

‘Women’s Friendships in a Post Modern World’ in *Placing Friendships in Context*, eds R. Adams and G. Allan, Cambridge University Press: 117-135 by Pat O’Connor

Introduction

It has become almost a cliché to observe that we are living in a post-modern world - a world where identity, truth and rationality are all equally problematic. Yet, in a strange way, the implications of this world for personal relationships in general, and for women's friendships in particular have tended to be ignored. Yet, there have been suggestions that within a world where discourses are relativistic, where power at many levels is diffuse, and where women in Western Society are becoming an important economic and political constituency, that their friendships with each other could play an important part in shaping their identities. On the other hand however, the space for women's friendships within Western Society has become extremely limited, and the boundaries between such relationships and lesbianism much more permeable than heretofore:

".....I saw that openly expressed love between women for the most part, ceased to be possible after World War I, Women's changed status and the new 'medical knowledge' cast such affection in a new light."

Faderman, 1987: 20

Furthermore, the very fluidity and instability of friendship exacerbates the legitimacy of investing resources (such as time and money) in women's friendships in the context of an increasingly challenged but still hegemonic discourse in which heterosexuality is privileged. Yet, paradoxically, other than perhaps in intensely romantic love relationships, relationships of validation, respect and equality are unlikely to occur between men and women. In this situation, women's relationships with each other - particularly freely chosen friendship relationships, have enormous possibilities as regards self validation. Yet, these are the very relationships which are culturally problematic and socially difficult to maintain. As has been widely noted (Oliker, 1989, Smith Rosenberg, 1975) that there is no cultural ideal of friendship between women. Rather there is a persistent stress on the impossibility of women

maintaining good relationships with other women, within a context where, it is assumed that they will be competing for male attention and/or general favours

The attractiveness of friendship as a relational form

Friendship is a voluntary relationship. It is a relationship which can be terminated without any legal involvement, and one whose essence is typically interwoven with its continued existence.

"Unlike marriage, there is no societal or contractual regulation of friendship at anytime, from inception through to dissolution. Rather, it is voluntarily undertaken and self-managed"

Wiseman, 1986:192

Within a post modern world, where there is increasing disenchantment with institutional structures which are seen as irrelevant, unrepresentative, illegitimate etc., friendship relationships are attractive. Simmel (1971:392) early recognized the basic contradiction implicit in cultural life viz. the idea that social forms make our life meaningful, and yet these very forms

'in their rigidly individual shapes, in the demands of their imprescriptable rights contradict the essence of life itself, with its weaving dynamics"

1971 : 392

Friendships are relationships which can be chosen and rechosen throughout one's life in a way which allows for a high degree of self definition. Parents and siblings are inherited. Husbands can only be changed so often. Lovers can be more numerous, but even to-day conventions about respectability arguably have some effect. Friendship however, is infinitely possible. Of course, to some extent this apparently open-ended availability is an illusion:

"People making friends actually direct their efforts discriminately as is clear from the following research findings. Friendships are usually formed with people of the same religion and socio-economic level, who have a similar job similar background, similar educational history, similar level of income similar recreational interests and similar racial origins"

Furthermore, since friendships involve relational work of some kind or other, it is now recognized that there are costs for women implicit in the creation and maintenance of friendships and these become more acute as friendships become more numerous (La Gaipa, 1990:126). Within a world where marriage is seen as less stable, where the number of children are falling throughout Europe, peer relationships potentially can be seen as increasingly important. Friendships offer, at least potentially, a way of inventing and re-inventing the self in an authentic way throughout one's life. As such, they are potentially particularly important to women whose idea of themselves is typically rooted in social relationships.

Within Western Society, where women have typically been viewed as 'the Other' (De Beauvoir, 1949). Part of the attractiveness of friendship as a relational form lies in the ability to generate alternative definitions of self. In a world where all knowledge is filtered through a male lens, it is impossible to know what it is to be a woman since women enter

"into a system of values that is not hers, and in which she can 'appear' and circulate only when enveloped in the needs/desires/fantasies of others, namely, men"

Inigaray, 1985 : 134

As Irigaray sees it, in this situation, it is only when women are together that a new and different way of being is possible:

"In suffering but also in women's laughter. And again : in what they 'dare' - do or say - when they are among themselves, in these places of women , among themselves, something of a speaking (as) woman is heard"

