

The Meaning of Social Interactions in the Transition From Acquaintanceship to Friendship

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The transition from acquaintanceship (nonunit) to friendship (unit) was conceptualized in terms of a preunit relationship. The authors theorized that in transitional relationships, discrete interactions are imbued with surplus meaning. Using a mental simulation procedure in 3 studies, participants randomly assigned to focus their attention on an exemplar from their social worlds representing unit, preunit, or nonunit same-sex relationships responded to social exchange scenarios. Preunits intended to act like a friend and not an acquaintance, yet they experienced more discomfort following a communal script than those in a unit relation. Content analyses of open-ended responses revealed that preunits were more likely than units or nonunits to see a nice gesture by the other person as having some social meaning. Failure to reciprocate a favor by either party was deemed more important to preunit than unit or nonunit relations. In Study 4, in which actual interaction records were used, the quality of individual discrete interactions was more highly correlated with momentary, on-line perceptions of relationship closeness for preunit interactions than unit or nonunit interactions.

Whereas one might use the term *acquaintance* in referring to “just someone I know,” the term *friend* connotes more closeness and greater mutuality. Often times, though, the term *potential friend* also refers to “just someone I know.” What is it like psychologically to be casually acquainted with someone yet, at the same time, to perceive potential for a friendship involving closeness and mutuality?

Given that people across cultures are well versed in the rules that govern and guide the conduct of friendships (Argyle &

Henderson, 1984), one might expect would-be friends to act like friends. Friendship behaviors may communicate a desire for friendship and help to develop and establish a friendship. In fact, Clark (e.g., Clark, 1984b; Clark & Mills, 1979) has demonstrated that simply the potential for a friendship or romantic relationship prompts one to assume the kind of communal orientation that is characteristic of friends (e.g., responding to the other's needs) rather than an exchange orientation (e.g., tit-for-tat, direct, concrete reciprocity). At a behavioral level then, would-be friends often may appear much like actual friends.

The behavioral similarities between potential friends and actual friends prompted Berg and Clark (1986) to suggest that there is a rapid development to relationships. Moreover, Clark and Mills (1993) maintained that the enactment of communal behaviors defines a relationship as communal. Clearly, potential friends need to enact a communal script at the outset to communicate a desire for a communal relationship. But the suggestion by Clark and Mills that a communal relationship exists if one calls for an ambulance for a stranger who has collapsed in front of one's house (p. 685) highlights the blurring of an important distinction between communal behavior and communal relationships.

A communal relationship suggests an interpersonal history or an expected interpersonal future guided by a communal orientation (Reis & Shaver, 1988). Moreover, we theorize that the enactment of a communal script by friends and would-be friends belies important underlying differences concerning their similar behavior. Despite behavioral similarities, one might expect that characteristics of friendships such as closeness (Berscheid, Snyder, & Omoto, 1989), trust (Holmes & Rempel, 1989), and interdependence (Kelley, 1979) would not yet be firmly established by would-be friends. Trying to act like a friend but not having yet established these qualities of a friendship may create

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feelings of ambiguity and uncertainty for those in this transitional state (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Such feelings of uncertainty and ambiguity are typically experienced as aversive (Brickman, 1987; Holmes, 1991). As a result, would-be friends may engage in behaviors and draw inferences that are designed to reduce uncertainty about the prospects for their relationship. Social interactions then may become a platform for diagnosing and advancing the state of the relationship.

We expect that the process of inferring social meaning from discrete interactions in an attempt to reduce uncertainty about relationship status is characterized by heightened cognitive and attributional activity (Fletcher, Fincham, Cramer, & Heron, 1987). Uncertainty about one's relationship status evokes vigilance in monitoring and regulating behaviors in the service of drawing social inferences (Holmes, 1991). Discrete behaviors and interactions are then imbued with "surplus" meaning. Thus, if a would-be friend talks about a personal problem, one may infer from this confidence a desire for friendship. But if the would-be friend pays one for doing a favor (going to the drugstore when he or she is sick), then the person may infer that the other does not desire friendship.

Discrete behaviors, we propose, typically do not have the same surplus meaning for established relationships as they do for transitional relationships. In established relationships, the intentions underlying behavior are not an open question, because one's interpretations are typically guided by chronic expectations that are held confidently. In a transition from acquaintanceship to friendship, expectations would not yet be firmly established about the other's intentions. Without confident expectations, behavior is likely to motivate attributional activity (Pyszczynski & Greenberg, 1981; Weiner, 1985). Whereas in an established relationship, a favor may be just a favor (not prompting an attributional analysis), in transitional relationships with would-be friends, a favor is a way of sending and receiving a message about hopes and desires for increased closeness (cf. Clark, 1984b).

Although we assume that there is some communal motivation driving the communal behaviors of would-be friends, we expect that there are additional motivations to communicate and learn through the social interaction process. These other, more latent motivations may become more apparent by looking beyond just behavior and examining the constellation of affective, cognitive, and behavioral responses of would-be friends. In this way, we may advance our understanding of the psychological nature of transitional relationships.

Predictions About Transitional Relationships

One way in which we expect would-be friends to differ from established friends is in the affective discomfort engendered by following a communal script. A would-be friend, by responding to the needs of the other person, is communicating an invitation for increased closeness as well as testing the interest and desire of the other person. Potential friends take the risk of acting as if they have a communal relationship in the hopes of forming one. Behavior then engenders concomitant anxiety, because the social exchange assumes added significance—"surplus meaning"—about the uncertain status of the relationship.

The anxiety we predict for would-be friends is a reminder

that trust is not yet firmly established. As a consequence, social interactions and exchanges are designed to promote reassurance about the prospects for the relationship (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Ironically, then, we expect that would-be friends, while trying to follow a communal script, will still find themselves drawn into concerns about reciprocity. Whereas acquaintances who do not hope to become friends may engage in reciprocity to maintain a balanced and fair exchange relationship, acquaintances who hope to become friends may desire evidence of reciprocity to secure feelings of equal involvement and attachment. As a result, more is at stake than fairness in the exchange of concrete outcomes—reciprocity becomes a mechanism for inferring acceptance or rejection. Thus, we expect that would-be friends will be quicker and more anxious to reciprocate a favor than either established friends or acquaintances. Moreover, we expect that the failure to reciprocate may be deemed more important for would-be friends than for either established friends or acquaintances.

Because more is at stake for would-be friends, we also expect that more attributions will be drawn and greater implications seen in an offer of a favor than for either established friends or acquaintances. Given that the issue in question is the status of the relationship, we expect that the content of attributions and social inferences about exchanges will be concerned primarily with relationship development. Finally, with heightened cognitive vigilance regarding relationship status, we expect more volatility in acute evaluations of the status of the relationship based on the qualities of discrete interactions. For would-be friends, behavior is diagnostic of the state of the relationship. Whereas an intimate and revealing interaction may prompt one to define a relationship as close, a mundane and trivial interaction may prompt one to define a relationship as not close. In contrast, we do not expect that perceptions of closeness in established relationships are so labile (Altman & Taylor, 1973). Although we might still expect qualities of an interaction such as intimacy to be related to perceptions of closeness in established relationships, we would not expect the interactions to define momentary perceptions of closeness.

