IN SEARCH OF FRIENDSHIP: AN EXPLORATORY ANALYSIS IN ‘MIDDLE-CLASS’ CULTURE

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Although social anthropologists themselves live lives in which friendship is probably just as important as kinship, and a good deal more problematic to handle, in our professional writings we dwell at length upon kinship and have much less to say about friendship. I venture upon this article with a large measure of disbelief at anthropologists’ efforts to uncover friendship. The meagre attention it has received seems to be a function of the formal traditions of our discipline, as much as anything else. For example, where we observe behaviour in the field between persons who are known to us to be cousins, we are very likely to analyse this behaviour in our writings as ‘cousin behaviour’; but it may be no such thing; rather, it may be behaviour between friends. Significantly, socio-anthropological studies undertaken by someone whose formal training was not within the discipline (e.g. Laurence Wylie’s (1957) monograph on the Vaucluse) and autobiographies by the anthropologists’ ‘primitives’ themselves (e.g. Baba of Karo recorded by Mrs Mary Smith (1964)) frequently devote a good deal of attention to friendship, both as an intrinsic value of human life and as one woven into the fabric of kinship, economics and politics.

However, I also believe that there are no short cuts in the comparative sociology of friendship. To begin with, we have to think hard about what we mean by the word ‘friendship’ when we use it; as Pitt-Rivers remarks in another connexion ‘let us examine the objective status of the terms in which the quality of interpersonal relations are described’ (1961: 181). Secondly, the tradition of structural analysis in our discipline is surely indispensable when trying to compare the nature and function of friendship with those of other interpersonal relations to which it is close in one way or another. These are the two objectives of this article. Their explication leaves space for only a preliminary and partial treatment of cross-cultural differences in friendship; instead, the argument proceeds to certain conclusions based on a notion of friendship in our own Western, middle-class culture.

A critical approach

Some anthropologists—e.g. Eisenstadt (1956) and Pitt-Rivers (1968a)—sometimes formally refer to friendship in the terms of Parsonian sociology. In these terms, friendship is, most importantly, particularistic, affectively toned and diffuse—rather than universalistic, affectively neutral and specific (Parsons & Shils 1951). It is also regarded as other-oriented rather than self-oriented, though I think this may be questioned as being misleading (see below). However, the Parsonian framework has not been developed to much effect in the study of friendship,
whether by Parsons and his associates or by anthropologists, and we are left at present with a general taxonomy and the question of what to do with it. One wonders whether the Parsonian framework is not overgeneralised for the task of distinguishing the properties of friendship, e.g. by contrast to those of kinship.

Wolf has recently approached the subject in the belief that ‘If we are to make headway in a sociological analysis of the friendship ties, we must . . . distinguish two kinds of friendship. I shall call the first expressive or emotional friendship, the second instrumental friendship’ (1966: 10, my emphasis). I hesitate to suppose that much light can be shed through this distinction: it is too broad and too descriptive, and it may also be spurious. For is not all friendship ultimately instrumental? And will there not be an expressive or emotional element in a relationship that is recognised as friendship though labelled as ‘instrumental friendship’? The suggestion that this is an either/or matter is unconvincing and reminiscent of what we now recognise to be the flaw in Ruth Benedict’s (1935) treatment of Apollonian/Dionysian configurations.

More common, in the literature, are ethnographical accounts in which friendship may even be the centrepiece without it being asked 1) what is meant by friendship (by the anthropologist, and by the people he is describing); or 2) what is its content; or even 3) who are friends.¹ It is helpful to consider these questions before coming to the more formidable task of placing them in a theoretical relationship to each other.

*What is meant by friendship?* The answer really depends on one being able to clear up satisfactorily a number of ‘what do you mean by’ queries; certainly the question is often lost at this level. Some assumptions seem unavoidable and perhaps justifiable at the outset, and one of mine is that certain human needs of an affective kind are universal and in our own society are taken care of by friendship, either alone or in conjunction with other institutions. However, our kind of friendship is different from bond-friendship among the Hausa, for example, and both are different from the ‘buddy’ relationship in parts of rural Newfoundland. These and other distinctions of the same type must not be lost from sight when we speak about ‘friendship’. Further, we should notice when we are talking about friendship, whether it is as a cultural artefact and a social arrangement, or as a set of universal needs. Confusion here would seriously impede the effort to distinguish between friendship and those other social relationships which, in all cultures, also serve, at least in part, these same needs.

Any initial assumption about its own universality would unnecessarily burden the approach to the subject of friendship. In my view friendship, expressed teleologically for the moment, is a sociological and cultural device in respect of which there exist, besides different versions, entirely different alternatives. This point may be more readily taken through reference to the operational relationship between linearity, in kinship studies, and the universal concept of kinship itself. As with linearity so with friendship, we should be concerned with its place within the realm of the phenomenologically larger order of things to which it belongs. In the case of friendship this realm is that of interpersonal relations as a whole.
The affective content. Its affective nature is, all agree, one of the diagnostica of friendship; yet to say as much is to say very little except to present ourselves with a number of questions about affective relationships. Pitt-Rivers said some time ago now, ‘the criterion which distinguishes true from false friendship flees from the anthropologist into the realms of motive’ (1963: 139). Is it possible to carry the pursuit into this realm? What may we say about the motives of this affective relationship?

Here the emphasis in anthropological writings seems to be on friendship as the act of professing the outstretched hand; I suggest that it may be useful to look also at the matter the other way round, namely, as the act of finding a hand which will clasp one’s own. I mean that the basic ‘motive’, or rather the affective meaning and value, of friendship is the sense of worth (Briggs, personal communication) it imparts to the person enjoying it. If I dared spell this out further, I would say that what is ‘special’ about the affective aspect of friendship is that the friend is someone who understands one, who can explain one to oneself; alternatively, a person is able to see himself in his friend.