Irigaray, 1985: 134 & 135

Inigaray is not suggesting that interaction between women will be harmonious, but rather that it offers the possibility of defining a self which transcends the place accorded to it within a male language and culture system. Within a post modern world where the inevitability of identities and discourses generated by the hegemonic institutions (Foucault, 1980) becomes

more problematic, the possibilities as regards the identity providing characteristics of friendship become heightened. The first and second Women's Movements have contributed to a recognition of the reality and importance of women's friendships. Nevertheless, there are limits to the extent to which such relationships can be valued without undermining the assumptions implicit of a heterosexual society, where women are defined by their relationships with men, who are seen as providing them with their identity, their most important emotional experiences, the rationale for living etc. Yet, of course such dependence on men has implications for women:

"Its a vicious circle for women, as it is for any devalued group in a society: They internalize the social definition of self as inferior, then turn to those who formulated that definition and who now have a stake in maintaining it, for reassurance that it isn't true. In doing so, they help to increase the power of the powerful"

Rubin 1985 :167

Within a social and cultural context where heterosexual units are seen as 'natural' and desirable and where women remain the main care- givers (for children, the elderly etc) there is a constant ambivalence about encouraging desires which might fracture such relationships.

Baker Miller (1986:89) suggested that in Western Society the only forms of connection that have been available to women are " subservient affiliations " The problem as she sees it is that women have been seeking connections that are impossible to attain under the present arrangements. Prioritising their relationships with men, they have continued to look to such relationships for validation, for intimacy, and for those kinds of interaction which it has been shown that they are least likely to be able or willing to give since

"In quite a real sense and despite rhetoric to the contrary, males and females continue to occupy separate spheres, to have different demands made of them and consequently to develop different skills and abilities."

Allan, 1989:66

In this context, because their needs for intimacy and attachment are not met within heterosexual relationships, they rely

"on kin, friends and children for the emotional engagement they do not receive in marriage"

Acker, 1989:68

Oliker argued that, in particular in their women friends, they found a willingness to enter the 'inner life'; an understanding of the constrained nature of their situation; and in particular an appreciation of those priorities and values which were not seen as important in the wider culture:

". . . children and personal problems in marriage and motherhood, even though these topics might have been slighted by husbands or the larger culture"

Oliker, 1989 : 38

Motherhood is perhaps typically one of the most important elements in women's idea of themselves. There is indeed no similar male identity - fatherhood being typically construed in terms of conception or economic support of the family rather in terms of 'love labour'(Lynch, 1989) which extends into adult hood and beyond. Through these friendships and the discourses they created, it is clear that the women in Oliker's study acquired validation and a positive definition of self - and in particular one which validated them as rearers of children. It is arguable that the dominant (male) culture provides little validation for such activity. Yet such relationships between women exist in a society which is essentially patriarchal. In this context

"socio-relation are the only bonds that receive social, political and economic sanction for women. In hereto - reality, female friendship is regarded as second-rate, insignificant, often preliminary to hereto-maturity"

Raymond, 1986 : 11

. Indeed, as Raymond (1986) O'Connor (1992) have noted that

"The most blatant obstacle to female friendship is the prevailing patriarchal adage that 'women are each others worst enemies'

Raymond, 1986 : 151

Women's relationships with each other cannot of course dissolve that world. They can however provide diversion. They can provide women with a status/or power, within the world of women which is denied to them within a predominantly male public arena where the aristocracy of sex predominates. Such status and/power may be based on a variety of sources such as their skills, their contribution to a group whether at the level of tending, leadership, conversational ability etc. They can maintain an idea of self which transcends other stigmatizing characteristics (such as those related to age or race). They can validate those identities which are required of women but not validated by the wider culture (e.g. motherhood, housewifery etc.). They can provide a kind of counselling service which enables women to come to terms with the gap between their expectations of marriage and the day to day reality.

It is clear that in many ways these relationships indirectly support the existence of a patriarchal heterosexual world. On the other hand they reflect and reinforce women's individual identity and one which typically transcends the familial parameters. By their very existence, they undermine the idea that women can only find pleasure and identity in their relationships with men. They create arenas where:

"They [men] are strongly present, but more as objects, seen through the eyes of their wives, girl friends, and daughters than as solely in their own rights."

Gullestad, 1984 :46

It has been widely accepted that women's friendships in the 20th century have little impact in the public arena, just as they had in the 18th and 19th centuries . . . when:

"women lived within a world bounded by home, church and the institution of visiting - that endless tramping of women to each others' homes for social purposes."

