

Think your friends know you? Think again

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Researchers conclude suggestions from our closest friends about matters of taste, such as movies or restaurants, may not be as helpful as we think they are.

University of Michigan and Columbia University scientists say people tend to overestimate personal information they get from close friends more than comments from acquaintances.

"Think your friends know you pretty well? Think again," write Andrew Gershoff of the University of Michigan and Gita Johar of Columbia University. "We make our worst estimates for our closest friends. This is important because it affects how willing we are to rely on our friends' advice and word-of-mouth recommendations."

Why do we think our friends know us better than they really do? One explanation, according to Gershoff and Johar, is the high regard protects the relationship, at least in our minds. "To maintain our self image we want to believe we are important to others, particularly to others we care about. So when we think about our close friends, we are more motivated to think they know us well compared to our less close friends, and so we overestimate more for our close friends."

The study will appear in the March 2006 issue of the Journal of Consumer Research.

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