

Introduction: Friendship and Emotions

by [Mary Holmes and Silvana Greco](#)

Flinders University; University of Milan

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Introduction

1.1 There has been an increase in sociological literature concerned with friendship in modern societies, although it was neglected until recently ([Allan 1977, 1986, 1989, 1996, 1998, 2007, 2008](#), [Adams, Allan 1989](#), [Alberoni 1990](#), [Allan 1977, 1997](#), [Bidart 1997](#), [Bosisio 2006](#), [Di Nicola 2002, 2003](#), [Duck 1991, 1993](#), [Eve 2002](#), [Ghisleni 2006](#), [Ghisleni, Rebughini 2006](#), [Kao, Joyner 2005](#), [Jamieson 1999, 2002](#), [Jamieson et al. 2006](#), [Mancdich 2003](#), [Nedelmann 1991](#), [Oliker 1998](#), [Pahl 2000, 2002](#), [Rebughini 2006](#), [Rebughini et al. 2011](#), [Silver 1989, 1990](#), [Spencer, Pahl 2006](#), [Yager 2004](#), [Walker 1994](#)). Sociologists have neglected friendships in the past because they have been understood as personal choices rather than as allied to the public matters that were the subject of most sociological interrogation ([Di Nicola 2002](#), p. 11). The idea of friendship as an intimate relationship which belongs only to the private sphere of social actors has been rejected in recent years by scholars. One reason for the change was that many social theorists turned their attention to the process of individualization and in particular institutionalized individualism ([Beck, Beck-Gernsheim, 2002](#), p. xxi), which arguably characterizes contemporary society ([Bauman 2003](#); [Giddens 1992](#)). As a result social thinkers began to

interrogate the role of friendship in modern life not only in the private but also in the public sphere. Ancient wisdom has its part in this new interrogation. Friendship is not only a 'virtue', according to the Greek philosopher Aristotle (1983), but a social practice: a social relationship between two individuals who freely choose and mutually trust each other. Trusting a person permits you to rely on him/her in order to receive advice, support, aid, affection but also in order to confide to him/her the 'backstage' of one's self. A friend is a person to whom you can show your dreams, delusions, fears and certainties, strengths and weaknesses (Di Nicola 2002, p. 71). The social norm that regulates friendship is reciprocity. Friendship also has to be understood also as a feeling and emotion which arises between the two persons involved in the relationship (Di Nicola 2002, Alberoni 1999). As is well known emotions and feelings have been strongly marginalized in sociological discourse (Flam 2002).

1.2 Some turn to emotions has more recently occurred in sociology and we seek to combine insights from this with the sociology of friendship in order to bring these fields into a new dialogue. The sociology of emotion has highlighted that emotions are not purely natural but socially shaped and challenged the reason/emotion binary. Scholars have sought to question sociology's traditional focus on the rational, cognitive elements of behaviour. This has applied more to the public sphere where (following Weber) rationality was judged dominant (see Barbalet 2002; Flam 2002). In regard to the intimate sphere the tendency has been to try and highlight that rationality does operate there, rather than it being the site of raw, asocial emotionality (see Hochschild 2003). In other words, the sociology of emotion has tended to say that the public world is not entirely rationalised but partly emotional and that families and relationships are not simply emotional but subject to social processes of rationalization. Yet the work on emotions in intimate relationships has left the emotional landscape of friendships virtually untouched, except for rather indirect attention via theorising on individualization.

1.3 Ideas about individualization can bring together new attention to friendship and to emotions. Theories of individualization suggest that it is a process that can weaken family bonds and work relations and the role of friendship for the single individual thus becomes crucially important (Di Nicola 2001, Ghisleni, Rebughini 2006). To the extent that there is some break from tradition, individualization ‘demands an active contribution from individuals’ (Beck, Beck–Gernsheim 2001). It asks them to decide and choose the different options for their lives which in earlier times were decided by family tradition, by rules around belonging to a specific social class or to village communities (Beck, Beck–Gernsheim 2001, p. 4). A more predictable life course for individuals has been replaced by biographies which have to be constructed by the single individual forced to choose in every area of his/her life – education, work, family and so on. As a supposedly freely chosen relationship based on reciprocity, friendship represents an ‘archetypal’ relationship in modern life (Di Nicola 2002, p. 113), of particular importance for identity building.

1.4 Identity is constructed around multiple belongings that span private and public realms, but in which friendship networks are crucial. Those networks are not only key in intimate lives but to how social order and social mobility operate (Rawlings 1992). Individualization may have had some effect but identities still often connect to old categories like class (Skeggs 1997; 2005) and these categories play a role in how friendships operate. Theories of social capital (for example, Coleman 1988; Putnam 2000) being especially influential in work demonstrating that friendships can be important in offering connections to the ‘right’ people (e.g. Pichler and Wallace 2007; Reynolds 2007, Tomescu–Dubrow et al. 2005, Di Nicola 2006). In addition, other scholars have shown how friendship provides a strong ‘kind of social glue’, a solidarity between individuals, although it is almost hidden (Spencer and Pahl 2006). However, this and more specific attention to the sociology of friendship, have been oddly lacking in an analysis of emotions. This collection of articles aims to fill this gap.

1.5 This Special Section comes out of papers given in the Emotions Research Network (RN11) stream of the European Sociological Association in Lisbon in September 2009. Scholars there gave a number of papers relating to this underexplored topic. This introduction frames those papers by exploring why emotions in friendship have been so ignored and what is most in need of attention. Most work on friendship assumes that it is something that takes place in the 'private' sphere. It is clear, however, that the 'public' world and especially the world of work are also crucial and emotional sites for friendship. This introduction explains key social changes surrounding friendship and emotions, and discusses these changes both in the public and private spheres. From this foundation it is made clear how the other articles of this volume will address these key gaps in the literature and establish new understandings of the importance of emotions and friendship in everyday life.