Smith Rosenberg, 1975 : 10

Increasingly however (Woolf : 1993) it has been recognized that women do have power, as consumers, viewers etc. - power that they have been slow to recognize and to utilize on behalf of other women. Indeed, it has been shown that even in the 19th Century women, as members of the Female Moral Reform Society, organized themselves in an attempt to change values and behaviour within the society as a whole (Ryan, 1979 : 73).

A small number of theorists (such as e.g. Shlapentak and Zeitlin) have suggested that within particular cultures friendship has been differently valued. Thus it has been suggested that within societies where the state plays an important role, friendship has been particularly valued, as a site of resistance as it were :

"Friendship in contrast, [to the family does not perform such positive functions for the state, and soviet politicians and ideologues have never found grounds for the revision of their disguised enmity towards it." Shlapentok, 216

At an even more basic level however, it is clear that friendship as a cultural form varies between and within societies - the topic to which we next turn.

The variability of friendship as a cultural form

In Western Society we have become accustomed to think of friendship as a personal attachment with people who are not socially defined as kin. Wright (1978) has suggested that insofar as one has to identify a single characteristic of friendship, it is the extent to which it provides self affirmation i.e.

"Acting and reacting in ways that facilitate the subject's expression and recognition of his/her more important and highly valued self attributes." Wright 1978:201

It is perhaps not co-incidental that in a society where the self is increasingly seen as problematic, the most important characteristics of friendships will be the extent to which they provide ego support i.e the extent to which they are

"encouraging, supportive, non-threatening and in general capable of helping the subject maintain an impression of him/herself as a competent, worthwhile person."

Wright 1978:201

Typically, this has been construed in terms of the level of intimacy in the relationship - such intimacy being defined in terms of the level of confiding about personal potentially damaging topics. From the mid 1980s onwards, there was increasing recognition of the limitations of this kind of approach. Thus Cancian (1986) noted that it implicitly prioritized a feminized style of interacting. Intimacy for women typically involved admitting dependency, sharing problems and being emotionally vulnerable - a style which reflected and reinforced their disempowered situation. Indeed, Cancian noted that the only area of personal experience about which women confided about less than men was their victories and achievements (Cancian, 1986 : 701). Other work showed that men were equally capable of intimate confiding but that they preferred either to do it less often than women (Reis et al, 1985) or if they did do so, they preferred to confide in women than in men (Derlega et al, 1985). Thus, what seemed to be happening was that a style of relating which reflected and reinforced powerlessness, and which was peculiarly characteristic of women's relationships, was being seen as an indicator of a close, freely chosen , and highly desirable personal relationship.

The question of the kind of cultural context which encouraged this kind of orientation to friendship was however typically not discussed (Allan, 1989:103)

It has increasingly been recognized that the concept of friendship is highly culturally specific. Evidence has come from a variety of different sources. Thus, Hannan (1972 :176) noted that in Ireland almost paradoxically, the 'concept of friend as a freely chosen confidante and intimate to whom one is joined in mutual benevolence" was still used by the older people in rural areas to refer to kin. A similar pattern existed in France in the high medieval period in France (Contarello and Volpato, 1991). There was evidence that in a variety of different cultures (including e.g. in Chile) friendship as a cultural form transcended the private world (Adler Lomnitz, 1990):

"For most of history, indeed, friendship had nothing to do with affection. A friend used to be above all a protector or someone useful to whom one sold ones' allegiance in return for favours, for as long as the favours lasted."

Zeitlin, 1995 : 210

Indeed, Allan's own early work (1979) highlighted the fact that within Britain, concepts of friendship varied by social class, with working class respondents being much more likely than their middle class counterparts to define friendship in terms of kinship or work based relationships.

Since then however, the main focus of attention has continued to be on best or close friends (such closeness typically being defined in terms of intimacy) on the processes through which such relationships were established, the provisions of such relationships etc. Yet it is obvious that insofar as friendship is defined as a voluntary, freely chosen relationship which provides self-affirmation, it can potentially include a very wide range of relationships within our own culture which might well not be intimate. Thus, it has been widely recognized that men's relationships with other men within organizations play an important part in "opening opportunities for some and closing them for others" (Allan 1990 : 5). Such ties today are typically described in organizational literature as mentoring and are seen as providing self affirmation, and furthering the economic and political interests of the mentored. It seems plausible to suggest that insofar as confiding occurs in such relationships it is more likely to be about achievement than about failures and inadequacies. Similar sorts of relationships exist between men in different organizations. They can be seen as personal in the sense that the individuals involved react to each other as 'genuine, unique and irreplaceable individuals' (Wright, 1978:201). They do so however from a position (as male, manager etc.) which is part of their idea of themselves and which the other person validates and empowers.