This point of view casts doubt upon the utility of characterising friendship as other- rather than self-oriented (Parsons & Shils 1951); indeed, the notion of ‘self-regarding sentiment’ (Pitt-Rivers 1968b: 503) is expressive, in part, of what I have just said of friendship. However, perhaps the affective nature of friendship is best characterised in sociological language that places it outside the dichotomy of other- or self-oriented relationships. In his Reith Lectures, Leach remarks: ‘In a formal sense a social relationship is the link between a pair of opposed roles,’ and he offers the examples of father/son, husband/wife, doctor/patient, employer/employee (1968: 57). However, friendship belongs to a class of relationships of which this is not true, but the relationship is rather between persons paired in the same role (i.e. friend/friend). Other instances—derived from the examples of opposed roles offered by Leach—may include relations between parents, between married persons of the same sex, between patients of the same doctor, between employees of the same employer, etc. These are structurally relatively unencumbered relationships, a fact which is often reflected in their affective content, as is certainly the case with friendship.  

Important characteristics of friendship arising from this affective content are those having to do with its fulfilment, and the nature of exchanges that take place within it. I shall attempt to show—because friendship makes mutual demands of intimacy and confidence and because the highest realisation of these values occurs in a relationship that is exclusive to the selected few—how its fulfilment is difficult to attain and to maintain, and difficult to perceive from outside the relationship.

Who are friends? The anthropologist has to explain the conditions—indeed, he may first have to discover them—under which such a strong affective bond is socially permissible and, secondarily, the conditions under which it is likely to be a lasting one. Explanations have hitherto tended to oversimplify matters. One that is sometimes given runs like this: human beings need a flow of affective exchanges with each other; in societies where kinship roles are strong and unambiguous, this affective exchange is normally built into theascriptive kinship system; in societies
where kinship roles are ambiguous and optative, however, the affective exchange takes place in the voluntary and revocable relations of friendship. In other words, there are kinship-oriented vs. friendship-oriented societies. This view is too simplistic, and at the root of it is a misconception about kinship behaviour. It is precisely on account of the constraints placed between kinsmen where the kin roles are strong and unambiguous that one may have to move outside the sphere of kinship proper, to find 'brotherly love'—and friendship (Burridge 1957; Schwimmer n.d.). What Pitt-Rivers says of ritual kinship is also true of friendship in many situations: as it 'avoids being implicated in the internal dissensions of the kinship structure, for it involves no structural issues, ... it is what cognatic kinship aspires to, but cannot, be' (1968a: 412, author's emphasis).

Another matter is that the way may be open for kinsmen to choose friends from among themselves, through including a voluntary role within—and in large measure independent of—their ascribed relationship as kinsmen. But in what conditions is this likely to occur, and—who are friends? Once this question is before us, there are a number of others that need answers; this is so not simply because friendship has a high affective charge but also because it is, in varying degrees, a voluntary and a personal relationship as well.

What are the principles by which persons select and reject each other as friends? What knowledge is there in a community of the friendships there? Which kinds of persons are permitted, in different societies, to enjoy a relationship of their own choosing and making? Put in another way: to which already existing (and approved) relationships between two persons is it permissible to add friendship? For instance, is friendship ever recognised in the father/son relationship? Or with a mother-in-law? Alternatively, which relationships are precluded between two persons on account of their existing friendship?

The importance of these questions may best be brought home through a reference to 'joking' and other avoidance relationships. These conventions of 'avoidance' are constructed to avoid structural and psychological aspects of serious role conflicts (cf. Radcliffe-Brown 1952). This is done even though there may be a strong element of ascription concerning, e.g. who becomes whose son-in-law, and even though there are other ascriptions placed upon the son-in-law relationship. In this perspective, it would be amazing were friendship always able to slip by, as it were, unfettered. It is a relationship in which strong affective bonds may be established that could well embarrass, to the point of challenging (and sometimes do so), sets of rights and obligations that are developmentally prior to such a friendship and are conceived as indispensable to the proper functioning of the society. Stated in this way, friendship is the polar opposite of the joking relationship. However, is friendship, in fact, left 'unfettered'? I believe it may be shown that friendship is a 'luxury' that cannot be afforded (either by the individual or his group) in many structural situations. The structure of our own society is peculiar in the relative permissiveness it affords in this respect.

I will now explore rather more systematically some of the issues raised so far. In doing so, it is necessary, heuristically, to posit some firm notion of what friendship is—its cultural complexity and variations notwithstanding. And for reasons that I must next make clear, I will use a notion of friendship that is abstracted from observation of our own society.
Friendship as an interpersonal relationship in middle-class culture

Methodology. In a theoretical essay on friendship and ritualised personal relations, Eisenstadt (1956: 90) commented:

The various ethnographical papers ... are numerous, but usually contain very little comparative analysis. While many of these analyses show much insight, it is nevertheless my feeling that most of them do not analyse in a systematic enough way the conditions in which these types of relations exist. Nor do they recognize sufficiently—if at all—some of the basic characteristics and conditions which are common to most of these phenomena.

The present situation is much as Eisenstadt portrayed it in 1956. It is therefore desirable to disregard initially the factor of cultural uniqueness—of the different forms friendship takes in different cultures—in favour of an effort to see which few factors have generative primacy in the formation of friendship compared to other interpersonal relationships in a given cultural framework (cf. Barth 1966a).

This task is attempted here in two stages. Firstly, two universal diacritics of interpersonal relationships for which generative primacy may be claimed are posited and described. These are rules of relevancy and standards of equivalency; characteristics of what we identify as the relationship of friendship are derived from them. Secondly, other kinds of interpersonal relationships occurring in the same broad cultural framework are examined in the same way in order that we may verify the distinctions claimed for friendship.

I will work, as suggested, with an abstraction of friendship based on our own Western, middle-class, cultural framework. One reason for this choice is that this kind of friendship has received all too little attention in anthropological discussions of friendship; these are notable for beginning and ending with, let us say, tribal bond-friendship or the Mesoamerican bond of compadrazgo. Another reason is that our kind of friendship is, or so I will argue, the one that exists in greatest independence of kinship and other institutional arrangements (and takes care of our affective needs tolerably well). This makes it a felicitous choice with which to work, initially, on the problems of the nature and maintenance of friendship. A difficulty in the anthropological approach to friendship stems from the fact that the term ‘friendship’ is drawn from the stock of everyday words in our own culture, and is explained by other everyday terms whose exact meanings are not necessarily agreed upon. The choice of our own Western culture as the setting of a discussion of the meaning of friendship, means that at least semantic ambiguities are more likely to be exposed to view, and perhaps some of them eliminated.