In distinguishing better between potential friends and established friends, it is important to note that potential friends also have the status of acquaintances. In comparing potential friends with acquaintances who are expected to remain acquaintances, it seems clear that we would expect differences in social exchanges and interactions (Clark, 1984a). However, if an acquaintance were to behave in a situation like a true friend, we propose that stable acquaintances—like potential friends—would experience discomfort, but that discomfort would belie different meanings. As we suggested earlier, the would-be friend may be anxious about the ambiguity and uncertainty of advancing the relationship. There may be fears that friendly advances will be rejected, and uncertainty about one's own feelings may remain. However, the stable acquaintance may feel uncomfortable for very different reasons, namely because the behavior is inconsistent with, and violates, the rules and norms of an exchange relationship (cf. Argyle & Henderson, 1984; Clark & Mills, 1979).

Nomenclature

Thus far, we have described three relationships of interest: established friends, acquaintances who are would-be friends,

and mere acquaintances. In deriving templates of these relationships, we were guided in part by Lerner's descriptions of identity, unit, and nonunit relations (Lerner, 1981; Lerner & Whitehead, 1980; cf. Heider, 1958). We labeled friendships as *unit* relations, potential friends as *preunit* relations and acquaintances as *nonunit* relations. Unit relations connote closeness and mutuality but not the vicarious "identity" feelings experienced in marital or parent-child relationships. Other properties of unit relations include perceived similarity and relative proximity (Byrne, 1971; Heider, 1958, pp. 177-178; Werner & Parmelee, 1979). Preunit relations are acquaintances who see potential for friendship. Closeness is not established, but it can be imagined. Similarity is assumed, but perceptions of it are tentative. Preunit relations are perceived as evolving and developing in somewhat uncertain ways.

Nonunit relations lack the feelings of closeness and connectedness of unit relations. Similarity between such acquaintances may be moderate (e.g., age, race, and education may be similar), but within the context of the social network of friends one has constructed, perceived similarity of nonunit relations might be relatively lower. Proximity may still be high (e.g., neighbor, colleague), but the relationship still may be characterized by a lack of affective intensity. This is in contrast to what we would call an *anti-unit* relation, which would involve negative feelings but persists because of circumstance. In fact, we conceptualize and operationalize nonunit relations as having closer parallels to preunit relations. The distinguishing feature between the two is that in nonunit relations, the current state of the relationship is seen as more stable, whereas in preunit relations, the state of the relationship is seen as more uncertain and in flux.

Research Strategy

A program of research was conducted to create some empirical basis for understanding preunit relations. To achieve this goal, we adopted two research strategies.

First, in Studies 1 and 2, we examined affect and behavior conjointly to demonstrate how preunit relations are different from both unit and nonunit relations. Specifically, we hypothesized that individuals in a preunit condition would report behavioral intentions and expectations that mirrored those of individuals in a unit condition. Participants in both the unit and preunit experimental conditions were expected to endorse a communal pattern of exchange distinct from that of participants in the nonunit condition, consistent with Clark's findings (Clark, Mills, & Corcoran, 1989; Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986). However, we also hypothesized that those in the preunit condition would report affective responses distinct from those in a unit condition. This hypothesized pattern of data would add new meaning to Clark's findings by revealing an underlying difference between two relationships (unit and preunit) that are characterized by similar communal behaviors. We also hypothesized that participants in the preunit condition would report affective discomfort similar to participants in the nonunit condition when a communal script was followed. However, such similarity in affective responses would belie underlying differences in social meaning reflected in their different behavioral intentions. Thus, the two hypothesized patterns of data (affect and behavioral intentions) collectively would support our assertion that behav-

ioral exchanges and social interactions have distinctive social meaning for those in a preunit relation and that this distinctive social meaning may be obscured by examining either affect or behavior in isolation.

Second, across studies we increasingly invoked a one-variable research strategy of identifying specific individual process variables, such as attributions and social inferences, that might distinguish those in a preunit condition from those in both a unit and a nonunit condition. For example, in Studies 2 and 3 we explored whether those in a preunit condition would report that discrete behavioral exchanges have more implications for the status of their relationship than those in a unit or nonunit condition.

In Studies 1 and 2 we developed a laboratory procedure, inspired by the strength of the experimental approach used by Clark and her colleagues (e.g., Clark & Mills, 1979) in studying communal and exchange relationships. However, we felt it incumbent upon us to move beyond a stranger paradigm (see Brehm, 1985) and in some way access real-life relationships despite the controlled setting.

Thus, we devised a methodology whereby participants in the lab were randomly assigned to focus their attention on an exemplar from their social worlds representing one of three prototypical same-sex relationships: unit, preunit, or nonunit. Then, as they visualized themselves and their relationship partner in a series of common social interactions, they reported their behavioral intentions and expectations as well as their affective responses (comfort or discomfort) to the social exchange scenarios. We hoped that by using a guided visualization procedure, we might overcome the potential problem of eliciting casual top-of-the-head responses to the scenarios and instead find evidence for our hypothesized pattern of affective responses different from our predicted pattern of behavioral intentions.

Study 1

Method

Overview

A 3 (relationship type) \times 5 (scenario) between-within design was used. Participants received a description of one of three types of interpersonal relationships: a unit relationship (close friend), a preunit relationship (an acquaintance with whom they could imagine becoming friends), or a nonunit relationship (an acquaintance). Participants responded to scenarios of social interactions while thinking of themselves and the person they selected.

Each scenario included a series of questions that were designed to ensure a naturalistic flow to the episode. In light of our theoretical understanding of the three relationships, we used a format of including one behavioral intention item designed to distinguish unit and preunit relations from nonunit relations, and one affective item designed to distinguish preunit and nonunit relations from unit relations.

Participants

Seventy-four university undergraduate students (30 men and 44 women) participated in a study of "interpersonal relations" for extra credit from their introductory psychology class that term. Twenty-three participants were randomly assigned to the unit relation condition, 25 to the preunit condition, and 26 to the nonunit condition.

Procedure

Participants were told that the study was concerned with "the ways in which we interact with others and how we think of those interactions." After receiving their informed consent, participants were asked first to read through the description of a relationship contained in their questionnaire and then to think of someone in their life of the same sex "who best fits a person with whom you have a relationship just like the one described." They were then to reread the description, filling in the person's first name wherever there was a blank in the description. They were told that after doing this they would be asked to respond to a series of scenarios describing various social interactions. They were informed that the study concerned what they or their selected person might do and feel in the situations described.

Participants were told then that this study was using a visualization technique and that they should take some time to visualize and imagine themselves and the other person in the different situations described. It was added that this would make it easier for them to respond to the questions about each situation.

Relationship manipulation. Embedded within the questionnaires were descriptions of one of three types of relationships. Those randomly assigned to the unit relationship condition received the following:

I consider ____ a close friend. We share many important things in common, although we are not the same in some ways. ____ is closer to me than my casual friends or acquaintances, but not as close as a family member. Somehow we just seem to belong together as friends. I feel more connected to ____ than my other friends.

Those in the preunit relationship condition received the following:

I consider ____ a casual friend or acquaintance, yet I could imagine the two of us becoming close friends as we get to know each other better. I think that we share some things in common yet we differ about other things. Although we are not close friends, ____ is the kind of person whom I would like to be with or do things with. It remains to be seen how our relationship will evolve or develop.

Those in the nonunit relationship condition received the following:

I consider ____ a casual friend or acquaintance. Although we share some things in common, we are essentially different kinds of people. ____ is not what I would call a good friend and I do not expect that our casual relationship will change. ____ is not particularly the type of person that I would seek out to be with or do things with. S/he is just someone I know.

At the end of the description were printed instructions to reread the paragraph, "filling in the blanks with the first name of the person in your life with whom you share a relationship just like the one described."