In so far as friendship is seen as a relationship which validates a discredited or discreditable self, such relationships however equal, voluntarily chosen, personal or long-standing sit uneasily within a typical feminized concept of friendship (Cancian, 1986).

It is perhaps not coincidental that insofar as the self becomes increasingly problematic within a post modern world, then a feminized concept of friendship acquires currency. It is important to recognize however that although this concept has considerable importance at the level of identity, a social reality constructed by patriarchy and capitalism still exists. It may be a less convincing reality than heretofore, and one which is not sufficient at the level of identity or meaning. Nevertheless it provides structures through which resources are allocated and tasks undertaken. Thus, within this society men's relationships with other men provide them with access to economic and political resources and validate their identity as men. It has been increasingly recognized that relationships within these structures play an important part in maintaining these structures. Indeed men's relationships with each other have been seen by Hartmann as a key element in the definition of patriarchy, which she defines as:

"a set of social relationships between men, which have a material base, and which, though hierarchical, establish or create interdependence among men that enable them to dominate women"

Hartmann, 1981: 14

It seems unhelpful to exclude these relationships from a discussion of friendship - or indeed to view them as in some way an inferior kind of friendship relationship.

The typical tendency to underplay the importance of such relationships can be seen as reflecting a continued acceptance of the distinction between 'private' and 'public'. This distinction increasingly been seen as problematic implying as it does that the public 'area is peopled by disembodied automons' (see culture article) - rather than a flesh and blood gendered beings.

Friendship as a residual social structure in Western Society

It is one of the paradoxes of Western society that friendship relationships are not institutionalized. Momentary reflection highlights the fact that key areas of social life are typically institutionalized - whether these relate to paid employment, education, marriage, family life etc. Such institutions can be seen to have an important social significance. However, it is equally clear that friendship has an important social and personal reality - particularly for those such as the elderly (whose lives are outside the dominant institutional structures). It will be argued that such relationships are structured. Yet the creation of such relationships is very much a matter of personal initiative and social chance. Indeed, it has been noted that:

"The single most important question for research is to discover how 'relationships' are created, both subjectively and objectively, from strings of interaction, and from the changing beliefs that individuals form about them."

in Duck and Perlman; 1985:5

It has been recognized that individual women will vary in terms of the extent and nature of their needs for friendship (Duck, 1988) depending on life stage or other social or personal characteristics. Such individual variation is in a sense neither here nor there. Thus, for example, a society does not abandon structures to control sexuality or to educate people simply because, some people, at particular times have a desire for neither.

Within a capitalist society, the importance of relationships which appear to be unrelated to the cash nexus is inevitably questionable (Lynch, 1989; Allen, 1989). Within a patriarchal society, the importance of women's relationships with each other is also questionable. Thus it is not surprising that friendship is a residual social structure in Western Society, and that friendship between women in particular has been neglected and ignored, or at the very least taken for granted. Thus, it is not perhaps surprising that insofar as attention that has been paid to friendship it has occurred in the context of a discussion of social support (see O'Connor, 1992). Such a focus implicitly ignores issues related to the wider social and

cultural context. It thus leaves the whole status of friendship as a residual social structure unexamined.

Amongst women, the emergence of similar sorts of structures has arguably been inhibited by the ideological dominance of heterosexuality as an institution, although it has been argued that the women's movement has played an important part in rehabilitating such relationships (Rose and Rodes, 1987). Furthermore,

Socially constructed similarity within friendship relationships

Friendship, although it is typically not thought of as a social institution is socially patterned, and unlikely to occur between those who are socially perceived as different. Indeed, it has been suggested that

"Patterns of friendship interaction provide one social indicator of the character of the status system operating. In terms of mapping out who is accepted by whom as a social equal, who is seen as occupying a different position, of investigating how permeable or otherwise the boundaries drawn around social groups are, informal networks of sociability in general, and friendship choices in particular can provide information just as crucial as marriage selection, education background and the like."

