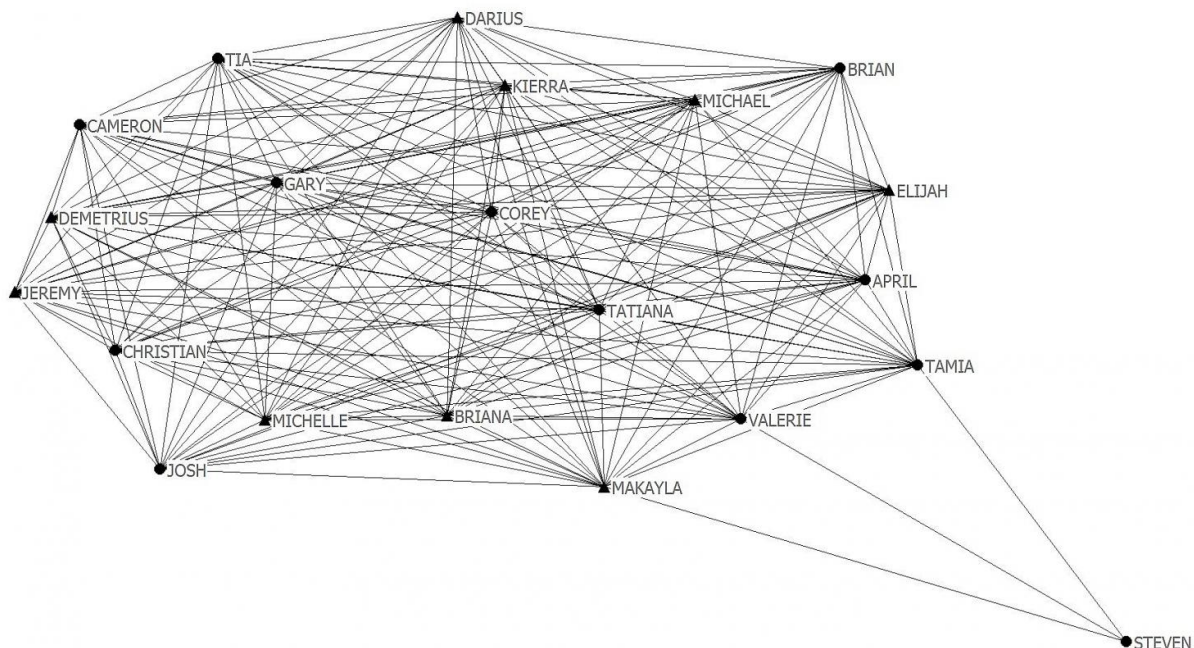


# How friendship networks at college impact students' academic and social success

October 25 2016



Valerie's friendship network: A tight-knitter. Credit: Visuals created by Janice McCabe, Dartmouth College.

Student friendships at college should not be underestimated, as they can either help or hinder students academically and socially, according to a Dartmouth study "[Friends with Academic Benefits](#)," published in the current issue of *Contexts*. The article by [Janice McCabe](#), associate professor of sociology at Dartmouth, serves as a precursor to her

upcoming book, "[Connecting in College: How Friendship Networks Matter for Academics and Social Success](#)" (University of Chicago Press, to be released November 11).

Previous studies on the importance of peers have examined the broader role that peers play in student life, often focusing on their social influence, whereas, this study examines: individual friendships at [college](#), how [students](#) benefit academically and socially from such networks, and how such networks reflect a student's race and class. The research analyzes and visually maps the friendship networks of 67 students at a Midwestern university that is predominantly white, by looking at the role that friendship groups play in a student's life and the density of ties that he/she shares with friends. McCabe finds that student friendships can be classified into three types of networks: tight-knitters, samplers and compartmentalizers.

- Tight-knitters have one dense group of friends, where nearly everyone knows each other, and their network resembles a ball of yarn. Most of the tight-knitters were students of color (Black or Latino). Tight-knitters referred to their friends as family and relied on each other socially. Academically, their friends could also be supportive and helpful. However, they also had the potential to pull each other down academically, if they lacked academic skills and motivation. The potential for such negative influence reproduced race- and class-based inequalities. (See Valerie's friendship network, as depicted in Figure 1).
- Compartmentalizers have two to four clusters of friends, who do not know each other, and their network resembles a bow tie. Compartmentalizers had separate clusters of friends: one or more for studying and one or more for having fun, with a good balance between the two. They tended to be white and from the middle class, and relied less on their friends to succeed in college than tight-knitters. In addition to having academic and social clusters

of friends, Black and Latino compartmentalizers also had a cluster of friends that helped them with race- or class-based marginality. (See Betsy's friendship network, as depicted in Figure 2).

- Samplers have one-on-one friendships rather than groups of friends, with friends from different places remaining unconnected to each other, and their network resembles a daisy. Samplers were independent and did not rely on their friends for a sense of belonging; they were often socially isolated. They were academically successful without the help of their friends. Samplers came from a range of race and class backgrounds. (See Steve's [friendship network](#), as depicted in Figure 3).