One problem that arises concerns the delineation of social relationships in terms of the bounds of their permitted content and conduct. Structural anthropologists have demonstrated, by means of the concept of status, that relationships may be defined through reference to the jural constraints placed upon them. The procedure is not adequate by itself, however, mainly for the reason that it produces a definition of a relationship with unchanging boundaries. It is this kind of inadequacy that Goffman’s (1959) work on ‘impression-management’ of statuses exposes. The present plea is that more attention be paid to the interrelational of the two approaches. When Fortes (1953), for example, speaks of ‘jural’ constraints he is concerned with rights by charter (corporate structure); when Goffman speaks of the ‘definition of the situation’, he is concerned with rights or advantages that are acquired by strategy, and for this reason they will be changing rights. These are cognate matters—
indeed, they are complementary (cf. Barth 1966a; 1966b). Yet they are alienated in some analyses (cf. Gluckman 1968). I believe it is only through their combined use that one may resolve the problem of how a particular relationship is bounded—of its location in a social system and the operational constraints or opportunities placed upon it or afforded to it.

Specifically, I think this means recognising interpersonal relations (which is really as much a field of enquiry for Fortes as for Goffman) as comprising a social infra-structure to the corporate structure delineated by Fortes and others. The crucial questions concern the margins that are available to persons for strategic dispositions, 1) within the framework of the corporate structure, and 2) within that of the infra-structure itself. As suggested already (p. 508), friendship is a relationship whose meaning can only be grasped by answering these kinds of questions.

Rules of relevancy. The rules of relevancy are offered as a necessary mediating notion between the ‘by charter’ and ‘by strategy’, and the ‘group-centric’ and ‘ego-centric’ (cf. Boissevain 1968) views of the bounds of human relationships. Even in the case of relationships that are generated by the corporate structure, such as military relationships, the operational boundaries are open to contextual adjustments. Where relationships are founded less upon connexion with the corporate structure and more on the strategic dispositions of the persons, e.g. some partnerships, acquaintanceships, and—above all—friendships, their boundaries may be determined almost wholly contextually. It is the contextual definition of boundaries that may give rise to what one may term a discourse (within the culture) concerning the rules of relevancy; that is to say, about what is permissible and/or desirable in the relationship.

One striking example is the rigorous and explicit attention paid to what is permissible—in content and conduct—in the English court of law procedure, where the prosecuting and defending barristers make their pleas and raise their ‘objections’ with the presiding judge. What the judge is adjudicating in this phase of a court case are, indeed, the rules of relevancy. In quite another cultural setting, there is Firth’s (1963) description of the elaborate confrontation between a Tikopia chief and Tikopia of lower echelons; this shows how the principles by which power is exercised in Tikopia cannot be inferred from the statuses of the persons alone, i.e. from the invariable boundaries of the ‘charter’.

Friendship, in this connexion, is remarkable in two respects. Firstly, its rules of relevancy may be largely hidden from view to all outside the relationship, and from the standpoint of society this can be tantamount to an absence of such rules. Secondly, friendship does not have rules of relevancy imposed upon it from outside. Both characteristics spring from the intimate and confidential nature of friendship. This means that a great deal of independence is provided from the basic cluster of statuses otherwise attached to persons. It is, for example, not a work relationship, and society does not recognise its dependence upon the existence of personal friendships for its smooth functioning (which is not to say that such dependence does not exist). As friends, persons are not subordinates or superordinates; nor is it much of an over-statement to say that friends may do anything and behave in any way that they agree upon, within psychological and legal
restrictions. This may mean that behaviour between friends reflects—is even based on—idiosyncratic evaluations of various statuses and roles in society at large. These evaluations need not at all accord with those expressed in the public culture (cf. Szweid 1966) or corporate structure. For example, a friendship between two young army officers may arise out of the evaluation that they both have of the officer status as providing the occasion for a fuller social life, rather than the exercise of discipline, power or valour.

It is to be emphasised that alongside unusual ‘closure’ of the relationship in regard to the world outside, there exists unusual ‘openness’ between friends themselves. Borrowing from Simmel (1950: 321), we may say that between friends, ‘what is not concealed may be known’, and very little is concealed; whereas in relationships that are less than friendship, ‘what is not revealed must not be known’, and this may be a great deal. The rules of relevancy of friendship, then, refer principally to the internal arrangement of the relationship rather than to rules of impression-management for the world outside; and within the relationship the rules refer less to content and more to conduct. Above all else, the rules of relevancy in friendship relate to the fact that friends are closely concerned with the evaluation each places on the other. Ideally, a friend is more concerned about this than he is, for example, about the evaluation other people make of his friends. This means that friendship is unusual also in its relative disregard of the social costs it may incur; compare the careful way this same matter is handled in some professional relations in our society. (It is perhaps in knowledge of this temerity, or foolhardiness, that we at times attempt to protect those near to us by moralising to them, ‘Remember!—A person is judged by the friends he keeps.’)

The importance, to friends, of the evaluation each places on the other draws attention to a process of ‘bonding’ as an element of friendship in our society. For it is true that one is judged, in many ways, by the kind of friends one has. This view recognises as a fact that friends, at least, are persons of one’s own choosing; that they are one’s own responsibility, and eventually become a part of one’s social person. It is the bond which friends desire to exist between them—perhaps jealously and anxiously desire—that is itself the major value in friendship. This bond is being renewed or reaffirmed, or rejected, in all the exchanges within a friendship. But how may we measure this?

Standards of equivalency. All interpersonal relationships necessarily include exchanges between the parties; the nature of the exchanges varies and its description, in each case, tells one much about the nature of the relationship.

That friendship is based upon equivalency—though perhaps mutuality is the better word—should not be lost from sight. Our difficulty arises from the fact that the ‘balance of reciprocal behaviour’ which Pitt-Rivers (1968a: 412) attributes to friendship is usually not discernible, least of all to someone outside a friendship and perhaps not even to the friends themselves. It is, in part, an act of faith for the friends; for the observer it is largely a supposition, in the same way as we suppose there to have been an absence of balance in instances where friendships break up. But this may be all too flimsy, as well as hazy. We recognise that a person may break his friendship despite apparent reciprocity, and we know that a friend may be valued as one, although he does not appear to reciprocate favours. How often
do we say, ‘... Can’t think why they’re friends!’ or ‘... Can’t think what X sees in Y!’? I think the pertinent point here is that one should not try to impose upon an analysis of friendship ideas from economic anthropology about reciprocity. This is because the equivalency may be unique in each instance. In particular, it may be independent of institutionalised modes of equivalency (e.g. money or exchange of socio-economic or domestic services) and for this reason may not be recognised by other persons in the community.