Scenarios of social interaction. Participants were introduced to this section with written instructions to try and place themselves and their selected person in the situations. To help them do this, they were told that they would continue to receive blanks throughout the scenarios in places where they were to write the selected person's first name. They were asked to imagine themselves in the situations by visualizing the selected person and the surroundings. They were encouraged to get a strong feeling for the situation, the atmosphere, and the two of them in the situation. Even if they had never been in a particular situation described, they were asked to try as best they could to imagine the two of them being there. They were asked to answer questions about their reactions to and feelings about the scenarios once they had a strong feeling for the situations.

In using this methodology, we were encouraged by Taylor and Schneider's (1989) review of research on mental simulation. They stated that

social interaction is a highly contingent activity requiring an assessment of others' likely behaviors, one's own behaviors, and the interdependencies of the two. A simulation may be particularly well suited as a method of estimating these contingencies because . . . as a representation it closely matches actual interactive experience. (p. 179)

Moreover, their assertion is supported by research demonstrating that imagining scenarios can influence personal intentions (Anderson, 1983), induce behavioral compliance (Gregory, Cialdini, & Carpenter, 1982), and evoke strong emotions (e.g., Rosenhan, Salovey, & Hargis, 1981; Thompson, Cowan, & Rosenhan, 1980) and physiological changes (e.g., Brown & Schwartz, 1980). Finally, because the guided visualization technique has been used effectively as a prime in one setting to influence self-evaluation in another setting (Baldwin & Holmes, 1987), we reasoned that such a visualization technique might help bring the scenarios to life, making them seem more real, and thereby permitting us to obtain a complex pattern of results that we felt would not be easily obtained by top-of-the-head responses.

Five scenarios were created to sample a diverse array of social interactions in which various social commodities were given, offered, or requested as benefits. Each scenario included a target affect question and a target behavioral intention question. For example, in the first scenario, the dinner scenario, participants were asked how they would feel if the other person paid for both dinners while they were away from the table (the target affect question). They responded by putting a slash somewhere through a 5-in. line where one end was labeled *very uncomfortable* and the other end was labeled *very comfortable*.¹ The target behavioral intention item asked, given that the other paid the whole check, "how likely is it that you would want to take ____ to dinner another time, with the explicit intention of paying for the meal?" The labels for this, and other behavioral scales, were *0% probability* and *100% probability*.

The second scenario involved the participant in her or his room studying one evening for a midterm the next day. The selected person drops by, concerned about a personal matter and looking for someone to talk with. The target affect question simply asked how the participants felt about this situation (i.e., comfortable or uncomfortable). The target behavioral intention question was the likelihood that they would spend time with the person that evening.

The third scenario involved the two people taking a course together. The selected person missed several classes and now wanted to borrow the participant's notes before the next exam. The target behavioral intention question asked the likelihood that the participant would lend the notes. The target affect question asked participants how they would feel "if ____ did not return the favor."

The fourth scenario involved the participant planning to go to a movie and then encountering the selected person, who invites the participant to a movie that she or he (the selected person) would like to see. The target affect question asked, "Given that you wind up going to the movie that you had intended to see (rather than the one the other had intended to see), how would you feel about this situation?" The target behavioral intention question then asked the likelihood that the two of them would forego the movies that they intended to see and do something different instead.

The fifth scenario involved phoning the selected person on a Friday evening just before going to meet some people and discovering that the person is sick and is unable to get to the drugstore to pick up a prescription. The target behavioral intention question asked about the likelihood of changing plans and going to the drugstore. The target affect question asked participants how they would feel about having to accept \$2.50

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all responses were made using this format of a slash through a 5-in. line.

extra from the selected person for their trouble when being reimbursed for the prescription.

By sampling a diverse set of scenarios, we were likely to increase within-subject variance and thus provide a more conservative test of our hypothesis than a sampling of more homogeneous, comparable scenarios. However, in so doing, the diversity of the scenarios provided a stronger test of the external validity of our hypothesis. In truth, the targeted behavioral intention item for three of the scenarios specifically assessed responsiveness to the other's needs (foregoing studying to provide social support, lending notes, going to the drugstore). In addition, the expectations that favors are reciprocated at some time or other (dinner scenario) and the likelihood of creating an integrative solution to a conflict of interests (doing something mutually satisfying rather than choosing between movies) also were used to discriminate between established friends (units) and acquaintances (nonunits).

The questions then were (a) Would those in the preunit condition intend to behave like those in the unit condition (and different from the nonunit control condition)? and (b) Would those in the preunit condition feel more discomfort than those in the unit condition about intending to follow a script similar to those in the unit condition? Finally, we explored the hypothesis that those in the preunit condition, although intending to behave in the situation like those in the unit condition, would nevertheless report an intention to reciprocate for the favor of a dinner more quickly than those in the unit condition and more quickly than those in the nonunit condition.

Results and Discussion

Participants' responses to the affect and behavioral intention items in each scenario were coded using a ruler that measured tenths of an inch. The 5-in. lines for responses were divided into 50 segments.

Behavioral Intentions

A 3 (relationship type: unit, preunit, nonunit) \times 5 (scenario) mixed analysis of variance (ANOVA) on the behavioral intention data revealed a main effect for the type of relationship involved, $F(2, 70) = 15.57, p < .01$.² This effect was not qualified by the scenario variable (no interaction effect), $F(8, 280) = 1.07, ns$.³ A planned contrast was performed to test the prediction that those in unit and preunit relationships would report behavioral intentions different than those in a nonunit relationship. As predicted, we can see in Table 1 that those in a preunit relationship expressed behavioral intentions, $M(24) = 38.0$, similar to those in a unit relationship, $M(23) = 38.2$. The two groups together differed significantly from the nonunit relationship, $M(26) = 30.7, F(1, 70) = 31.14, p < .001$.⁴ Thus, participants in a preunit relationship were more likely to report

responding to requests and reciprocating favors in a manner similar to those in a unit relationship but different from those in a nonunit relationship. Those in a unit or preunit relationship tended to report greater probabilities than those in a nonunit relationship that they would (a) reciprocate for the dinner, (b) spend time with the other the night they needed to study, (c) lend notes to the other, (d) forego either movie and do something different together, and (e) change their plans and go to the drugstore for the other.

Affect

A 3 \times 5 mixed ANOVA on the affect index revealed an effect for the type of relationship as well, $F(2, 66) = 17.95, p < .001$. However, the prediction in this instance was that those in a unit relationship would feel more comfortable about a range of social exchange situations than those in a preunit as well as a nonunit relationship. In Table 1 we can see that the planned contrast testing those in the unit condition versus those in the preunit and nonunit conditions revealed, as predicted, a significant contrast, $F(1, 66) = 32.28, p < .001$. Those in a unit relationship, $M(20) = 32.8$, felt more comfortable than those in a preunit, $M(23) = 26.7$, and nonunit, $M(26) = 24.0$, relationship. However, in this case, scenario did qualify the main effect for relationship type, $F(8, 264) = 2.41, p < .05$, even with a Geisser-Greenhouse adjustment for sphericity. Whereas the predicted pattern of data (preunits and nonunits similarly more uncomfortable than units) was obtained for comfort ratings about the other paying for dinner, the other not returning the favor of lending notes, and participants attending their desired movie (rather than the one the other wanted to see; all p s $< .05$), there were also two anomalies. Preunits actually felt more comfortable than nonunits about the other coming by while the participant was studying, and none of the groups differed in their comfortableness about the other offering that the participant keep the change for going to the drugstore (they all tended to be uncomfortable about this, $M = 15.7$ on a 0–50 scale).