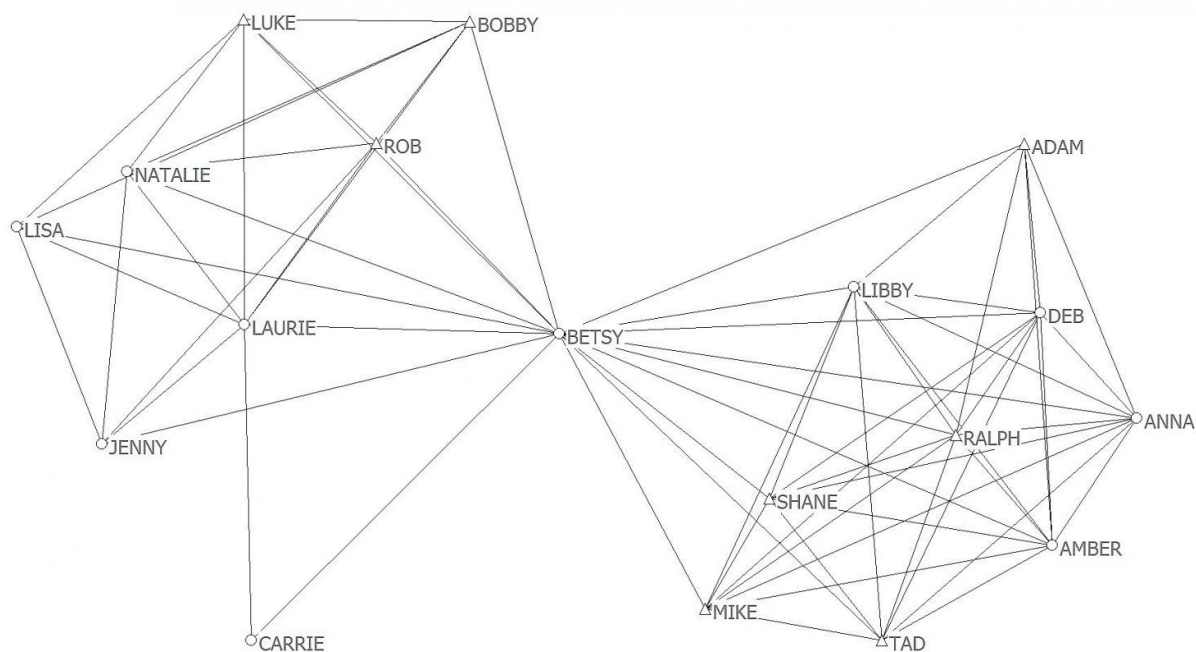


Figure 2. Betsy's friendship network: A compartmentalizer. Credit: Visuals created by Janice McCabe, Dartmouth College.

"Contrary to conventional wisdom, students are quite savvy in recognizing that friends can distract them and in strategically using [friends](#) to help them improve their academics. The most successful strategies, however, differ by network type," says McCabe.

For the most part, the type of friendship networks that students had during college remained their type after college. Tight-knitters remained tight-knitters and compartmentalizers remained compartmentalizers; however, most samplers became tight-knitters after they graduated and felt more supported.

College friendships that offered both strong academic and social ties proved to be the most enduring. Tight-knitters maintained nearly one-third of their friendships from college while compartmentalizers and samplers retained about a quarter of their friendships from college.

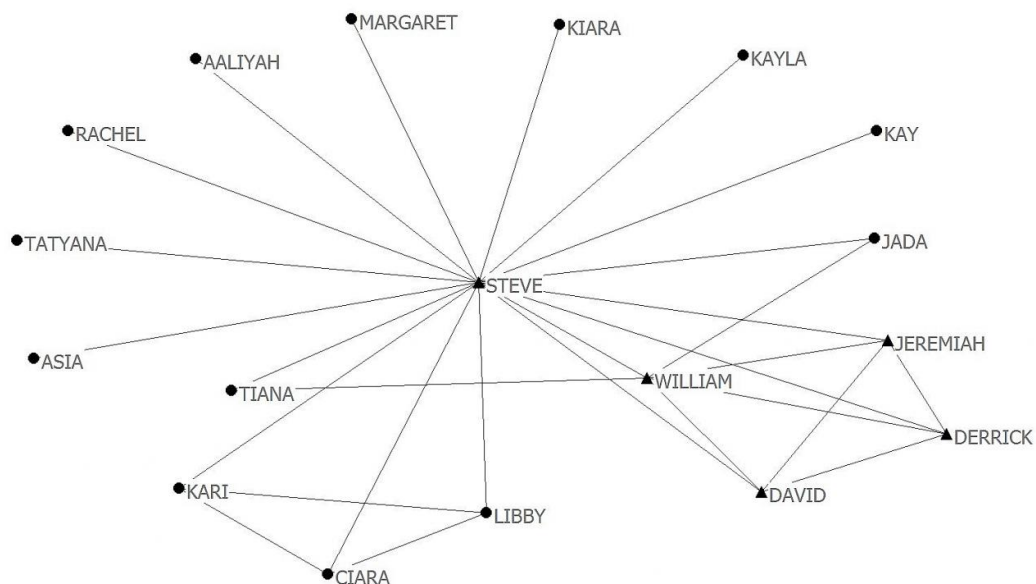


Figure 3. Steve's friendship network:A sampler. Credit: Figure 1. Valerie's

friendship network: A tight-knitter. Visuals created by Janice McCabe, Dartmouth College.

Provided by Dartmouth College

Citation: How friendship networks at college impact students' academic and social success (2016, October 25) retrieved 9 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-10-friendship-networks-college-impact-students.html>

<p>This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.</p>
--