Allan, 1990 :9

This reflects the fact that friendship is typically seen as a relationship between equal. Hence, the social identity of those who are chosen as friends reflects assumptions about status. In this context it is perhaps not surprising that, other than in adolescence and in the early 20s, friendships tend to be gender specific. Amongst women, they tend to be between those who are similar in social class, race, marital status, maternal status and participation in paid employment. In this sense, they can be seen as relationships which reflect and maintain these structural realities. However, since friendships are personal relationships chosen on the basis of shared interests, it is clear that there is some possibility for similarity to be socially constructed.

Thus for example if the relationship is mainly concerned with discussing issues related to motherhood and the care of children, then it is arguable that similarity in this area will be important. Similarly if interaction mainly revolves around shared interests (such as bridge) then it is arguable that similarity in this area is likely to be key. Thus, it is clear that similarity is socially constructed within particular contexts. By asking then about 'best friends' one is implicitly asking respondents to prioritize what are for them, the most important kinds of social similarity. Frequently, these people are the ones in whom they can confide about their marriage their children and with whom they can create a discourse which helps them to deal with the lack of validation and/or emotional support in these relationships and in the wider society.

It has been noted that this stress on similarity in close ties in particular situations is taken a stage further, insofar as one's 'best friends' are chosen from amongst kin relationships (O'Connor, 1992; Allen; Gouldner and Symonds Strong 1987). This pattern has been observed, as previously mentioned, within highly ascriptive societies (such as Ireland up to the early 1970s). It has also been observed in Britain by Allan (1989) amongst his working class respondents, and by O'Connor (1992) amongst some of her lower middle class respondents. It is arguable that amongst these respondents similarity of early experiences is seen as key. Thus, only kin can 'qualify' so to speak as socially similar. It is not clear to what extent amongst kin this early similarity can offset, current difference in social class marital status, maternal status, paid employment etc., although it is at least possible that it might do so.

Implicit in the notion of such similarity as a important element in friendship lies the idea that friendships are likely to be differentially available to women who are in some way 'out of synch' with the normal life style and/or with the wider social context (young widows; single women in their 40s and 50s etc.). A further implication of the stress on similarity as a basis for friendship, is that changes in key attributes (such as divorce, unemployment etc.) inevitably challenge the basis of the friendship (Allan and Adams). The implications of this is

that although true friendship is implicitly assumed to be long-standing and unaffected by such vicissitudes, those who experience such events may well be faced with the need to create new friendships.

"The burdens of the throw away, tear down, remodel, redecorate society are shouldered by them without much help from the social institutions which are slow to supply new forms of organized social life."

*Gouldner and Symonds Strong,
1989 : 153*

This social construction of similarity is one reflection of friendships as relationships of equality. A second reflection of this lies in the idea that friends are in some ways equal in status within the context of their interaction. It is arguable that this concept is far too simple. Thus for example Hochschild (1973) noted that amongst the elderly women she studied :

"There was a shared system of ranking according to which she who had good health won honour. She who lost the fewest loved ones through death won honour and she who was close to her children won honour. Those who fell short on any of these criteria were often referred to as 'poor dears'

Hochschild 1973:58

In a sense then, the stress on equality as a characteristic of friendship arguably tells us more about the hierarchical cultural context within which friendship. Relationships arise, than it does about the friendship relationship itself.

Forms of interaction within friendly relationships (broadly defined)

Although, as previously mentioned, what we think of as friendship relationships, we think of relationships which have a subjective reality, in the sense that they are close it seems useful to look at the various forms of sociability which can be identified within what one might broadly define as such relationships. The first of these can be described as 'sociability':

". . . in sociability talking is an end in itself; in purely sociable conversation the content is merely the indispensable carrier of the stimulation, which the lively exchange of talk as such unfolds . . . "

Simmel 1971:136

It is a playful form of sociation where

"the concrete motives bound up with life goals fall away"

Simmel, 1971 : 128

Within this social context the social characteristics of those involved are arguably only relevant insofar as they are important in generating a feeling of ease and security which allow playful sociation to emerge.

At the exact opposite extreme is interaction which is intimately related to 'the concrete motives bound up with life goals'. This kind of interaction is seen as facilitating access to key resources which are necessary for the performance of key roles, and/or for the attainment of key objectives. As noted by Allan (1990:5) studies of elites have adverted to the importance of friendship ties in influencing access to information, or to status maintaining or enhancing relationships. The same kinds of interaction has been adverted to by Kanter(1993) in the context of hierarchical organization. Within this context, who you have coffee or lunch with reflects and reinforces your place within the organization structure : with those who are upwardly mobile seeking to associate with higher status individuals so as to increase their own status within the organization.

