

## Original Article

## Closeness is enough for friends, but not mates or kin: mate and kinship premiums in India and U.S.

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## ABSTRACT

Close relationship researchers have proposed that the increased sharing, helping, and sacrifice among social partners of all kinds—friends, spouses, and biological kin—are mediated by the same internal indicator: the feeling of emotional closeness. However, recent work on “kinship premiums” in the U.S. and Europe show that emotional closeness is not sufficient to account for increased giving among genetic kin, suggesting that closeness may not be a sufficient proximate mechanism to account for giving in other evolutionarily important relationships. Using a hypothetical social discounting paradigm with a \$75 reward, we test for such premiums among mates, close friends, and kin in two cultural settings where researchers have proposed key differences in relationship cognition—India (N = 63) and the U.S. (N = 284). We find that emotional closeness substantially mediates (often fully) the effect of close friendship on the amount of money forgone, suggesting that this is a key factor in the increased sharing observed among friends. On the other hand, people on average report sacrificing an additional \$8.3 (95% CI: \$4.5–\$12.1) for mates and \$9.7 (95% CI: \$6.5–\$12.8) for genetic kin when removing the effects of closeness. Importantly, these effects are not statistically different across samples from the U.S. and India. These results show that people use relationship-specific information about genetic relatedness and pair bonding in addition to general indicators of emotional closeness when making decisions to share with others.

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## 1. Introduction

Emotional closeness is a robust predictor of sharing and helping among humans. People tend to help those they feel close to more than those they do not (Aron, Aron, & Smollan, 1992; Hruschka, 2010; Jones & Rachlin, 2006; Leider, Möbius, Rosenblat, & Do, 2009; Rachlin & Jones, 2008; Strombach et al., 2013). Recent neuroimaging studies also suggest that people find sharing rewards with close others more rewarding than sharing with other partners (Fareri, Niznikiewicz, Lee, & Delgado, 2012). While most findings about emotional closeness have not been situated in an evolutionary framework, the strong association between emotional closeness and helping raises questions about the role of this internal variable in the evolution of helping and generosity.

Some close relationship scholars have proposed that subjective or emotional closeness serves as a primary proximate mechanism regulating costly helping behaviors (Brown & Brown, 2006; Korchmaros & Kenny, 2006). For example, Korchmaros and Kenny's Close Relationship Model (2001, 2006), treats emotional closeness as an internal variable that integrates a number of cues of propinquity—frequency of interaction, amount of interaction and degree of similarity—that would have been reliable indicators of genetic relatedness in the evolutionary past. According to this argument, emotional closeness is a crucial

internal indicator of genetic kinship, and in turn genetic relatedness indirectly affects helping via emotional closeness. In a similar vein, Brown and Brown's Selective Investment Theory (2006) suggest that emotional closeness is an indicator of the existence and strength of a social bond based on fitness interdependence. They describe emotional closeness as an indicator of two kinds of fitness interdependence—one based on common genes and the other on mutual reproductive need (e.g. mates, or potential mates).

These evolutionary models of how closeness influences helping are consistent with the more general concept of an internal regulatory variable—“variables whose function is to store summary magnitudes (or parameters) that allow value computation to be integrated into behavior regulation” (Tooby, Cosmides, Sell, Lieberman, & Sznycer, 2008, p. 253). For example, scholars have posited the existence of a welfare tradeoff ratio (WTR) that serves as the key internal regulatory variable indexing a person's willingness to trade off their own welfare with that of another (Tooby et al., 2008). This WTR assesses information regarding many of the things we know to affect human altruism: reputation, potential for reciprocation, relatedness, etc. Importantly many of these are themselves summary variables. For example, reckoning relatedness requires assessing a number of cues of relatedness (e.g. propinquity, maternal association, phenotypic similarity, etc.), and Lieberman, Tooby, and Cosmides (2007) argue for a kinship index that summarizes these cues. These cues are implicit inputs that gain their meaning by affecting downstream cognitive, emotional, and behavioral

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processes. Importantly, these internal regulatory variables then regulate the emotions that underpin our willingness to help others (Lieberman et al., 2007; Tooby et al., 2008).

In the language of internal regulatory variables, the Close Relationship Model of emotional closeness proposed by Korchmaros and Kenny (2006) treats emotional closeness as a summary variable that takes as inputs several cues that would have reliably covaried with genetic relatedness in past environments (e.g. frequency and quantity of interaction and perceived similarity). In turn, helping behavior is a relatively direct output of this summary variable. According to this model, emotional closeness originated as an internal indicator of genetic kinship that now extends to other kinds of relationships (Korchmaros & Kenny, 2001, 2006; Neyer, Wrzus, Wagner, & Lang, 2011). Thus, our tendency to help close others is due to efforts to aid kin (Ackerman, Kenrick, & Schaller, 2007), with closeness serving as a primary summary variable of relatedness that shapes willingness to help across kin and non-kin relations. Brown and Brown (2006) describe emotional closeness as one proximate indicator of fitness interdependence—whether that interdependence is based on shared genes (kinship), shared reproductive needs (mateship), or reciprocal altruism (friendship). Although, Brown and Brown do not specify the inputs or cues used to estimate emotional closeness specifically, they do argue that decisions about costly long-term investment are a key output.