Dinner Scenario

Despite robust findings on each dependent measure, we thought it would be useful and instructive to consider a scenario in detail to appreciate the conjoint effects of behavioral intentions and affect in inferring the meaning of the social exchange. The first scenario, the dinner episode, provided an especially interesting and revealing perspective. Given that the other paid

Table 1
Means for Study 1 Dependent Measures

Measure	Condition		
	Unit	Preunit	Nonunit
Intentions ^a	38.2	38.0	30.7
Affect ^b	32.8	26.7	24.0

^a Reliable planned contrast of units and preunits versus nonunits. ^b Reliable planned contrast of units versus preunits and nonunits.

² A behavioral intention score for 1 participant in the preunit condition and affect scores for 3 participants in the unit condition and 1 participant in the preunit condition could not be computed. Finally, 4 participants did not provide codable responses to the question in the dinner scenario about time until reciprocation.

³ Initially, gender was treated as a variable in the analyses of the behavioral intention and affect data. However, gender did not qualify any of the findings.

⁴ In addition to the planned contrasts reported in the body of the article for all studies, post hoc comparisons using the Newman-Keuls test were performed to ensure that the conditions grouped together were not reliably different. For each analysis, there was no reliable difference between the conditions grouped together.

for dinner, those in a unit relationship felt more comfortable ($M = 34.7$) than those in a preunit relationship ($M = 20.4$) and those in a nonunit relationship ($M = 21.2$). When asked about the likelihood of reciprocating, those in a unit relationship reported an 82.8% mean probability and those in a preunit relationship reported an 88.0% mean probability, whereas those in a nonunit relationship reported a 70.8% mean probability of reciprocating at some time.

On the surface, responses to the reciprocation item suggested that those in a unit relationship were very concerned (and as concerned as the preunits) about the issue of eventual reciprocation. This might seem surprising given that friends are thought to be more communal and less exchange oriented. However, the meaning of the reciprocation responses for a unit versus preunit relationship were clarified by examining a follow-up question about how much time would pass before reciprocation. Those in a unit relationship reported mean estimates of 26.6 days, whereas those in a preunit relationship reported mean estimates of 16.6 days, $t(65) = 2.02, p < .05$.

These data suggest that those in a unit relationship want and expect to return the favors of friends, but they do not need to balance the books right away (Clark, 1981). They feel comfortable receiving favors and allowing reciprocation to happen more or less spontaneously. Those in a preunit relationship want to act like a friend (unit) but they do not feel as comfortable about the gesture of the other (and what those gestures mean) and they feel a need to respond more quickly than actual friends to communicate and provide reassurance about their interest.

Thus, Study 1 demonstrated, across a variety of social exchange situations, that those in a preunit relationship intended to act like those in a unit relationship, but they did not feel as comfortable about the exchange situations or their anticipated actions in the situations. These data suggest that those desiring a close, communal relationship (preunit) are similar to those in actual close relationships (unit) in important ways (behavioral intentions). However, the differences between these two types of relationship in feelings of comfort and discomfort suggest that the essential meaning of the social exchanges may be quite different.

Study 2

Study 2 was designed to replicate and extend the findings of Study 1. The dinner scenario in Study 1 revealed that those in a preunit relationship have a shorter time perspective for reciprocating a favor than those in a unit relationship. This finding is consistent with our initial theorizing on the motivation of those in a preunit relationship. We hypothesized, like Kelley and Thibaut (1978), that people experiencing a transition would be motivated to reduce uncertainty about their prospects by monitoring exchanges for information that would permit inferences about the state of the relationship. Preunits should be more inclined than units or nonunits to assign symbolic meaning and infer implications for the relationship on the basis of discrete social exchanges. Thus, we speculated that in a preunit relationship, behavior may influence the ascription of motives, whereas in a unit or nonunit relationship, existing attitudes may influence the interpretation of behavior (cf. Holmes, 1981). For those in a unit or nonunit relationship, it is their perceptions of the

relationship that influence their interpretations of behavioral exchanges. In contrast, for those in a preunit relationship, it is the behavioral exchanges that influence their interpretations of the relationship.

Therefore, for Study 2, we generated items designed to assess participants' perception of how diagnostic particular exchanges were of the state of their relationship, that is, to assess the meaning and importance the specific scenarios had for the relationship in general. In this way, with one set of dependent measures, we hoped to distinguish those in a preunit condition from those in both the unit and nonunit conditions. We expected that individuals in a preunit condition would consider a failure to reciprocate (by either themselves or the other person) to have more important implications for the relationship than either those in a unit or a nonunit condition (i.e., make stronger relationship attributions). Moreover, we expected that those in a preunit condition would expect less time to pass before a favor was reciprocated than those in the unit and nonunit conditions (i.e., have a shorter time perspective).

Study 2 also included changes in the dependent measures from Study 1. To increase the reliability of the measures, two items were generated for each scenario to assess affective discomfort, and two items were generated to assess behavioral expectations and intentions. Additionally, a set of items was included that assessed aspects of the relationship independent of specific scenarios (e.g., questions about frequency of borrowing and lending, and feelings about each).

Method

Overview

A 3×3 between-within design was used. The between-subjects variable was relationship type: unit, preunit, or nonunit. The within-subject variable was type of scenario: dinner, sick friend, or notes for a test.

Participants

Sixty-three university undergraduates participated in a study of "interpersonal relations" for course credit. The data for 3 participants were deleted because they did not follow the slash response instructions for the dependent measures. The final sample consisted of 31 male and 29 female participants randomly assigned to one of the three relationship conditions: unit ($n = 20$), preunit ($n = 18$), or nonunit ($n = 22$).

Procedure

Study 2 was conducted in basically the same manner as Study 1. Participants received the same instructions, relationship manipulation, and introduction to the visualization technique. In an effort to bolster visualizations for later scenarios, the experimenter guided participants through the first scenario, instructed them to answer the questions for that scenario, and then told them to wait for the next one to be introduced. In this way, the experimenter could reintroduce the visualization for each scenario by having participants close their eyes and listen to the experimenter describe each scenario (encouraging participants to picture themselves and their selected other in the situation).

Each scenario included two behavioral expectation/intention (BEI) items, two affect items, and two diagnosticity items (i.e., relationship attribution item and time perspective item). These latter items were designed to assess the extent to which the exchange interaction was

perceived to be revealing about the relationship in general. In the first scenario, the dinner scenario, participants were asked, "Would you expect ____ to treat you and pay for both dinners while you were gone from the table?" As well, they were asked, "How likely is it that ____ would pay for both dinners?" Responses to these two items were averaged together for the BEI measure. Participants also were asked, "How would you feel about the idea of ____ paying the check for both of you while you were away from the table?" Additionally, they were asked "Given that ____ paid for both dinners while you were away from the table, how would you feel about the situation?" Responses to these two items were averaged together for the affect measure.

Participants also were asked a time-perspective question (following up the time data from the dinner scenario in Study 1): "How much time would pass before you would begin to feel uncomfortable about not reciprocating (returning the favor)?" Additionally, they were asked, "How important to the relationship would it be if the particular favor was not reciprocated?" These two items were designed to assess how diagnostic reciprocation would be of the relationship in general.

The second scenario involved participants phoning the selected person just before going out with friends on a Friday night and discovering the person is in bed sick and unable to get a prescription from the drugstore. The participants' expectations that the person might request that they pick up the prescription and the likelihood that they would do this were assessed as the BEI measure. Participants' feelings about the idea of the request and their feelings about actually responding to the request served as the affect measure. As well, the diagnostic questions of time before reciprocation and importance to the relationship of a failure to reciprocate were assessed.