Friendship is, perhaps, a pure instance of what Barth calls a ‘relationship of incorporation’ where a high compatibility of assets promotes a common value commitment, so that ‘a value optimum is sought [by all] for the sum of partners’ (1966a: 4). (In the case of friendship the assets are quite likely to be intangibles and, at all events, not readily recognisable to the outside world.) This being so, is friendship bereft of bargaining processes? This cannot be so; but there do appear to be important alterations in the structure and function of the ordinary ‘bargain’. In other interpersonal relations (see below) the principle of the bargain is ‘to each what he wants, in proportion to what he can give’; and a ‘good’ bargain for a person is one in which the value of what he receives is greater, for him, than that which he gives (cf. ‘transaction’, Barth 1966a). This notion of bargain also rests upon the assumption that the needs and values of A are not the same as B’s, but those of both may be forwarded in a complementary relationship. This may look like friendship, especially in regard to complementarity of needs, and it is frequently reduced to this; yet friendship may be distinguished conceptually. As suggested earlier, it is not a relationship that links opposed roles. Expressed as a bargain, A, in his concern with his own side of a bargain with B, is, in friendship, also concerned with B’s, and vice versa.6

Yet perhaps the nature of the exchange and fellowship in friendship is presented with most perspicacity by the psychiatrist R. D. Laing, where he is speaking of the synthesis occurring in an ‘us’ group (or a ‘nexus’):

... [its] unification is achieved through the reciprocal interiorization by each of each other, in which neither a ‘common object’ nor organizational or institutional structures etc. have a primary function as a kind of group ‘cement’ ... (Laing 1968: 72).

To this one may add that friendships are broken from inside the relationship, not from outside it. Further, any attempt by friends to make an explicit statement of what their friendship should be (in order to save it) will probably only hasten its demise. Significantly, this is less true of spouses inasmuch as their relationship is always, in some measure, based upon institutional modes of equivalency, and also because their relationship with each other obligates both of them to other people as well.

Friendship as a personal and private relationship. Wherever it is reported, friendship is considered to be a personal relationship. (Cf. the Parsonsian characterisation of friendship as a ‘particularistic’ relationship.) Friendship in our kind of society, however, is remarkable, in the comparative view, as a personal and private relationship. This is implicit in the descriptions I gave of the rules of relevancy and standards of equivalency. Let us look at the terms ‘personal’ and ‘private’ and at their respective opposites, ‘group’ and ‘public’.

First of all, we are not concerned here with the purely affective sense of personal
as ‘warm’ and the opposite of ‘impersonal’, but with its sociological dimension. Here, the opposite of a personal relationship is a group relationship (cf. the Parsonian ‘universalistic’). The probability of a high affective content in a personal relationship is apparent; this feature, however, is not exclusive to it and may be present in group relations.

A personal relationship is between particular individuals. A group relationship is between mutually substitutable persons, as members of a group. It is in a personal relationship that a man ‘... defines his relationship with another on the basis of the experience he has had with him’ (Chiaramonte in press b) and where ‘... a judgement is made at each point a man shares an experience with another’ (Chiaramonte in press a).

On the basis of this fundamental distinction between personal and group relations, one may be able to point to cultures where the elements of a personal relationship are so weak that there is nothing approaching our kind of friendship (cf. Eisenstadt 1956; Cohen 1961). The distinction is, of course, the kind I spoke of earlier as being based upon the ‘jural’ or ‘by charter’ view of relationships; but by itself, it is too crude. Also necessary is a contextual and ‘by strategy’ distinction which is found in the polar terms ‘private’ and ‘public’. This will help to refine the meaning of friendship in our culture, particularly through reference to relationships in yet other cultures which, while they are personal and recognisable in many respects as friendship, are different from our kind of friendship (cf. Eisenstadt 1956; Cohen 1961). They are different because they lack the attribute of privacy.

In our culture, privacy is widely recognised as the prerogative particularly of personal relationships. Bates defines privacy as ‘... a person’s feeling that others should be excluded from something which is of concern to him, and also a recognition that others have a right to do this’ (1964: 429). Following Simmel again (1950: 369), one may say it is in a private relationship that everybody is excluded who is not explicitly included (contra the inclusion of everybody who is not explicitly excluded). Privacy, in this sense, is a device used in group relations as well. However, it is quite clear that where used in personal relations it enhances and protects the attributes of a personal relationship: without this protection a personal relationship may not, after all, be able to escape the sanction of third parties or the group.

Privacy in a personal relationship, then, means that the relationship may be established and maintained independent of reference to the various group-derived statuses of the individuals. It also means that particular individuals may choose whether or not they will communicate to others the content and norms of conduct of the relations between them. In short, the hallmark of a personal/privacy relationship is the great measure of autonomy afforded to a person, both in the way he handles the relationship and in his original decision to make the relationship and in any decision to break it.

Now it is precisely this kind of relationship that is a sociological ‘luxury’ that cannot be afforded in many other cultures (p. 508). This is the case with many bond relationships, labelled ethnographically as ‘bond friendship’. Relations between Baba of Karo and her bond friends were to a large extent routinised and open to social surveynance (Smith 1964). Wherever loyalties to kin are afforded primacy over those of all other relationships, privacy between non-kin is likely to be
disallowed or, at least, disapproved of. This is shown in Burridge’s (1957) description of friendship among the Tangu of New Guinea. In all of these situations (and there are many) public performance, as well as personal rights, appears to be a characteristic of ‘friendship’. Whereas privacy enhances personal rights, these may exist only in attenuated form where the relationship is conducted in public. Consider here the restrictions put upon Baba in her choice of, and conduct with, bond friends (Smith 1964; cf. the sociological thesis in Eisenstadt 1956).

The contrast between personal and private contra personal and public situations has various other implications which we may look at briefly in order to summarise and clarify further the nature of friendship in our culture. Friendship is characterised in the literature as voluntary or outside the world of ascription; but this is most true—or only true—where it is a personal and private relationship. One invariably talks of friendship as being an institution. Inasmuch as friendship is recognised as a social relationship, it is an institution in the limited and rather loose sense of bestowal of recognition; and this is commonly the extent of its institutionalisation in our culture, where it amounts to a kind of institutionalised non-institution.