This kind of interaction is frequently depicted as 'male', and is denigrated because of its lack of intimacy. It certainly assumes that positional and personal identity are fused - and so side-steps issues concerned with the disjunction between the 'public' and 'the private'. The other is valued for their unique contribution, but this is defined more in terms of pragmatic usefulness, rather than in terms of depth or the extent of intimate confiding in the interaction. Although it is typically not thought of as a 'female' type of interaction it has been documented amongst women within hierarchical work organizations although:

"There is a plethora of evidence, moreover that women are disadvantaged in male-dominated work organizations because of their lack of integration into powerful informal networks "

Gouldner and Symons Strong (1987:87) noted that business and professional women typically referred to the growth of respect and admiration rather than intimacy in their work based friendships and stressed that they rarely saw each other outside the work setting - leading her to conclude that :

"In a number of ways, achieving women were becoming more like men in their social relationships"

Gouldner and Symonds Strong, 1987:93

The third type of interaction involves intimate confiding. Amongst women this typically deals with revelations about the self which are discrediting, and about other aspects of the 'private' arena (such as e.g. marital problems, worries about children etc.). Numerous studies have explored the existence of such relationships amongst women (Oliker, 1989; Gullestat, 1984; O'Connor, 1992). They have implied that their particular importance to women partly reflects the position of women in society, and partly the fact that the activities which are particularly important to them (such as rearing children) are not part of the dominant discourse.

A fourth type of interaction is a kind of inarticulate solidarity, which is reflected in routinized activity. This differs from sociability in so far as solidarity and identity comes from being part of a particular 'scene'. Rubin (1985) suggests that this sort of solidarity can be reflected in

"the shared experience of maleness- of knowing its difference from femaleness and affirming those differences through an intuitive understanding of each other that needs no words"

Robin, 1985:69

This kind of sociation is stereotypically seen as reflecting and reinforcing a general bond between men - and as being characteristic of a traditional male pub culture. The image is one

almost silent men seated on bar stools, part of a tenuous but identity defining and undemanding group.

The fifth type of interaction includes a greater caring component, whether this is reflected in emotional concern or in more practical tending. This kind of sociation which is often thought of as peculiarly characteristic of kinship relationships, has also been documented amongst 'real' friends(see O'Connor, 1992). Jerrome (1990:57) suggested that those who provide extensive help and support are frequently seen as 'special' quasi kin - 'a true friend', 'like a sister to me'.

. However, it is not peculiar to them. Thus, Cavendish (1982) documented similar kinds of sociation amongst the assembly line workers she studied.

"The women helped each other 'on the line' when one of them was falling behind in her work; they took a concerned interest in the health and personal lives of their work mates, they helped newcomers with their work and introduced them to the other women"

Green, 1990:147

In a sense the creation and maintenance of friendships reflects the very real situational parameters of women's lives - the topic to which we turn in the next section.

"Friendships do not start until people do friendly things in friendly places : they are not created merely by friendly talk."

Duck, 1988: 56

Thus for example, in the case of the elderly we have seen the emergence of Day Care Centres one of whose purposes is simply to provide a public arena where people can meet, and where sociability and friendship relationships might emerge. The emergence of active retirement associations constituted a similar and more sophisticated sort of structure, generating as it

does, a variety of different types of activities for a specific age range, thereby creating a more differentiated context within which sociability and friendship may occur.

It is only as the State has come to recognize the part played by women in maintaining some kind of stability in working class communities that the idea of Drop - In Centres, Child and Family Centres etc. has acquired any support. However, funding for such venues continues to be resisted in many situations.

It is being increasingly recognized that the issue of women's own dependency needs is structurally unresolved in Western Society. Thus, although in Western Society, men are brought up to be independent and separate, there is the assumption that women will be available to meet their emotional needs, without them even having to be spelt out. On the other hand:

"Girls absorb early on that in the most profound sense they must rely on themselves, there is no-one to take care of them emotionally . . . They cannot assume - as does the man - that there will be someone for them to bring their emotional lives to"

Eichenbaum and Orbach, 1984:22

Insofar as women need such a relationship, then within Western Society it is up to them to create it for themselves. The importance of such relationships is heightened by the fact that many activities which are central to women's idea of themselves (e.g. childrearing) receive little or no validation within the dominant discourse. Similarly it has been suggested that there are inevitable tensions involved in maintaining heterosexual relationships within a context where they are not providing the expected emotional support (Hite, 1987). To a degree to which Western society has only begun to appreciate, these tasks have been performed by women's friendships. Ironically, such relationships have typically been viewed with considerable suspicion.

