



The Standard of Selecting Friends and its Effect on Friendship Quality Among College Students

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ABSTRACT

Objective To explore the present status of standard of selecting friends and friendship quality, and analyze the effect of standard of selecting friends on friendship quality among undergraduates. **Methods** A random sampling was used to select 1002 undergraduates through Internet in Guangdong province. They were investigated with Standard of Selecting Friend Scale for College Students (SSFS) and McGill Friendship Questionnaire (MFQ). **Results** (1) The friendship quality of undergraduates was relatively high, with MFQ total score of (254.16 ± 38.80) . (2) The most important standards of selecting friends were mutual compatibility and complementarity, followed by personality, physiology condition, social conditions and other conditions. (3) Multivariable stepwise linear regression showed that the total score of MFQ was positively correlated with the following 4 factors such as mutual compatibility and complementarity, personality, as well as other conditions ($\beta = .477 \sim .690$, all $P < .001$). **Conclusion** The overall level of friendship quality among undergraduates is relatively high. Mutual characteristics may be related factors of friendship quality.

Keywords: College Students, Friendship Quality, Standard of selecting friends, Multivariable Stepwise Linear Regression

The main content of college students' life is school life. They contact peers of the same age most frequently. The influence of peers on college students is increasingly important [1], which even exceeds the influence of parents and teachers, and becomes the most important source of interpersonal influence for college students.

Friendship reflects the emotional connection characterized by trust between two parties. Friendship quality is a common indicator to measure peer relationship and refers to the degree of companionship, support, conflict, intimacy and security between friends [2]. Persistence, intimacy and stability are not only the characteristics of friendship, but also the important indicators to measure the quality of friendship [2]. Higher friendship quality can not only provide necessary social support (such as interpersonal care) for individuals, as a protective

factor, regulate the adverse effects of risk factors on individuals [3], maintain physiological balance and physical health [4], but also enable individuals to actively deal with setbacks and failures, avoid the formation of deviant peer relationship [5], reduce social anxiety [2], social avoidance [2], interpersonal conflict [4], interpersonal aggression [6], smoking [7] and other behavioral problems, reduce depression, loneliness, autism and other emotional problems [8-10], help to enhance individuals' self-worth, and promote their growth and development [11].

Friendship quality is influenced by many factors, such as personal life events [12], emotion [13], personality characteristics [14-15], social media usage [16], social information and social support provided by both parties [17], etc. Although the above factors are important, friendship, since it is a close and long-term companion relationship established by both sides in the communication, naturally involves mutual attraction and the equal status in the relationship. So the quality of friendship should be closely related to the subjective evaluation of each other's characteristics, which is to say, how much the qualities of the other party meet their standard for choosing friends.

Based on the above analysis, this study intends to understand the main standards of choosing friends and their impact on the quality of friendship among undergraduates.

OBJECTS AND METHODS

Objects

Questionnaires are released to college students through Internet. 1078 questionnaires were collected, including 1002 valid ones, with an effective rate of 92.9%. There are 508 boys and 494 girls; 221 freshmen, 214 sophomores, 201 juniors, 185 seniors and 181 fifth-year students; 617 only children and 385 non only children; 305 city students, 262 town students and 435 rural students.

Tools

Standard of Selecting Friend Scale for College Students (SSFS)

Compiled by Luo Jing (2002) [18]. SSFS has 20 items, which are divided into five dimensions: social conditions (SC, including political, economic and cultural conditions), physiological conditions (PC, including appearance and health status), personality traits (PT), mutual compatibility and complementarity (MCC), and other conditions (OC). Likert 5-point scoring method is used to score from 1 to 5 points corresponding to "very important" to "not considered". The higher the score, the less important the dimension (item) is. In this study, *Cronbach's* coefficient of the total scale is 0.820, and *Cronbach's* coefficients of the five dimensions are 0.743, 0.776, 0.751, 0.753 and 0.739, respectively.