The possibility that is present in a personal/private friendship for communication: closure from the group, deserves further emphasis. It is in this sense that I suggest we may regard friendship in our society as a terminal relationship. By this I mean that where it is the will of the friends, the content or conduct of a friendship may not be carried into social interaction with other persons; it stays inside the relationship which generated it. This is what is meant by an intimacy that enjoins confidentiality. One may contrast here the broker role and its use of intimacy; its modus operandi is the circulation and ‘processing’ of information from one social interaction, or one status set, to another. The kind of terminality found in friendship arises out of the subjective evaluation of a relationship with another person as unique, as well as exclusive; and the maintenance of this evaluation independent of any group. Here friendship is similar to the relationship between lovers, and both are contrasted with that between spouses. In the latter, the exclusiveness of the relationship is juraly confirmed in the bestowal of in rem rights and obligations (as well as others of the in personam kind: cf. Radcliffe-Brown 1952); and as these are the same in all instances, the individual relationship is not unique. In the former, however, the ‘uniqueness’ that is added to the exclusiveness of the relationships means, in effect, that they are beyond jural reach. That friendship, nevertheless, may be nurtured voluntarily within the formal constraints of a spouse relationship is a matter considered in the next part of this article.

In summary, the making and breaking of friendships in our society is largely a matter of personal choice that is beyond social control. Further, the content of a friendship cannot be at all accurately determined from a position outside it, while friends themselves are unlikely to be able to predict the course that their friendship will take, or its lease of life. It is also a relationship of emphatic confidence. Here we have three characteristics of true friendship in our culture: autonomy (as opposed to ascription), unpredictability (as opposed to routinisation) and terminality (as opposed to open-endedness). Singly, they appear in relationships other than friendships; but is is only here and in the few other personal/private relationships that they appear in combination. This is especially remarkable when one recalls that friendship exists alongside other rudimentary relationships that are all carefully
regulated; and that friends are chosen from among persons who are also kin, neighbours, or business associates of oneself or of yet other people.

**Relationships in middle-class culture that are less than friendship**

By using the notions of rules of relevancy and standards of equivalency, I have suggested the unique qualities of friendship in our own middle-class cultural framework as a personal and private relationship. The distinctions that have been claimed for it may now be validated from a similar examination of other interpersonal relationships in this culture. Besides making the formal distinctions with friendship, I attempt here to suggest the circumstances in which some of these other relationships absorb and include a friendship role.

**Acquaintanceship.** Acquaintanceship is, ordinarily, not a relationship of confidence or intimacy, and therefore not a terminal one. Indeed, a great deal of information is trafficked, loosely and widely and from person to person, between those who recognise each other as ‘acquaintances’. The code of conduct of acquaintanceship may be little elaborated and impart a ‘surface’ character to this relationship. However, much of what appears to be superficial about the relationship may arise out of structural constraints. Acquaintanceship may be an implication of persons being neighbours; and this kind of association carries a front of congeniality which may either be mandatory or a sensible precaution taken by many. Goffman makes the same point; acquaintanceship is one of the ‘institutions that pertain specifically to the privilege and duty of participating in face engagements ... the rights of social recognition form the principal substance of the relationship’ (1966: 112, 113).

Acquaintanceship has a structure that not only stops short of friendship (Simmel 1950: 320) but is also opposed to it in several respects; and acquaintances cannot, therefore, also be friends (as can, e.g. spouses). Indeed, an important aspect of acquaintanceship may be phrased as the problem of controlling and curbing approaches to intimacy. An acquaintance—commonly for reasons of occupational competition and of exclusive loyalties to other persons—may impart little information about himself. But there are always other people who have a relationship closer than acquaintanceship with one’s acquaintances. One may, oneself, have a closer relationship with some of these other persons and so learn from them a great deal about one’s acquaintances. Thus a feature of acquaintanceship is its mediation by other relationships that are outside it. It is here in particular that it is structured in the diametrically opposite way to friendship which, as I have said (p. 511), is unusual in 1) its ‘closure’ in regard to the world outside, and 2) its ‘openness’ between the friends themselves. Acquaintanceship is also unlike friendship in that it is unaffected when extended to include several or many persons; indeed, it is one of the relationships on which networks are commonly based. Otherwise, one notes that while the friends of middle-class people are mostly of the same class themselves, lower than middle-class persons whom the middle-class people know are more likely to be acknowledged merely as acquaintances.

Acquaintances (especially when both are middle-class) may become friends, and in many instances ‘acquaintanceship’ usually refers to but a temporary and literal ‘getting acquainted’ role that is a prelude to friendship. However, I am
concerned, by contrast, with acquaintanceship as an established relationship between persons who are already familiar to each other. It is likely to be enduring; indeed, this is often a life-long relationship. It has its own set of constraints and, as some of these are inimicable to friendship, the conversion of an acquaintanceship to friendship becomes the less likely the longer the acquaintanceship continues.

Conversely, there is the suggestion in Goffman (1966: 114) that people who once were ‘close’ may, even involuntarily, sustain the minimal kind of exchanges associated with acquaintanceship, i.e. they are bound to continue to recognise each other when confronted by each other.

**Partnerships.** These may be ascribed (typically between such close kin as brothers) or voluntary; they may be short-term or long-term. They may also be viewed as ‘alliances’. Where it is voluntary and valued, a partnership may gain some of that sensitivity characterising friendship (e.g. Galsworthy 1968; Mann 1924).

Yet partnership is a relationship with a number of significant differences from friendship. As it is task-oriented, its rules of relevancy and standards of equivalency are usually explicit. Its content and conduct will have definite sectors and degrees of ascription and routinisation (as opposed to autonomy and unpredictability). The terminal quality of friendship may be evident in a partnership in respect to certain aspects of its task; yet even in these, the relationship of confidence may well be qualified, unless the persons are also confident that theirs is a partnership in the long-term. For an ex-partner can—or will—become a rival. Thus the danger of over-investing in a partnership is a very real one. Other aspects of the task shared by partners will call for interaction with other enterprises and with clients, and not express terminality at all. Beyond the realm of the task shared by them, the social behaviour between partners may be similar to that between acquaintances.