CREATING AND MAINTAINING RELATIONSHIPS

It is increasingly recognised that relationships are embedded in social life , in the sense that ,
"a major part of creating a relationship is the co-ordination of the social status of the too
included partners"

" Friendships do not start until people do friendly things in friendly places : they are
not created merely by friendly talk."

Duck , 1988 : 56

Implicit in this is the idea that the day to day rhythm of women's lives ; the type of areas in
which they meet others and the kinds of outwardness in which they are involved, as their
access to social resources such as time , money and personal space, as well as their experience
of social and geographical transistions and the correctedness of the networks into which they
are already connected

" ties of love and duty "

will all effect their ability to create and or maintain friendship relationships.

Paradoxically , despite the many constraints leaning on womens lives , they
typically do form such friendships. "Darrets
capacity to develop and maintain friendships of school , in the workplace , outside the school
gates and in any number of other uncompromising leisure venues where women meet
regularly has long been noted by observers. G reen et Al , 1990 : 143

It has been noted friendship becomes interwoven with such daily chores , anongst married
women for example conversations being interrupted to distract , soothe or reprimand children
; to prepare food , answer doors etc. Yet as noted by Duch (1988) very much less attention
has been paid to these processes than to those involved in eg joining romantic relationships.

It has been increasingly recognised that such friendships like all relationships need to be
maintained.Lynch (1989) has referred to this as " love labour" until compared recently as
Stacey (1981) noted ,

" people work"

was given little attention in the analysis of labour - another the tendency was to

" define human labour in terms of an industrial model which generally fails to take cognizance of non industrial human service work , unpaid domestic work and the solidary labour required to produce supportive and caring relationships."

Lynch , 1989 : 1

These relationships involved the supersitute of time effect and other resources - just as other work did.

It has also been increasingly recognised that part of the maintenance of friendship (like romantic relationships) involves the creation of noted Boxter (1987 : 278) has called " relationship symbols " .He has suggested that in the case of friendship such symbols are more likely to involve behaviourous , outputs and events rather than physical outputs . Implicit in

Boxter's work is the idea that nontinigid interaction with friends was not simply a way of embedding friendship within their day to day life , but that it is also a way of signalling to themselves and others reality as a

"unit"

(Cambell & Lesser , 1985)

I ndeed , Cheol (1987) & Lynch (1989) have noted that this bird of "love labour " is typically carried out by women in the nuclear wider friendship areas .The work involved includes visiting, writing letters , answering phone calls , sending presentsand cards , organizing Christmas , hoildays etc (Cheol , 1987 : 155)

Cheol has also noted that in capitalist society , the social construction of these ties is tied up with the money economy.Buying gifts requires money , as does participation in a variety of interaction venues (even having people in for coffee in your own home requires some financial expenditure) .In this context we would suggest that participation in paid employment would increase womens opportunities as regards having friendships , while today increase in access to personal spending money from their own ways might be suspected to increase their sense of entitlement to such leisure.(Green et Al , 1990 : 96) On the other

hand however , where such areas do not provide access to potential friends they obviously potentially reduce the time and energy to form friendships in other contexts.

Indeed it has been noted that the very existence and reality of friendship is increasingly within Capitalist societies where, at one level the reality is the pursuit of power and profit.

" Beyond providing the bards of psychological theory , womens close friendships forge, subcharge and preserve moral values that contrast astranged, impressed ,unnameful and untimidated valued in the dominant " culture"

(Oliker , 1989 : 165)

At an equally fundamental level it has been noted that friendships between women occur within a context where husband- wife is central.

" the husband comes first , then the friends .This is symbolised by always finishing coffee "patches in due time to tidy up the house and fix midday {dinner} before he is home"

(Gullstad ,1984 : 244)

Gullstad has noted that potential tension between friendship and spouse ties are reduced by giving priority to the husband , with visits to friends occurring while he is at work.Oliker has also noted that the participation of their family ties and responsibilities meant that women avoided

" entering into the exchange of resources over which they did not have sole juristiction .These included family time , family territory and money "
(Oliker , 1989 : 117)

Such responsibilities often not only include the the care of husband and children but elderly parents and other relatives etc.(Allow and Adams,1989) .Thus almost paradoxically Oliker noted that what she called

" Women's culture of friendship "

(Oliker ,1989 : 100)

encouraged industrial ties but within the context of limited family responsibilities Yet, women's ability to move outside this would be frequently limited .Thus, for example a variety of studies have been shown that husbands typically have greater access to personal

spending money more than wives.(see Hollow ,1989; Rottman , 1994) and they typically have more free time.(Green et Al , 1990) Culturally their access to a participation in non - home based areas for sociale interaction (eg the pub) tends to be seen as more acceptable , all other such attitudes are changing.