The third scenario involved participants taking a class with the selected person, who "has missed a number of classes since the last midterm, and now would like to borrow your notes shortly before the final exam." The expectation that the selected person would ask to borrow the notes and the likelihood that participants would lend the notes were assessed as the BEI measure. Participants' feelings about the request and their feelings about actually responding to the request again served as the affect measure. Finally, the diagnostic questions of time before reciprocation and importance to the relationship of not reciprocating were assessed.

After completing the questions about the scenarios, participants were asked, for exploratory purposes, a series of questions about their relationship with the selected person. They were asked how long they had known the person (years, months, weeks) and how they knew the person (e.g., classmate, roommate, someone from back home) and some questions about their perceptions of the relationship (e.g., borrowing, lending, disclosures).

Results and Discussion

Participants' responses to the scenario items were coded in the same fashion as in Study 1. A ruler measuring tenths of an inch was used to divide the 5-in. lines into 50 line segments.

BEI Measure

A 3 (relationship: unit, preunit, nonunit) \times 3 (scenario: dinner, sick other, notes for a test) between-within multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed on the BEI criteria with expectations and likelihood estimates of offers and requests by the selected person serving as multiple dependent measures. There was a main effect for the relationship variable, multivariate $F(4, 114) = 3.71, p < .01$,⁵ which was not qualified by the scenario variable. Univariate analyses revealed that the effect was reliable for both expectations and intentions ($ps <$

Table 2
Means for Study 2 Dependent Measures

Measure	Condition		
	Unit	Preunit	Nonunit
Behavioral Expectation/Intention ^a	31.4	28.1	24.2
Affect ^b	36.7	30.5	26.9
Reciprocation importance ^c	13.8	20.9	17.3
Time until reciprocation ^d	35.3	30.0	31.0
<i>n</i>	20	18	22

^a Reliable planned contrast of units and preunits versus nonunits. ^b Reliable planned contrast of units versus preunits and nonunits. ^c Reliable planned contrast of preunits versus units and nonunits. ^d Reliable post hoc difference between units and preunits.

.05). Moreover, as predicted and seen in Table 2, planned contrasts revealed that the BEI responses of those in a unit and a preunit relationship were reliably different from those in a nonunit relationship, multivariate $F(2, 56) = 6.67, p < .01$. Again, univariate analyses revealed that the effect was consistent for both dependent measures ($ps < .05$). Thus, those in a preunit relationship, like those in a unit relationship, saw the offers and requests of the selected person as more likely and expected than those in a nonunit relationship.

Affect Measures

The MANOVA on the affect items also revealed a main effect for the relationship variable, multivariate $F(4, 114) = 4.05, p < .01$, which was not qualified by an interaction with the scenario variable. Univariate analyses revealed that the effect was reliable for both dependent measures ($ps < .01$). Moreover, as predicted and seen in Table 2, planned contrasts revealed that those in a unit relationship felt less discomfort about the offers and requests of the selected person than both those in a preunit and those in a nonunit relationship, multivariate $F(2, 56) = 8.12, p < .01$. Again, both univariate analyses were reliable ($ps < .01$). Those in a preunit relationship and those in a nonunit relationship felt less comfortable than those in a unit relationship about the idea of offers and requests in the social exchanges. Likewise, they felt less comfortable about actually accepting offers and responding to requests.

Diagnosticity Measures

One item designed to assess how diagnostic the interaction was of the relationship was the relationship attribution question concerning the importance to the relationship of a failure of either party to reciprocate a favor. A 3 (relationship: unit, preunit, nonunit) \times 3 (scenario: dinner, sick other, notes for a test) between-within ANOVA revealed that the main effect for

⁵ All multivariate F s reported are based on the Pillai-Bartlett trace statistic, as recommended by Olson (1976). Gender did not qualify results of Study 2, although there was a trend for men in preunit relationships to intend to behave more like units, whereas women in preunit relationships intended to behave more like nonunits ($p < .10$).

relationship, $F(2, 57) = 3.44, p < .05$, and the planned contrast, $F(1, 57) = 4.90, p < .05$, were both reliable. As seen in Table 2, those in a preunit relationship felt that reciprocation of the favors (independent of who was indebted to whom) was more important to the relationship ($M = 20.9$, across scenarios) than did those in either a unit relationship ($M = 13.6$) or a nonunit relationship ($M = 17.3$).

The second item designed to assess the diagnosticity of the social exchange for the relationship concerned the time that would pass before one would feel discomfort about not reciprocating. With this dependent measure there was not a reliable effect for relationship type, $F(2, 57) = 2.15, ns$. However, as seen in Table 2, those in a preunit relationship had a consistently shorter time perspective for reciprocation than those in a unit relationship, $t(36) = 1.75, p < .05$, although not shorter than those in a nonunit relationship.⁶

Summary

In summary, with broader indexes than Study 1 (two items per scenario), Study 2 replicated the findings that those in a preunit relationship intend and expect social exchanges like those in a unit relationship, while at the same time feeling less comfortable about such exchanges. This supports our speculation that those in a preunit relationship, by responding to the offers and requests of the other in a manner similar to those in a unit relationship, may be signaling their interest and desire to forge a close, communal relationship. However, the discomfort they feel, relative to those in a unit relationship, reveals the uncertainty and ambiguity underlying the exchange.

Moreover, in Study 2 we found that those in a preunit relationship see the failure to reciprocate (independent of who is indebted to whom) to be more important to the relationship than those in a unit or a nonunit relationship, across a variety of social exchange scenarios. Thus, those in a preunit relationship were more likely to make attributions about the relationship on the basis of discrete social exchanges. This process of assigning symbolic meaning to behavioral exchanges is consistent with our theorizing that those in a preunit relationship feel uncertain and insecure about the status of their relationship.

A series of exploratory questions framed in terms of participants' general perspectives on the relationships helped to clarify our understanding of the preunit relationship. The reports of those in a preunit relationship about sharing personal information about themselves ($M = 33.6$) were not reliably different from those in a unit relationship ($M = 40.2$), and both groups reported sharing and revealing more than those in a nonunit relationship ($M = 14.3$).⁷ In contrast, when it came to the selected person sharing and revealing themselves to the participants, those in a preunit relationship reported that the other shared less often ($M = 31.1$) than those in a unit relationship ($M = 39.4$) but more often than those in a nonunit relationship ($M = 16.8$). Thus, those in a preunit relationship reported disclosing their feelings like a friend, but they did not perceive the other as reciprocating like a friend. It would seem that this might reinforce uncertainty about the other's feelings and thereby increase feelings of vulnerability to potential rejection.

Interestingly, this may be borne out in an asymmetry about borrowing and lending. Whereas those in a preunit relationship

were similar to those in a unit relationship in their likelihood of lending to the other ($M_s = 23.2$ and 26.5) and quite distinct from those in a nonunit relationship ($M = 8.9$), those in a preunit relationship were reliably less likely to borrow from the other ($M = 18.7$) than those in a unit relationship ($M = 27.0$). Moreover, the same pattern of data was obtained for general feelings about lending and borrowing. When it came to lending, those in a preunit relationship ($M = 37.4$) felt as comfortable as those in a unit relationship ($M = 40.8$) and more comfortable than those in a nonunit relationship ($M = 28.4$). Conversely, when it came to borrowing, those in a preunit relationship did not feel as comfortable ($M = 30.7$) as those in a unit relationship ($M = 40.2$), but they felt more comfortable than those in a nonunit relationship ($M = 22.5$).