There are here several factors favouring greater stability and less risk in partnerships than in friendships, and I think they help to explain the far wider distribution (also cross-culturally) of partnerships. Basically, they relate to the higher degree of understanding of partnerships, and hence of their acceptance, by the remainder of society, than is the case with friendships. For partnerships not only belong to the personal/public sector, but the reasons for their establishment usually refer to ecological and economic circumstances whose importance is popularly recognised. The same cannot be said of friendships. An important implication that comes to light here is the reduced social costs factor in partnerships, compared to what it is in friendships. Moreover, inasmuch as a man may be seen to have just cause to break off a partnership, the act may not be unjustly held against him in the community; but as friendships are not open to view in this way, broken friendships are commonly the subject of speculative comment that may well be unjustly damaging.

In conclusion, then, against the apparent greater ‘warmth’ of friendship over partnership there are a number of liabilities attached to friendship. These may be locally recognised and deter persons from embracing this special relationship. One of the usual liabilities is the substitution of ‘balanced’ or specified for ‘general’ or unspecified reciprocity (cf. Sahlins 1965).

**Professional relationships.** The kind of relationships that I have in mind here include those of lawyer/client or doctor/patient, and others whose typical (normative)
habitat in our culture is, perhaps, middle-class and urban. But also included are such characteristic rural and village relationships as pastor/parishioner, shopkeeper/client, schoolmaster/parent and, not least, visiting anthropologist/local inhabitant. These are akin to partnerships and unlike friendships in that they are task-oriented and usually bound by explicit rules of relevancy and standards of equivalency. But the professional relationships can also be contrasted with both partnerships and friendships in several respects that are important and, I trust, not unduly obvious.

One approaches these ‘professionals’ for a service that neither a partner nor a friend can ordinarily provide, or, in fewer instances, should not be burdened with. The service required may be one that calls for skills that are esoteric (provision of spiritual absolution) or plainly technical (extracting a tooth); the relationship in both cases is thus based on a gross division of a) roles and b) labour, and, therefore, is clearly separated from both partnership and friendship. Alternatively, the problem facing a person may be one that does not necessarily require esoteric or technical skills for its solution; it is simply a personal problem. This also ordinarily lies outside the specific task-orientation of partnerships; nor—more significantly—does one always approach a friend.

There are certain things that one does not tell a friend because he is a friend. The reason is not that one cannot trust him. It is because the matter to be divulged is a ‘dark secret’ or one that is ‘incompatible with . . . image of self’ (Goffman 1959: 141). The strain that this places upon a friendship rests ultimately on the fact that catharsis is achieved at the price of the embarrassment or harassment of a friend. For one friend is left carrying a dark secret in his evaluation of the other and, as was stressed earlier, friends are closely concerned with the evaluation each places on the other. Another aspect of this same matter is, of course, role conflict and people’s awareness of it; there are circumstances in which it is believed locally that the combination of the roles of friend/adviser or /attorney or /censor would break a friendship (cf. Stouffer & Toby 1951).

Patron-client relations. The gross division of roles and labour between patron and client resembles that of professional relations, and the one is frequently encapsulated in the other. Both relationships are ‘asymmetrical’ (Wolf 1966). Some authors relate the asymmetry to relative capacity to grant goods and services. While this may be an appropriate characterisation of professional relations, I believe the patron and client are more properly regarded as possessing complementary capacities to grant goods and services to each other, and in this limited way their relationship is congruent with friendship. Rather, it is in its rules of relevancy and standards of equivalency that the ‘asymmetry’ between patron and client distinguishes emphatically their relationship from both professional relations and friendship. In a patron-client relationship, but not necessarily nor even ordinarily in professional relations, and certainly not between friends, the imposition of the values of the one party (the patron) has to be accepted by the other (the client). Thus:

. . . the client demonstrates, to his patron and others, his acceptance of the value, which the patron has chosen for circulation between them; herein lies the ‘loyalty’ and ‘dependence’ for which the client is rewarded. The reward of the patron is in this acceptance by the client
of the chosen value . . . . Thus, the important services of the client to his patron may be considered as derivates of the services received by him from the patron; e.g. the loyalty and esteem of the client are derivates of the protection provided by the patron (Paine in press).

**Group fellowship.** In some cases, friendship may exist within and independent of the overall, solitary structure of such institutions as masonic lodges, voluntary associations and religious denominations (and age-sets, regiments and lineages in other cultural contexts). Or, there exists only something 'less than' friendship for the reason that the members of the group or institution have a relationship to each other only in terms of their dedication to it; i.e. they have chosen the group and not each other, nor must they begin to choose between each other within the group. This might be termed 'inalienable group friendship' (cf. Cohen 1961) were it not that, for the argument presented, this contains its own contradiction; it is something other than friendship as I have defined it.

**Relations among kin and between spouses.** In many cultures a kinsman may be a friend; nevertheless, probably in all cultures 'friend' and 'kinsman' are concepts that are not only distinguishable but highly contrastable. Is our own culture an exception? Perhaps the basic issue here is what happens should a person 'person-alisce' his relations with a few individuals of his choosing from among a whole number of people, all of whom are related to him and perhaps to each other.

The relationships infer the existence of a constellation of rights and obligations, in respect of which there are explicit and overt rules of relevancy and standards of equivalency. But one may require, from a selected few people, more than the services and goods that are one's rights by, e.g. kinship. By the same token, a person may be either unwilling or unable to fulfil his obligations to all those who have a formal claim to them; or he may wish to give, again to a selected few individuals, more than that which is obligatory. He will also wish for a degree of terminality in some of his relations that kinship per se does not afford him.⁸

In middle-class society, this problem of the opposition between the values of kinship and friendship is minimal, now that kinship lays so much less claim to the loyalties and personal lives of the individuals, and property rights are increasingly a matter beyond kinship. Thus friendships replace kin ties and friends may be intimates, all without much cultural fuss. Indeed, our society is peculiar on two counts here: one is the emergence of friendship with so few institutional constraints; the other is the way in which the injunctions of kinship have changed, where they have not lapsed, in a direction that brings them closer to those of friendship. In former times, kinship rules were noteworthy as injunctions of minimum expected conduct, as is still the case in many other cultures. In respect of gift-giving, for example, the rules told a kinsman what was expected of him (in some cultures, the exact gifts might even be stipulated); they did not place injunctions upon him to make generous gifts. This is no longer true of middle-class behaviour where generosity is a value at least between spouses, between parents and their children, and the parents' siblings and those children. Generosity, of course, is of the essence of friendship everywhere, and has always been so. Likewise, our kin ties (exclusive of affinal ties here) were formerly notable for their durability; they were even considered as irrevocable by their very nature. Thus,
while long absences could mean that friendships waned and lapsed, a cousin who
returned to his natal community after years of absence would probably resume
there the rights and obligations of cousinhood; indeed, he may have been forced
to do so. But today, in our middle-class culture especially, while absent friends may
keep their friendship alive more easily by letter-writing, kin ties are allowed
(selectively) to wane at the will of the individual kinsman.