McGill Friendship Questionnaire (MFQ)

Compiled by Mendelson and Aboudd (1999) [19] and revised by Wang Danwei (2010) [20] into Chinese version. MFQ has 37 items, divided into two subscales: MFQ-Respondent's Affection (MFQ-RA) and MFQ-Friendship's Functions (MFQ-FF). MFQ-RA is used to measure the overall situation of friendship quality, which has two dimensions: positive emotion and satisfaction. MFQ-FF is used to measure the specific situation of friendship quality, which has four dimensions: intimacy, self confirmation, solidity of friendship and friend's help. Likert 9-point scoring method is adopted in MFQ-RA to score from -4 to 4 points corresponding to "very disagree" to "very agree". Likert 9-point scoring method is adopted in MFQ-FF to score from 0

to 8 points corresponding to “never” to “always”. The higher the score, the more obvious the tendency of the subjects in this dimension (item).

In this study, *Cronbach's* α coefficient of the total scale is 0.913, *Cronbach's* α coefficients of the two subscales are 0.834 and 0.877, respectively; and *Cronbach's* α coefficients of six dimensions are 0.743-0.816.

Data Processing

SPSS 20.0 software is used for statistical analysis. The main statistical methods are descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation analysis and multivariate stepwise linear regression analysis.

RESULTS

The status of friendship quality of College Students

It can be seen from Table 1 that the total score and scores of two dimensions of MFQ-RA of this group are greater than 0, while the theoretical median score of MFQ-RA is 0, so the respondent's affection of this group is at a relatively high level; The total score of MFQ-FF and the scores of six dimensions of this group are all greater than 6, while the theoretical median score of MFQ-FF scores is 4, so the satisfaction of friendship function of this group is also at a relatively high level.

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of MFQ scores (n = 1002)

Dimension	N	M	SD	MIN	MAX
Average of MFQ-RA	1002	2.44	0.95	-9	26
Satisfaction with friendship	1002	2.55	1.05	-25	7
Positive emotion	1002	2.38	1.14	-13	19
Average of MFQ-FF	1002	6.73	1.44	39	142
Intimacy	1002	6.56	1.34	14	47
Self confirmation	1002	6.97	1.25	9	52
The solidity of friendship	1002	7.19	1.56	10	24
Friend's help	1002	6.36	1.48	16	33
Average of MFQ	1002	5.08	1.27	23	157

The importance ranking of college students' standards for choosing friends

The selection frequency of each importance level of five dimensions of SSFS

Importance level refers to the five scoring levels set by SSFS to evaluate the importance of each standard for choosing friends, which are level 1 (very important), level 2 (relatively important), level 3 (general), level 4 (not very important) and level 5 (not considered). Selection frequency refers to the number of people who choose a certain scoring level. The selection frequency of each importance level of 5 dimensions of SSFS is shown in Table 2 to Table 6.

Table 2 Selection frequency of each importance level of social conditions

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid 1	54	5.4	5.4	5.4
2	70	7.0	7.0	12.4
3	396	39.5	39.5	51.9
4	465	46.4	46.4	98.3
5	17	1.7	1.7	100.0
合计	1002	100.0	100.0	

Table 3 Selection frequency of each importance level of physiological condition

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
valid 1	62	6.2	6.2	6.2
2	153	15.3	15.3	21.5
3	380	37.9	37.9	59.4
4	386	38.5	38.5	97.9
5	21	2.1	2.1	100.0
Sum	1002	100.0	100.0	

Table 4 Selecting frequency of each importance level of personality

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
valid 1	760	75.8	75.8	75.8
2	174	17.4	17.4	93.2
3	48	4.8	4.8	98.0
4	20	2.0	2.0	100.0

Table 5 Selection frequency of each importance level of mutual compatibility and complementarity

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
valid 1	120	12.0	12.0	12.0
2	596	59.5	59.5	71.5
3	158	15.8	15.8	87.3
4	121	12.1	12.1	99.4
5	7	0.6	0.6	100.0

Table 6 Selection frequency of each importance level of other conditions

	Frequency	Percentage	Valid percentage	Cumulative percentage
Valid	1	4	0.4	0.4
	2	8	0.8	1.2
	3	20	2.0	3.2
	4	10	1.0	4.2
	5	960	95.8	100.0
Sum	1002	100.0	100.0	

The average comprehensive score of each dimension of SSFS

The average comprehensive score of a certain dimension reflects the comprehensive ranking of the dimension. The higher the average comprehensive score, the higher the comprehensive ranking of the dimension. The specific calculation method is as following: average comprehensive score of a dimension = (Σ frequency of option $\times$ option weight) / the number of people filling in this dimension. The weight is determined by the position in which the option is arranged in SSFS. For example, there are 5 options in social conditions for sorting, the weight of the first position (very important) is 5, the weight of the second position (more important) is 4, the weight of the third position (general) is 3, the weight of the fourth position (not too important) is 2, and the weight of the fifth position (not considered) is 1.