This asymmetry between lending like a friend but not borrowing like a friend supports our assertion that those in a preunit relationship feel uncertain about the other's feelings and are concerned about the risks of rejection. For the preunits, the perception that the other does not disclose quite as much as a friend may promote feelings of insecurity about the relationship that make it difficult and uncomfortable to borrow—to make requests of the other amid uncertainty about the other's feelings.

Study 3

In Studies 1 and 2 we examined affective and behavioral responses conjointly to infer the social meaning of exchange situations for those in different types of relationships (what we termed in the introduction our two-variable strategy). In Study 2 we also used our one-variable strategy by considering the implications of a failure to reciprocate as an indicator of relationship attributions. In Study 3 we tried to obtain more direct evidence consistent with our assertions about attributions and social inferences concerning relationship status. Specifically, we elicited written responses to open-ended questions about the favor of a dinner and content-analyzed these responses for attributions and social inferences. In this way, we could test our notions that social exchange behaviors imply some social meaning for those in a preunit relationship, especially meaning about relationship development. In contrast with this bottom-up approach of inferring relationship status from discrete exchange behaviors among preunits, we also sought to demonstrate that those in a close (unit) relationship would use a more top-down approach of attributing the discrete exchange behaviors to interpersonal dispositions (Kelley, 1979; Newman, 1981), that is, to chronic tendencies of the person within the context of the

⁶ One explanation given for this null finding is that the scale of the measure was *very little time to a great deal of time* rather than actual days, weeks, and months, as in Study 1. Those in a nonunit relationship, by virtue of having known the other person on average for 3 more years than those in a preunit relationship, may have invoked a different metric in responding to the time perspective item (cf. Biernat, Manis, & Nelson, 1991). We gratefully acknowledge the insight of the UCLA Close Relationships Interest Group in offering this explanation.

⁷ All analyses described in this section are based on three-group one-way ANOVAs, $F_s(2, 57) > 6.58, p_s < .01$, and all cell comparisons refer to significant differences ($p < .05$) using the Newman-Keuls procedure.

relationship. Although those in preunit relationships may behave like friends and engage in greater cognitive and attributional activity than established friends, they would not yet have the trust and confidence to make the same interpersonal attributions of established friends. Thus, we predicted that those in a unit relationship would make more interpersonal attributions than those in either a preunit or a nonunit relationship.

Method

Using the same visualization procedure as in Studies 1 and 2, we presented 108 university students (37 men and 75 women) with the dinner scenario after randomly assigning them to focus on a unit ($n = 35$), preunit ($n = 39$), or nonunit ($n = 34$) relationship from their existing social worlds. They were asked to imagine that the other person had paid for their dinner while the participant was away from the table. Participants then received a set of open-ended questions designed to elicit paragraphs describing the social meaning of the event for them—its causes and probable future implications and significance.

Two raters blind to condition and hypothesis then coded for all the attributional explanations given by participants for the other person paying for the dinner. In addition, they coded for any implications that participants thought the situation had for the relationship. Attributional categories included dispositional inferences about the other person (e.g., "because she is a nice person"), interpersonal attributions (e.g., "because he likes me," "to share with me"), relationship maintenance attributions (e.g., "to be a good friend"), relationship development attributions (e.g., "to become closer"), and relationship attributions that were too ambiguous to be clearly classified as maintenance or development (e.g., "as a gesture of friendship"). The significance that the dinner had for the relationship was coded in terms of relationship development (e.g., "We'll probably get closer") and relationship maintenance (e.g., "This occurrence cements our friendship"). In addition, raters coded responses that explicitly stated that the buying of the dinner had no particular implications or significance for the relationship (e.g., "none").

Intrater reliability for dichotomous judgements was good across category codes, ($M \kappa = .78$, range = .63–.94). Note, though, that the overall response rate for any specific code could be quite low given the open-ended response format, which elicited spontaneous, divergent, and at times sparse explanations for the situation.

Results and Discussion

Using one-way ANOVA for proportion data (Lunney, 1969), attributions to the relationship in general (i.e., combining maintenance, development, and ambiguous relationship codes disjunctively) differed as a function of relationship type, $F(2, 105) = 6.52$, $p < .01$. Whereas 72% of the preunits made these attributions, only 34% of the units and 41% of the nonunits made attributions about the relationship. A more detailed examination (see Table 3) revealed that the locus of the effect was on the predicted relationship development code. Preunits were more likely to attribute the dinner to relationship development (41%) than either the units (6%) or the nonunits (21%), planned one-tailed contrast with separate variances, $t(57.3) = 3.12$, $p < .01$, overall $F(2, 105) = 7.25$, $p < .001$.⁸ There were no reliable differences between groups for relationship maintenance or for the ambiguous relationship category attributions.

Consistent with this pattern of data, we found that those in a preunit relationship tended to see the event as more often having

Table 3

A Priori Comparisons of the Percentage Making Attributions for the Dinner and Seeing Implications of the Dinner for the Relationship in Study 3

Code	Relationship		
	Unit	Preunit	Nonunit
Attributions			
Relationship development ^a	6	41	21
Interpersonal dispositions ^b	37	13	15
Implications			
Relationship development ^a	9	21	9
Explicitly stated "None" ^a	54	28	47

^a Reliable planned comparison of preunits versus units and nonunits.

^b Reliable planned comparison of units versus preunits and nonunits.

implications for the maintenance or development of the relationship (31%) than did nonunits (9%), $t(105) = 2.33$, $p < .05$, with units (23%) differing from neither group, overall $F(2, 105) = 2.70$, $p < .10$. In particular, preunits tended to see the dinner as having implications or significance for relationship development more often (21%) than did units (9%) and nonunits (9%), planned $t(59.3) = 1.60$, $p < .06$. Moreover, those in a preunit relationship were least likely to report that the dinner did not have any implications for the relationship (28% vs. unit = 54%, nonunit = 47%), planned $t(88.8) = 2.36$, $p < .05$. Implications for relationship maintenance were mentioned more often by units (17%) than nonunits (0%), $t(105) = 2.47$, $p < .05$, with preunits (10%) not reliably different from either units or nonunits, overall $F(2, 105) = 3.15$, $p < .05$.

Finally, it is interesting to note that all groups made similar levels of dispositional attributions for the dinner (overall $M = 44\%$), $F < 1$, but as predicted, those in a unit relationship made more interpersonal attributions (37%) than did the preunits (13%) or the nonunits (15%), planned $t(51.2) = 2.53$, $p < .05$, overall $F(2, 105) = 4.08$, $p < .05$. Thus, those in a unit relationship saw the behavior as more characteristic of and intrinsic to the way in which the other person chronically acts within their relationship per se, whereas preunits were unable or unwilling to make attributions about interpersonal dispositions.

In sum, the content analysis of participants' own thoughts and feelings about an exchange situation supports our notion that those in a transitional, preunit relationship are unwilling or unable to see a favor as just a favor but instead view it as an event with surplus social meaning. In particular, for those in a preunit relationship, discrete behavioral exchanges prompt attributional activity as preunits monitor these exchanges to infer for themselves the causes, current status, and future prospects for their relationship. Finally, despite hopes and desires for a

⁸ We present the more appropriate separate variances estimate (rather than the pooled) for all planned one-tailed contrasts because heterogeneity of variances is expected with proportion data due to the curvilinear relationship between the means and the variances. Indeed, using Cochran's C , we typically found heterogeneity of variances across groups. However, analyses using pooled variances did not change the pattern of data.

close relationship, those in a preunit relationship are not yet able to make the stable interpersonal attributions about the other's chronic behaviors and motives within the relationship that are characteristic of unit relationships.