It is when kinsmen are rivals because they are kinsmen that one still finds in
middle-class society some of the traditional injunctions of kinship, and the polarisation
of the roles of kinsman and friend. This is, of course, a common implication
of siblingship where siblings are co-heirs. On the other hand, where siblings are
not competitors, their ‘closeness’ as kin may generate a wide range of behaviour
between them, including elements of friendship.

It is this last alternative that is a probable expectation (even cross-culturally) of
the relationship between spouses. For 1) they are ordinarily co-producers and co-
consumers and joint custodians of an estate, or at least they are not competitors
(co-heirs) for it; and 2) while society expects the spouses to extend in personam
rights in each other to persons outside the relationship, it is also recognised and
expected that they have an exclusive relationship with each other—to the point of
terminality—over a wide range of matters. Thus the conjugal relationship may
span the difference between the personal/public and personal/private sectors of
social life. At the same time as spouses follow explicit rules of relevancy and
standards of equivalency in the one sector, their relationship may have a private
aspect with idiosyncratic and diffuse behaviour, in which it approaches friendship.

**Conclusion**

In the first part of this article I tried to suggest some of the questions that should
be asked about what is recognised, sometimes rather uncritically, as ‘friendly
behaviour’. This behaviour may be subjected to different cultural and social
constraints, each with its own implications for friendship; moreover, the beha-
viour may not be denoted terminologically. In the next part of the article a
systematic delineation was made of ideal properties of friendship in our own
society; finally, these properties were illuminated and verified through com-
parisons with those of other interpersonal relationships that are close to but ‘less
than’ friendship.

This Western, middle-class type of friendship was identified with three ideal
characteristics: autonomy, unpredictability and terminality (p. 514). But an im-
portant relation of co-variance exists between them; it arises out of the distinction
between personal/private and personal/public sectors of social life. It is as a personal/
private relationship that the autonomy of friendship is greatest; and hence arises
also its unpredictability and terminality. It is in these circumstances that it is least
institutionalised and more of a truly voluntary relationship. It is also true—though
this point was not developed—that the ideal characteristics would be weakened
with the extension of a friendship beyond two persons (without it necessarily
belonging to the personal/public sector).

Rather than summarising the findings more fully, we may more profitably
look now at some of the questions with which we are left, particularly regarding
the premises of the argument.
Friendship boundaries: cross-cultural. I hope it may be accepted that friendship is not a residual relationship, in the sense of one 'left over' to the individual after he has assumed his responsibilities in relationships of kinship, religion and economics; and I hope it may be accepted that friendship manifests its own structure, strategies and principles of selection. These things are also true of friendship outside our own culture, as is well shown by Burridge (1957), Gulliver (1955) and Smith (1964). Nonetheless, the crucial and vexing question in the analysis—indeed, in the analysis of any non-corporate relationship—is that of its boundaries (cf. p. 509).

One may ask doubtfully whether . . . concepts such as "personal" and "private", while useful categories in our own society, are . . . readily transferable to . . . primitive societies' (Schwimmer, personal communication). Again, how general is the distinction private/public? At one level, the answer is that the validity of the present article is unaffected, even should its distinctions prove to have most limited application cross-culturally; indeed, this would verify its thesis that our kind of friendship is most distinctive, perhaps unique. However, one would be unable to proceed at all with comparative analyses were one using measuring rods that are shown to be 'unique' to one culture. For this reason it may happen that the frame of reference used in the present analysis has to be modified and/or expanded (without necessarily abandoning it) for the purpose of cross-cultural comparisons of the meaning of friendship and its manifold structural forms.

A related question of methodology presents itself. My own preliminary search of the literature (where I have been disproportionately concerned with 'Western' cultural areas) shows interesting clues in the matter of the boundaries of friendship. These are most often associated with kinship and conjugal roles: e.g. 'cunny kin' (Faris 1966), conjugality (Bott 1957; Chiaramonte in press), 'cousin' (Pitt-Rivers 1963) and simbo or 'distant cross-cousins' (Schwimmer n.d.). In these examples and others, friendship boundaries—notable as boundaries of affective relations—are deducible from kinds of data that are present in most anthropological monographs nowadays. While the moral of this should not be lost, namely, that there is no occasion here to abandon the structural approach, a question that presents itself is whether this approach requires to be adapted to new kinds of data? Consider, as an example, this passage in the Firth and Djamour study of kinship in the South Borough of London:

As an hypothesis it might be argued here that the prime characteristic of the South Borough kinship system lies in this aspect of selectivity on a basis of emotional attachment rather than on a basis of formalized ties. It has freedom to treat some kin on a basis of close relationship and to relegate others to social limbo, to summon up or lay down the value believed to inhere in kinship more or less at will. To be able to treat kinship as an instrument of social expression is personally important in the South Borough system (Firth 1956: 44).

I suppose that had the fieldwork and its subsequent conceptualisation been done from slightly different perspectives, the authors would have been able to say a great deal about friendship boundaries. The work of Roberts (1965) on Zuni is also interesting in this regard. From his enquiry directed to the 'scaling [of] a set of thirty-four kin and non-kin terms along a dimension of probable allocation of support', there is this conclusion:
Friends, then, do not have much claim on the allocation of support by Zunis, if the present terminological study will justify such a generalisation. If a Zuni wishes to indicate higher commitment than the scale position of ‘friend’ would warrant, he is likely to employ the device of fictitious kinship or the device of adoption. A first indication of improvement is the use of kin terms as a courtesy. The author, for example, progressed from being called a friend to being called younger brother by some Zunis (1965: 42).