According to the above calculation method and the selection frequency distribution of each dimensions of SSFS, we get the average comprehensive score of social conditions, physiology condition, personality, mutual compatibility and complementarity, as well as other conditions are 2.680, 2.849, 3.671, 3.700, and 1.090, respectively.

It can be concluded that the importance ranking of each dimension is in the order of mutual compatibility and complementarity, personality, physiology condition, social conditions and other conditions.

In this study, the top three answers of other conditions are values, tacit understanding and social skills.

The importance ranking of each specific standard of choosing friends

Likert 5-point scoring method is used. "Very important" is marked as 1, calculated score is 5; "More important" is marked as 2, calculated score is 4; "General" is marked as 3, calculated score is 3; "Less important" is marked as 4, calculated score is 2, "Not considered" is marked as 5, calculated score is 1. According to this, the total score of each specific standard of selecting friends is calculated, and table 7 is sorted according to the scores.

Table 7 Score ranking of each specific standard of choosing friends

Score ranking	Standard for choosing friends	Score
1	appearance	2210
2	education	2181
3	tender and considerate	2153
4	economic status	2146
5	smart and capable	2142
6	health	2129
7	family background	2128
8	age	2113
9	sense of humor	2089
10	time together	2078
11	habits and customs	2077
12	reputation and reputation	2069
13	height and figure	2054
14	gender	2027
15	region	2026
16	hobby	1980
17	open minded and tolerant	1943
18	etiquette cultivation	1916
19	arts or science student	1879
20	loyalty and honesty	1871
21	conscientiousness	1812

The relationship between standards of choosing friends and friendship quality

Correlation analysis between standards of choosing friends and friendship quality

It can be seen from table 8 that physiological conditions (PC), personality trait (PT), mutual compatibility and complementarity (MCC), as well as other conditions (OC) are significantly correlated with the total score of MFQ (all $P < 0.05$).

Table 8 Correlation analysis between scores of SSFS and MFQ (n = 1002)

Dimension	SC	PC	PT	MCC	OC
Average of MFQ-RA	.081*	.163**	.191**	.252**	.194**
Satisfaction with friendship	.075*	.150**	.180**	.234**	.182**
Positive emotion	.064	.159**	.172**	.243**	.186**
Average of MFQ-FF	.032	.153**	.177**	.326**	.244**
Intimacy	.014	.187**	.167**	.274**	.235**
Self confirmation	.009	-.053	.183**	.195**	.124**
The solidity of friendship	.022	-.079*	.176**	.299**	.276**
The help friends offer me	.045	-.044	.157**	.311**	.228**
Average of MFQ	.031	.168*	.193**	.341**	.231**

Multivariable stepwise linear regression analysis of the influence of friend selection standards on friendship quality

Taking the total score of MFQ as the dependent variable and the scores of five dimensions of SSFS as the independent variables, a multivariable stepwise linear regression analysis is carried out within the 95% confidence interval, and the results are shown in Table 9.

It can be seen from table 9 that 3 factors such as personality, mutual compatibility and complementarity and other conditions are positively correlated with the total score of MFQ ($\beta=.477$ to $.690$, all $P < .001$).

Table 9 Multivariable stepwise linear regression analysis of the influence of friend selection standards on friendship quality

Dependent Variable	Independent Variable	regression coefficient		β	t	P	R^2	R_{adj}^2
		B	SE					
Average	PT	.565	.068	.581	8.167	<.001	0.505	0.503
MFQ	MCC	.679	.076	.690	5.588	<.001		
	OC	.517	.061	.477	4.215	<.001		

DISCUSSION

The importance ranking of friends selection standards of college students is in the order of mutual compatibility and complementarity, personality, physiology condition, social conditions and other conditions, which is consistent with the results of previous studies [17, 21-22].