Study 4

Our overriding assumption across studies has been that discrete social interactions serve as a basis for current inferences about one's relationship. The implication is that the interaction, and its concomitant meaning, define on-line perceptions of closeness. In Study 3, we sought to demonstrate this by eliciting open-ended responses from participants. Nevertheless, we still used the same mental simulation procedure as in previous studies. Therefore, we designed Study 4 to test the notion that in preunit relationships, the quality of actual social interactions and acute, momentary, on-line perceptions of closeness will be highly correlated. Although in unit and nonunit relationships we might expect some correlation between the quality of social interactions and on-line perceptions of closeness, we do not expect the magnitude of the correlation to be as great as in preunit relationships.

Note that we would expect the pattern of mean differences in interaction quality and the amount learned in an interaction to be different from the pattern of correlations. We would expect people to have higher quality interactions in their unit relationships than in their nonunit relationships. In a sense, such mean differences validate the distinction between the two relationship types—there is more closeness in unit relationships, and therefore there are higher quality interactions that allow people to learn more about each other and their relationship. Those in preunit relationships likely have interactions of higher quality than those in nonunit relationships but not quite as high as those in unit relationships. This would reflect the potential for a unit relationship. Importantly, though, variation in the quality of the interactions would be more strongly related to perceptions of relationship closeness for transitional preunit relationships than stable unit or nonunit relationships.

Method

Participants

Twenty-six university students (6 men and 20 women) were recruited for a study of personal relationships and social interaction. Participants were paid \$5.00 for their participation.

Procedure

A modified version of the Rochester Interaction Record (RIR; Reis & Wheeler, 1991) was used by participants in rating the properties of daily dyadic interactions of at least 10 min for a period of 1 week. Participants received detailed instructions from the experimenter at a lab session, consistent with those used in previous RIR studies. Participants were instructed to complete interaction records at the lab for interactions they already had that day of at least 10 min in duration. Participants were instructed to drop off their first batch of interaction records after 3 days and to pick up additional interaction records. They received telephone calls reminding them of this and giving them an opportunity to address any additional questions to the experimenter. At their lab session at the end of the week they completed an exit questionnaire about the veracity

and faithfulness of their recording interactions. On a scale from 1 (*very inaccurate*) to 7 (*very accurate*), participants rated their interactions as accurate ($M = 5.31$, $SD = 1.54$).

Measures

Quality of the interaction was assessed in two ways using 7-point scales. First, a measure of interpersonal learning was based on an average of how much the participant learned about the other person and how much was learned about the relationship ($r = .71$). Second, a measure of intimacy was based on an average of ratings of seven items. Specifically, participants rated how much they disclosed in the interaction, how much the other person disclosed, the extent to which each person expressed their feelings, the meaningfulness of the interaction, the degree of intimacy in the interaction, and satisfaction with the interaction ($\alpha = .93$). Participants also rated how close a relationship they felt with the other person and how much they would like the relationship to be closer.

A set of templates describing relationship types included the three templates from the previously reported studies. Two other templates used for exploratory purposes were potential romantic partner interactions and actual romantic partner interactions. Half of the participants coded relationship types along with the interaction records, and half coded relationship types at the end of the week in the lab. This made no difference in the results.

Results and Discussion

Participants completed 1,084 interaction records ($M = 41.7$ records per participant). Of these, 665 records involved nonunit, preunit, or unit same-sex interactions and were used for our analyses because of their correspondence to Studies 1–3. For each variable (e.g., interpersonal learning, on-line perceptions of closeness of the relationship), means for each participant were computed by averaging across interaction records of the same relationship type. Twenty-three participants had same-sex nonunit interactions, 24 had same-sex preunit interactions, and 23 had same-sex unit interactions.

Preliminary Analyses

A series of repeated measures ANOVAs using the 18 cases with all three relationship types revealed that participants felt more closeness in unit interactions ($M = 5.53$) than in preunit interactions ($M = 4.05$), $t(34) = 5.34$, $p < .01$, which, in turn evoked more feelings of closeness than in nonunit interactions ($M = 2.25$), $t(34) = 6.50$, $p < .01$, overall $F(2, 34) = 70.50$, $p < .001$. Similarly, in unit relation interactions, participants reported greater intimacy ($M = 4.48$) than in preunit interactions ($M = 3.62$), $t(34) = 4.97$, $p < .01$, which were in turn rated as greater in intimacy than nonunit interactions ($M = 2.87$), $t(34) = 4.33$, $p < .01$, overall $F(1, 34) = 42.59$, $p < .01$.

In ratings of interpersonal learning (i.e., how much was learned about the person and the relationship), participants reported greater interpersonal learning in preunit interactions ($M = 3.42$) than in nonunit interactions ($M = 2.85$), $t(34) = 2.23$, $p < .05$, overall $F(2, 34) = 7.48$, $p < .01$, but they did not report learning reliably more in unit interactions ($M = 3.84$) than in preunit interactions, $t(34) = 1.64$, *ns*. Similarly, with ratings of how much participants wished to be closer, the desire for increased closeness was greater in preunit interactions (M

= 4.86) than in nonunit interactions ($M = 2.51$), $t(34) = 8.61$, $p < .01$, overall $F(2, 34) = 61.44$, $p < .01$, but the desire for greater closeness in unit interactions ($M = 5.32$) was not reliably greater than in preunit interactions, $t(34) = 1.69$, $p < .10$.

As one might expect for preunit interactions, self-disclosure was correlated with the desire for closeness, $r(22) = .40$, $p < .06$. However, this might reflect a unidirectional relationship of hope and desire. Interestingly, though, for preunit interactions, ratings of other's disclosure was reliably correlated with the desire for closeness, $r(22) = .52$, $p < .01$. Thus, at least from participants' perceptual experience, there seems to be some real basis for seeing potential in preunit relations. Note further that other's disclosure was not a cue prompting an increased desire for closeness in unit or nonunit interactions, $r_s = .21$ and $.19$, respectively.

Interaction Quality and On-Line Perceptions of Closeness

The more critical analyses in this study focused on the correlations between properties of the interactions (interpersonal learning and intimacy) and on-line momentary perceptions of closeness of the relationship. Standard scores for unit, preunit, and nonunit interactions were computed. To generate within-cell correlations, a cross-product of the standard scores for interpersonal learning in the interaction and perceived closeness was calculated for each interaction. Similarly, a cross product of intimacy in the interaction and perceived closeness was calculated. A 26 (participants) \times 3 (relationship type) ANOVA was performed, with participants treated as a categorical covariate. Three was set as the minimum number of cross products in each cell, consistent with the minimum criteria for calculating correlation coefficients.

The pattern of correlations between interpersonal learning and perceived closeness revealed significant modest correlations for unit, $r(365) = .35$, $p < .01$, and nonunit, $r(62) = .37$, $p < .01$, interactions. For preunit interactions, the correlation was significantly greater, $r(206) = .62$, $p < .01$, as revealed by a planned contrast between transitional preunit interactions and stable unit and nonunit interactions, $t(585) = 3.18$, $p < .01$ (see also Table 4). The overall main effect for relationship type on degree of association between perceived closeness and learning in the interaction was also significant, $F(2, 588) = 6.29$, $p < .01$, as were the cell comparisons between preunit and unit, $t(588) = 3.70$, $p < .01$, and between preunit and nonunit interactions, $t(588) = 2.07$, $p < .05$.

