exchanged with Friends, Neighbors, and Coworkers

Dimensions of Exchange	Low Exchangers (1)	Advice Exchangers (2)	High Exchangers (3)	Advice and Transportation Exchangers (4)	Helpers (5)
Gave help with transportation ^a	0.0798	0.2823	0.8362	0.5718	0.5914
Received help with transportation ^a	0.0141	0.0000	0.5309	0.8286	0.1236
Gave help with work around the house ^b	0.0495	0.0623	0.7109	0.0001	0.5323
Received help with work around the house ^b	0.0265	0.0491	0.5393	0.2227	0.1518
Gave help with child care ^c	0.0122	0.0397	0.2281	0.0399	0.1340
Received help with child care ^c	0.0006	0.0036	0.0487	0.0244	0.0151
Gave help with advice ^d	0.2097	0.9996	0.9527	0.8011	0.6576
Received help with advice ^d	0.1223	0.7421	0.9925	0.8002	0.3378
Latent class proportions	0.4510	0.2503	0.0686	0.0630	0.1672

^a Has given (received) any help with transportation, errands, or shopping to (from) friends, neighbors, or coworkers in the past month.

^b Has given (received) any help with housework, yard work, repairs, or other work around the house to (from) friends, neighbors, or coworkers in the past month.

^c Has given (received) any help with babysitting or child care to (from) friends, neighbors, or coworkers in the past month.

^d Has given (received) any help with advice, encouragement, moral or emotional support to (from) friends, neighbors, or coworkers in the past month.

Table 4

Multinomial Logistic Recession Model of the Structure of
Help Exchanged with Friends, Neighbors, and Coworkers

Independent Variable	Advice Exchangers vs. Low Exchangers	High Exchangers vs. Low Exchangers	Advice and Trans- portation Exchangers vs. Low Exchangers	Helpers vs. Low Exchangers
Gender	0.918 ***	0.021	0.521 ***	-0.541 ***
Education				
no college or refused	--	--	--	--
1-3 years of college	0.452 ***	0.417 **	0.300 *	0.017
4 years of college or B.A.	0.572 ***	0.797 ***	0.645 ***	-0.300 *
5+ years of college	0.792 ***	0.913 ***	0.728 ***	-0.037
Physical Health	-0.002	-0.336 *	-0.563 ***	-0.044
Log of Per-capita Household Income	0.072	-0.355 ***	-0.084	-0.239 ***
Marital Status				
Currently Married	--	--	--	--
Currently Separated or Divorced	0.468 ***	2.026 ***	1.239 ***	0.656 ***
Widowed, Not Married	-0.056	1.791 ***	0.757 **	-0.049
Single, Never Married	0.290	1.503 ***	0.882 ***	0.397
Currently Employed	0.195 *	-0.025	-0.196	-0.313 **
Co-Resident Parent	-0.253	-0.676	-0.467	-0.852 *
Co-Resident Child, Aged 0-17	-0.050	0.074	0.321 *	-0.073
Co-Resident Child, Aged 18+	-0.140 *	-0.157	-0.016	-0.169
Club or Church Involvement				
Log of Club/Church Involvement Score	0.450 ***	1.192 ***	0.607 ***	0.642 ***
No Club or Church Involvement	-0.903 ***	-1.497 ***	-1.104 ***	-1.084 ***
Intercept	-2.968 ***	-1.183	-2.253 *	0.524

Data are the 1992/3 WLS. See text for sample selection criteria. Other variables in the model are: *inrefus*, *marrefus*, and *clubsrf* (see Table 1 for descriptions).

- * P < .05
- ** P < .01
- *** P < .001

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