Participation in such arenas requires disposable income which can be legitamenly spent on personal pleasure.The existance of such patterns of integrationalso reflects newforces a concept of personhood which transends the typical parameters of marriage , motherhood, home and family.It has also been noted that in eg the Sheffald study in the majority of couples ; the men felt threatned by the " women's nights out " which they saw as providing opportunities for contact with other men (Freer et Al , 1991: 126). Womens access to these opportunities were still bounded in subtle negotiating tactics,going out for a " a laugh with the girls was sceen as a leisure highlight particuluary if it included evening drinks in the pub and ending up in a Night Club." (Green et Al , 1990: 24)Green et Al (1990:35) have also noticed that women's attitudes - including their friendships - outside the home " are often policied" by the actions of men , or by womens own superstitions , such as their fear of male violence : such fears can affect women's willingness to do a variety of activities including walking in the countryside during the day; going out together in the evening etc . In Ireland , we have seen our fears heightened by a series of murders of women, whose activities were subsequently depicted as " inviting trouble " (eg.driving a car home at night ; travelling alone in a Taxi / bus late at night : O' Connor 1995.Such carryon implicity invokes notices of femininity " reputation " which suggests the appropiatness of women being in areas where they are not being protected by men.Indeed Raymard has suggested that the privacy accorded to Hetrosexual ties means that there is a world view

" Hetro- reality , the world view that woman exists always in relation to man , has consistantly percieved women together as women alone "

(Raymard , 1996 : 3)

Yet despite such structural situational and cultural constraints it has been consistently shown that women overwhelmingly do create and maintain friendship ties .The kinds of relationships which they describe as friendships vary ; the context of quality of these relationships vary, as they are embedded in social networks and their dyadic group ? .

"Nevertheless the rise of what appears to be a growing consciousness of a need to develop and maintain a circle of friends deserves explanation . It seems to come best in part from the increasingly problematic world riddle.Class women - a world that is undergoing rapid and confusing change,"

(Gouldner & synas strag , 1987 : 150)

Equally of course , although women share many similar experiences arising from their position within a natural Capitalist society which which preconcieves hetrossexual relationships, sees caring as an important element in femininity etc , their life styles may differ in many ways.For example it was noted (Hurt & Sutenbee , 1987 : 287) that the middle class women had the use of cars during the day, and that they were less likely to have kinship ties which restricted going outwards so that they were freer during the day.Women also vary in terms of the ? and nature of their responsibilities for housework and childcare and in their ability to purchase services to undertake these tasks , and ? their unwillingness to participate in these tasks .

Womens situations are also equally affected by their husband' s attitudes to their wives friendships , and the extent to which such are in a position to control their behaviour eg the extent to which they are physically present in the home because of unemployment ,(Allan, 1989 ; McKee & Bell , 1986) .We are able to impose controls on these friendships because of overall controlling nature of the premarital relationship.Oiker's (1989) showed that two thirds of the women felt that a spouse had at the same time disapproved of a friendship - with the single , divorced bad housekeepereers being most likely to evoke disapproval , because they were seen as in some way

" morally suspect , a bad influence or in some way more threatning to him or the marriage "

(Oliker , 1989 : 103)

Similary , women will vary in the extent that of their social and geographical nobility, and in the sheer number and scheduling of their life transistions.They will also vary in the kinds of

networks in which they are embedded., and in the opportunities these provide as regards facilitating - giving access to potential friends in the rest of such life transitions. Thus it has been noted that eg small dense networks tend to provide a restricted range of options while in larger looser networks , there is a greater possibility of meeting similar others.(Milardo , 1980).

Women will also differ in terms of the kind of friendship structure they create and /or maintain

(ie dyadic or group based)and in the extent to which they do / do not favour the superimposition of such ties or kinship ties.

Some of these characteristics will affect their affluence and or educational level (eg the correctness of their networks : (Willmott , 1987 : 76)