The correlations between intimacy in the interactions and perceived closeness were highly significant for each type of

relationship, as seen in Table 4. However, a planned contrast revealed that the degree of association was significantly greater for preunit interactions ($r = .69$) than nonunit ($r = .53$) and unit ($r = .57$) interactions collectively, $t(588) = 1.68$, $p < .05$. The overall main effect for relationship type was again significant, $F(2, 588) = 5.55$, $p < .01$, but cell comparisons were not, $t_s = 1.23$ and 1.53 for preunit comparisons with nonunit and unit interactions, respectively.

In sum, interactions in unit relationships were characterized by greater intimacy and greater feelings of closeness than interactions in preunit relationships, which in turn were characterized by greater intimacy, greater interpersonal learning, and greater feelings of closeness than interactions in nonunit relationships. However, the strength of the relationship between properties of the interactions (interpersonal learning and intimacy) and perceptions of closeness were stronger for transitional preunit relationships than for stable unit and nonunit relationships.

General Discussion

Collectively, the findings across four studies support our assertion that acquaintances who see the potential for friendship, a preunit relation, represent a psychologically distinct type of relationship as compared with existing, stable friendships and acquaintanceships. In a preunit relation, one intends to act like a friend and not like an acquaintance, yet one experiences more discomfort about following a communal script than one does in a unit relation (Study 1 and Study 2). Moreover, in a preunit relation, one is more likely than in a unit or nonunit relation to see a nice gesture by the other person (treating for dinner) as having some social meaning (Study 3). Failure to reciprocate a favor (by either party) was deemed more important to preunit relations than to unit and nonunit relations (Study 2). Also, in Study 1, those in a preunit relation were most anxious (shorter time perspective) to return the favor of the dinner. Finally, in actual preunit social interactions, momentary, on-line perceptions of relationship closeness were associated strongly with both ratings of the intimacy of the individual, discrete interactions, and degree of interpersonal learning in the interactions. Thus, across studies, a clear pattern emerges to support our contention that in transitional preunit relations, discrete social interactions are imbued with surplus meaning.

The findings in Study 1 and Study 2 were obtained using a diverse array of social exchange scenarios. The diversity of scenarios and our procedure of allowing participants to imagine the scenarios idiosyncratically had the potential of increasing variance and obscuring real differences. However, the templates we created to manipulate the targeted relationship and the careful induction of the simulated events produced a reliable and replicated pattern of effects.

Nevertheless, the scenarios may have elicited participants' naive theories of relationships. We do not see this as a serious problem for three reasons. First, we suspect that behavior in actual social interactions is often influenced by personal theories of relationships (Baldwin, 1992). Second, despite using scenarios, we were able to elicit reports of affective discomfort about following a communal script in a preunit relation. Finally, to

Table 4
Within-Cell Correlation Coefficients in Study 4

Correlation with perceived closeness	Unit	Preunit	Nonunit
Interpersonal learning ^a	.35	.62	.37
Intimacy ^a	.57	.69	.53

^a Reliable planned comparison of preunits versus units and nonunits.

some extent, Study 4 validated the preunit construct in actual daily interactions.

And how do we characterize this psychological construct? The message across studies is that the psychological experience of preunit relations is fraught with attributional ambiguity. Whereas for units, favors being offered, requested, and returned in some way at some time would seem to be a natural, comfortable part of social interactions among friends, for preunits, offers and requests of favors are made amid the uncertainty and instability of their relationship status (cf. Holmes & Rempel, 1989). Is a favor from a potential friend a genuine invitation to friendship, or is it expressive of the person's communal disposition (Clark, Mills, & Powell, 1986)? Alternatively, a favor may even be construed as an instrumental strategy because of the indebtedness it may create. In turn, the requests of the other may signal to preunits that they are valued. Again, however, there is likely to be residual uncertainty and anxiety about the implications that the specific request has for the aspired-to relationship. Without the trust of a close relationship, preunits do not have a clear set of expectations to use as a framework for drawing confident inferences about the meaning of different acts.

Ironically, then, preunits, in moving from a relationship based on a norm of reciprocity to one based on a norm of responsiveness to needs, appear to place somewhat more importance on reciprocity than do nonunits. Whereas the failure to reciprocate may be a norm violation of rules of exchange in a casual relationship for nonunits, the failure to reciprocate may increase doubt and uncertainty about the prospects for developing a closer relationship for preunits. Essentially, then, in ongoing relationships in the real world, reciprocation is likely more important for preunits than nonunits because more is at stake.

The importance and immediacy (shorter time perspective) of discrete social exchanges for preunits may suggest a fundamental difference in attributional and social inference processes between those in stable versus transitional relationships. In stable relationships, interactions typically do not evoke attributional activity and controlled processing (Fletcher & Fincham, 1991; Fletcher et al., 1987). Those interactions that do evoke attributional activity and controlled processing would be guided by chronic expectancies about interpersonal dispositions such that the construal of the relationship will influence the behavior and its interpretation in a top-down fashion. Thus, even when a close friend does something unexpectedly negative, prompting attributional activity, one is likely to make benign attributions about the behavior based on chronic expectancies.

In a preunit relationship, and possibly in other transitional relationships as well, one cannot appeal to chronic expectancies because of uncertainty and ambiguity about the relationship. As a result, attributional activity and controlled processing is greater relative to stable relationships. Moreover, in preunit relationships, one cannot use interpersonal dispositions to give meaning to the behaviour. On the contrary, preunits are left to rely on specific behaviors to make inferences and attributions about the relationship in general, in perhaps what might be characterized as a bottom-up inference process.

One explanation for these effects is that preunit relationships are new relationships, and therefore, consistent with social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973), each discrete piece of information is especially informative. However, we have found

that the average duration of preunit relationships in our studies is 53 weeks, with 25 weeks as the lower bound of the 95% confidence interval. Moreover, as we saw in Study 4, the number of preunit interactions was more than double the number of nonunit interactions. Thus, the effects of preunit relationships do not appear to result from people being newly acquainted. Instead, we contend that the effects of preunit relationships are due to the uncertainty about a transitional relationship. In this sense, the newness of the type of relationship may be an important factor to consider.

Of course, the difference between transitional and stable relationships is a relative one. Surely, preunits' perceptions of the prospects for the relationship influence their behavior. As well, the behavior of units and nonunits likely influences their relationships by bolstering perceptions and expectancies. However, we maintain that for preunits, discrete social exchanges typically give meaning to the relationship, whereas for units and nonunits, the relationship typically gives meaning to the social exchanges. In the former case, behavior defines a social reality, whereas in the latter cases the social reality defines the behavior (see also Fletcher & Fincham, 1991; Fletcher et al., 1987).

Transitional Relationships

The investigation of preunit relations is interesting in its own right because it allows us to better understand how relationships develop from acquaintanceship to friendship. Moreover, examining preunit relations and unit relations in the same study may help us to better understand how the desire for or availability of communal relations differs from established communal relations. More broadly, though, preunit relations may be a particularly interesting exemplar of transitional relationships.

Attention to transitional relationships is important because it underscores the dynamic nature of interpersonal relationships as developing and deteriorating. Precipitating conditions may challenge and alter relationship status at any stage in a relationship. Although the content and valence of inferences drawn in deteriorating postunit relations may differ from developing preunit relations (because perceptions about the prospects for the relationship may differ), we theorize that the same general psychological process occurs in such transitions: Discrete behaviors and interactions are imbued with surplus meaning. Uncertainty about one's relationship status evokes vigilance in monitoring behaviors in the service of drawing social inferences. In transitional relationships, a favor is not just a favor.

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