The average comprehensive scores of mutual compatibility and complementarity and personality are higher than the cut off score of high score by 3.5 [18], suggesting that mutual compatibility and complementarity and personality are the dominant standards for college students to choose friends. First of all, the most important standard for college students to choose friends is not that they are completely consistent in all conditions, but that they can tolerate each other in habits and interests, complement each other in knowledge and ability, promote each other in life and study, and get along with each other for a long time, which also reflects the autonomy of college students in choosing friends to a certain extent. Personality is the second leading criterion for college students to choose friends, but it is less important than mutual compatibility and complementarity. In other words, compared with the internal personality, college students pay more attention to the comfortable and interesting feeling brought by the external compatibility and complementarity. This is determined by the age characteristics of college students' psychological development: Because they are not familiar with the world, they have not yet realized that friends with good personality play a great role in promoting their study, career and life, while friends with bad personality play an important role in hindering or even destroying their study, career and life [23-24]. On the other hand, due to their limited judgment ability, it is difficult for them to judge whether the personality of a friend is good. However, it is easier to judge whether the external characteristics such as living habits and interests can be compatible, which is also easy to attract the attention of college students [25].

The average comprehensive scores of physiological condition and social condition are higher than 2.5, but lower than 3.5, suggesting that physiological condition and social condition are the common standards for college students to choose friends, but not the dominant standard [18]. Although we are against judging people by their appearance, physiological conditions (such as height, body shape, appearance and health status, etc.) still play an important role in college students' choosing friends. The reason is the role of social stereotype of "love your house and your doeng" in human subconsciousness. People often think that people with good appearance also have excellent qualities in all aspects, while people with bad appearance also have poor qualities in all aspects. Although college students have relatively strong logical thinking (rational thinking), due to their subconsciousness (using the automatic irrational way of working), they can't help but first "judge people by their appearance" when they face the objects of communication. On the other hand, the influence of network culture has also intensified the trend of "judging people by their appearance" to a certain extent: Influenced by the media and network culture such as "Internet celebrities", people pay unprecedented attention to "face" and "face value", and put forward the argument that "this is an era of face". As enthusiastic followers of network culture, college students naturally have higher requirements for the appearance of their friends [16].

Although the average comprehensive score of social conditions (geography, family background, reputation, cultural level, liberal arts or science students, economic status, etc.) ranked the fourth standard, the score was similar to the third physiological condition, suggesting that social conditions are also the commonly used standard for college students to choose friends. Nowadays, college students have higher achievement motivation [26]. They are increasingly aware that making friends is not only for emotional support, but also for obtaining rich social information, powerful social network resources and opportunities for progress, and that friends with good social conditions can meet their above needs better [17].

The friendship quality of this group is at a good level, which is inconsistent with the results of previous studies [27-28]. The reason may be that the measurement tools and sampling areas are different. Personality, mutual compatibility and complementarity, and other factors (such as values, communication skills) positively predict the friendship quality of college students, which is consistent with the research results of previous literature [14,21,29], suggesting that the higher the degree of mutual acceptance and tolerance in cultural traditions, living habits, interests and hobbies, the more complementary they are in thinking and ability, the better a friend's personality (for example, the more agreeable he is), the more positive his values, and the stronger his social skills, the better the quality of friendship will be.

The average comprehensive score of "other conditions" is 1.09, ranking the fifth among the five types of friend selection standard, belonging to the secondary friend selection standard, but it can positively predict the friendship quality of college students. The possible reason is that most college students are still in the "self exploration period", and their values have not been established; At the same time, due to busy learning, no time to participate in social activities, and lack of communication skills, the overall level of "other conditions" is low, which has little effect on most college students' life (including the quality of friendship); A small number of college students get high-quality friendship because they have established "Three Outlooks" and mastered good social skills. The difference of friendship quality between this two groups results in the significant positive predictive effect of "other conditions" on friendship quality.

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