I venture to expand the conclusion in this way. Roberts’s study does not show friendship to be absent among the Zuni, but rather that it ordinarily occurs within the ambient of kinship and is always conceptualised in its idiom. It is for this reason that the terms for ‘friend’ and ‘best friend’ receive low scores in the Roberts test, although Zuni clearly do have friends, and they may even value highly the relationship of ‘friendship’. The observation just cited from the Firth and Djamour study would seem to be pertinent among Zuni as well, namely, ‘. . . to be able to treat kinship as an instrument of social expression is personally important’. This brings me back to the point that behaviour between particular kinsmen may not necessarily be ‘kin behaviour’; it could be friendship behaviour (p. 505). Roberts’s enquiry suggests the additional possibility that, in some cultures, ‘friendship’ values may, in fact, be the values of certain kin relationships, while not of others. Which relationships, then? We can only find out about these matters by describing the properties of friendship, as opposed to those of other social relationships, in each culture.

The circumstances of intimacy: our own culture. On some cross-cultural evidence, it would seem that ideal postulates about human relations are commonly put into the notion of friendship, rather than into other interpersonal relations like acquaintance or partnership. What is rather remarkable about our own culture, however, is the way in which this matter is handled operationally. The highest ideals of friendship are a) proclaimed as realisable and b) not protected institutionally. In other words, ideal friendship is located by us in the personal/private social sector.

There is, first of all, a seeming paradox to be unravelled. For it is in the circumstances just described that compromises, or fictions, are made in the precept of unsecretive conduct between friends, and friends are sometimes even excluded as confidantes (p. 517). The explanation is that these are non-institutionalised measures which are taken to ensure the relationship some protection. The ideals of friendship are likely to be spoiled without such protection. Of course, the fact that the protection is necessary suggests that the ideals of friendship are, in some measure, factitious values.

The reason that we do not institutionalise our friendships is, surely, that to do so would smother their ideal aspect—as personal and private relations. Elsewhere, I will suggest that this is what happens to incipient friendships of our kind in other parts of the world (cf. Foster 1967). The important task, there, will be to provide an analysis of the cultural pre-conditions of our kind of friendship—how does our kind of friendship flourish without institutionalisation? Foremost among these prerequisites is, I believe, the existence in the society of an efficient and dispassionate bureaucracy, so that an individual may enjoy private and competitive relations without prejudice to those other relations that belong to the competitive public sector.
This is a revised and somewhat shorter version of a paper written for the Colloquium on the ‘Comparative sociology of friendship’, at the Memorial University of Newfoundland, March 1969. Earlier, preliminary statements were given in a sociology seminar at the Johns Hopkins University and at the meetings of the Northeastern Anthropological Association in the winter and spring, respectively, of 1968. Special acknowledgements are due to Jan-Petter Blom, Jean Briggs and George Park for their careful criticisms and valuable suggestions.

1 Exceptions include Bott (1957), Burridge (1957), and Reina (1959). In my view, serious shortcomings in Cohen’s (1961) ambitious, typological survey of friendship relate to these questions. Cohen summarises his schema in this way:

It is hypothesized that inalienable friendship will be found in the maximally solidary community; that close friendship is characteristic of the solidary-fissile community; that casual friendship appears in non-nucleated society; and that expedient friendship is found in the individuated social structure (1961: 354).

The definitions of these community-systems are found on pp. 314–18 of the same volume, and the types of friendship are described on pp. 352–3. In the course of 17 pages, ‘the ethnographic data for sixty-five or so societies with respect to a specific problem’ are excerpted and fed into the typology.


3 For example, see the essays in a recent issue of Human Organization on ‘atomistic-type’ societies, collected by Rubel & Kuperfer (1968).

4 The exceptions here include Eisenstadt’s own article (1956), which will be discussed in the context of another paper, and insights in Burridge (1957), Pitt-Rivers (1963; 1968a) and Wolf (1966). I have not read the papers of the seminar on friendship held by Du Bois, at Harvard, in the 1950’s.

5 This general point is capable of much ethnographical and theoretical extension. For example, it is important in the analysis of patron-client relationships, especially where these are across ethnic boundaries (cf. Paine in press). The distinction between ‘charter’ and ‘strategy’ and the concept of rules of relevancy are also indispensable, in a different problem of analysis, where the ‘formal structure’ of a society or small group of persons has to be kept ‘under ground’, e.g. guerilla groups. In this connexion, Whyte’s (1955) analysis of the street corner gang and its ‘set events’ is illuminating: ‘The interesting thing . . . is that the “structure” of the gang had to be underground, the above-ground ethos was mutuality’ (George Park, personal communication).

6 Potter (1967: 153–60) is concerned with an opposition similar to this one between transaction and incorporation; he expresses the opposition in terms of Goffman’s notion of ‘presenting self’ (transaction) versus Fromm’s concept of ‘sharing’ (incorporation); cf. Goffman (1959), Fromm (1955).

7 The emphasis we place upon friendship as a private relationship (rather than specifically as a dyadic one—though one does assume this to be a common implication of privacy) circumscribes here the matter of networks and friendship. However, the various probable connexions between this analysis and those of Barnes (1954), Bott (1957), and Mayer (1966) are yet to be explored. Acquaintanceship is probably an important pivotal notion in this respect. George Park (personal communication) comments: ‘Can we define acquaintanceship . . . as a form of friendship in which tendencies toward exclusiveness/possessiveness are held in check; the kind of non-excluding possessiveness which makes cliques and gangs possible? (E.g. “Any friend of Jane’s is a friend of mine.”)’.

8 Cf. Foster (1961), also Arensberg (1937). But the matter may be manipulated in the other direction, in other cultures; e.g. Evans-Pritchard (1940) and Barth (1959) where a man’s prestige or his status, or both, are measured by the number of kin he is able to obligate. What one would like to know is the place of friendship in these different systems of relations.

9 One recognise, though, that the conjugal relationship itself may be a significant variable; and when attending to the possible relationships between conjugalty and friendship, the kinds of analyses made by Bott (1957) of conjugal roles and networks, and by Gluckman (1965) of linearity as a variable of divorce frequencies, might be usefully adapted.

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