Both of these models treat the evolutionary function of emotional closeness as a summary internal regulatory variable that facilitates fitness-enhancing resource transfers. According to the Close Relationship Model, emotional closeness originally evolved as an indicator of one type of fitness interdependence—genetic relatedness—and was then applied to other close relationships. According to the Selective Investment Theory, emotional closeness summarizes several kinds of fitness interdependence—including that among kin, mates and friends—regardless of its specific origins. Importantly, these models do not specify different algorithms or different algorithmic components for governing interactions among different kinds of social partners. Given the unique challenges and opportunities created by different kinds of relationships, ties of kinship, mateship, and friendship may demand different algorithms for making adaptive decisions about directing valuable resources to others (Hruschka, 2010; Curry, Roberts, & Dunbar, 2013). In these alternative algorithms, closeness may be one kind of informational input, rather than an ultimate downstream summary variable. Recent evidence supporting this view shows that emotional closeness is not sufficient in explaining altruism among specific types of fitness relevant relationships. For example, several studies have shown evidence for a ‘kinship premium’, whereby people favor genetic kinship over and above non-kin for the same level of emotional closeness (Bressan, Colarelli, & Cavalieri, 2009; Curry et al., 2013; Pollet, Roberts, & Dunbar, 2013; Rachlin & Jones, 2008). These results suggest that emotional closeness is not the ultimate output variable of an algorithm regulating altruism, but rather one among possibly several inputs.

Despite evidence for the independent effects of kinship status, no study to date has examined whether people apply similar ‘premiums’ to other evolutionarily important relationship categories, such as mates or friends. In the case of mates, increased investments over and above that predicted by levels of closeness may reflect an indirect form of kin investment (Burton-Chellew & Dunbar, 2011). Altruistic acts towards partners may also signal important information, such as genetic or phenotypic quality, provisioning ability, or commitment to a relationship (Barclay, 2010; Zahavi, 1995). Although several studies have shown that spouses often inherit larger portions of estates than genetic kin, it is not clear whether this increased giving results from greater feelings of closeness or an independent effect of mate status (Judge & Hrdy, 1992; Smith, Kish, & Crawford, 1987).

As opposed to the independent effects of genetic kin and mate status on helping, there is no strong theoretical prediction for such a premium among friends. Results of Curry et al. (2013) suggest that feelings of

emotional closeness may be sufficient in explaining all help among unrelated friends. Indeed, if emotional closeness is not sufficient in predicting levels of altruism across mates and kin, but is sufficient for explaining help among unrelated friends, then we would expect a more refined information-processing algorithm than those suggested by Brown and Brown (2006), Korchmaros and Kenny (2006).

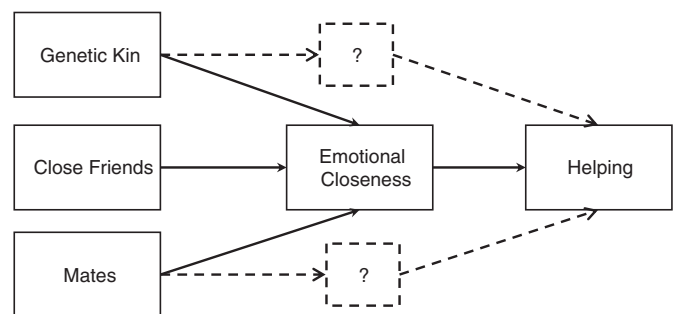
While hypotheses for the importance of different relational cues and indicators have been developed from U.S. and European samples, cross-cultural psychologists have argued that the importance of specific cues and indicators in making relationship decisions may vary depending on cultural context. For example, Miller and Bersoff propose that Hindu Indians place more emphasis on moral responsibility to help others in special relationships, while European-Americans place greater emphasis on individual choice and agency in deciding to help certain others (Miller & Bersoff, 1992; Miller, Bersoff, & Harwood, 1990). Furthermore, affective responses such as liking seem to carry more weight among European-Americans than Hindu Indians in motivating helping behaviors (Miller & Bersoff, 1998). According to this argument, the importance of emotional closeness as well as other relational cues and indicators may be less important in such cultural contexts.

### 1.1. Current studies

In this paper, we estimate the degree to which three kinds of relationship information—genetic kinship, mateship, and friendship—have an independent direct effect on forgoing a reward for a partner over and above emotional closeness (Fig. 1). First, we assess whether genetic kinship, mateship, and close friendship provide additional information independent of emotional closeness in decisions to give among U.S. students (study 1). Second, we test whether information about genetic kinship, relationship category and emotional closeness vary in their effect in a cultural setting—India—where researchers have argued that different cues and indicators are relevant for giving in relationships (Miller & Bersoff, 1998) (study 2). Finally, we use a formal mediation analysis, to estimate the degree to which the effects of these relationships are mediated by measures of closeness (study 3: formal mediation analysis).

## 2. Study 1

We used a social discounting paradigm to test whether emotional closeness mediates the effect of relationship type on giving (e.g. Rachlin & Jones, 2008). We extend prior studies examining helping among genetic kin (Curry et al., 2013; Korchmaros & Kenny, 2006) by exploring the mediating effects of closeness across three specific relationship types—genetic kin, close friends, and mates. In line with findings from these previous studies, we expect to see that closeness only partially



**Fig. 1.** Two models of the effect of closeness on helping across three relationships. The solid lines are the associations predicted by the Close Relationship Model (CRM) of altruism (Korchmaros & Kenny, 2006). According to this model, variation in observed altruism across these three relationships is directly related to variation in emotional closeness across these three relationships. The dashed lines are those associations predicted by a Relationship-Specific Model, adapted from Curry et al. (2013), where different relationships rely on both some general measure of closeness, but also on relationship-specific cues that influence helping behaviors. (Figure adapted from Hruschka, Hackman & MacFarlan, in press).

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