Towards a sociology of emotions and friendship

2.1 The aims of this Special Section are to contribute to both the sociology of emotions and to the sociology of friendship, and thus more broadly the sociology of intimacy. It achieves these aims by presenting articles which discuss original research relating to friendship and emotions across a range of topics and in various European societies including Britain, Finland, Germany, Italy, and Sweden. Graham Allen also provides a commentary to connect some of the key themes that emerge from the special section. There is still very little sociology on friendship and emotion is only just gaining ground as an area of sociological inquiry.

2.2 Friendship has been ignored as a topic within sociology, with attention usually centring on familial and couple relationships. These have been thought more crucial to the workings of social structure and social life. More recently it has been recognised that friendship, or at least friendly relations, can play a key role in social reproduction (Allen 1998; Eve 2002; Pahl 2002; Spencer and Pahl 2006). However, while literature about social

capital (e.g. [Pichler and Wallace 2007](#); [Reynolds 2007](#), [Tomescu–Dubrow et al. 2005](#)) deals with the importance of friendship networks, the range of qualities that constitute friendship are not well addressed by the more instrumentalist focus on understanding what/where friendship can get you (but see Bjornberg in this section).

2.3 The sociology of friendship that does exist has tried to investigate friendship in its own right. Efforts have been made to outline the key characteristics of friendship such as reciprocity, trust and intimacy (e.g. [Pahl 2000](#); [2002](#)). There have also been studies exploring the shifting boundaries between friendship and kin relations, some of which question the usual definition of the former as chosen and the latter as given ([Heath 2004](#); [Pahl and Spencer 2004](#), [Spencer and Pahl 2006](#)). Some work has suggested that friendship has become the model and basis for most intimate and especially cohabitational relationships, leading to families of choice and the de-centring of heterosexual coupledness in intimate life ([Roseneil and Budgeon 2004](#); [Weeks et al. 2002](#); [Weston 1991](#)). Despite attention to social capital, the importance of friendship in ‘public’ and not just ‘private’ life is badly in need of attention.

2.4 In much of the sociology of friendship there has still been little ([Ghisleni and Rebughini 2006](#)) or no attention to emotions. What there is examines the ‘emotional support’ or care friends can provide (e.g. [Spencer and Pahl 2006](#)). Friendship is more than this emotionally. In common sense terms, it is represented as convivial, sociable, and reciprocal. Anger and conflict are not typically associated with friendship, nor do fear, disgust or shame spring to mind. Friendships have usually been thought to be ‘fun’ and free from the difficulties and obligations of kin relations ([Spencer and Pahl 2006](#)), but how emotions are related to friendship is in need of sociological investigation.

2.5 This collection of papers attends to these gaps in the literature, discussing key ways in which emotional friendships shape everyday lives. It

explains key social changes surrounding friendship and emotions, and presents original research outlining these changes both in the public and private spheres. There are contributions on friendship at work and on leisure activities such as drinking and internet use. The issue also attends to the crucial part that friendship can play in social inclusion or exclusion, as is especially evident for those undergoing times of crisis in their lives and those at the social margins such as anorexics and refugees.

2.6 The first two articles are evaluations of how friendship has changed through time and differs across cultures. **Cas Wouters** uses German and English manners books of the twentieth century to show how the emotional quality of friendships has varied in those countries and how friendships became more informal as the century progressed. He analyses some of the characteristic differences in manners between the Germans and the English, from the end of the nineteenth century until the 1970s. Rules for introductions were the most prominent topic in English manners books, but barely mentioned in the German ones. Friendship was a central theme in the German manuals, together with topics such as *duzen* – addressing each other with the informal you: *Du*. Friendship meanwhile was almost absent as a topic in English manners books. Although different, both cultures show more distant and hierarchical friendship relations being replaced by more equal and intimate ones. The differences are explained by placing them in the context of their national class structures and by connecting them to differences in the processes of social emancipation and national integration. **Mary Holmes** continues this story by examining online advice about Facebook etiquette. The popular social network site has become a part of millions of people's everyday lives and there are many websites offering advice about how to navigate the friendships formed and maintained on Facebook at the beginning of the twenty-first century. This paper applies the approach of Norbert Elias and of Cas Wouters, who have explored social changes in emotionality by looking at etiquette and advice books. Advice about Facebook etiquette can help reveal contemporary

social rules about emotional expression. Holmes argues that emotions in the twenty-first century are reflexively organised not so much around emotional norms but around complex relations to others in which expanded definitions of friendship require emotional reflexivity in navigating those relations.

2.7 Friendship is typically thought of as conducted within leisure time.

Jukka Törrönen and Antti Maunu use their data from young Finns' drinking diaries to examine the intersubjectivity involved in emotions. Following Thomas Scheff, pride and shame are argued to be the basis of all emotions embodied in the management of friendship ties. These emotions are the barometers for the character of particular social relations. Pride indicates a participant feeling safe and respected within an encounter, while feelings of shame indicate that a participant feels negatively judged and social bonds suffer. Examples from the diaries provide often moving descriptions of the pride and shame involved in managing friendships. The type of sociability and social situation are found to produce interesting differences in whether pride and shame occur in managing those bonds. Pride and shame are more strongly associated with 'ordinary' friendships with relaxed and like-minded people. Here solidarity is key, whereas more competitive friendships involving assertions of self and superior status are avoided as emotionally unsatisfying.

2.8 The final section of the issue deals with how friendship and emotions relate for individuals dealing with personal problems or within groups at the social margins. Friendship can be crucial for people when they face difficult moments such as the death of a loved one or loss of a job. **Paola Rebughini** draws on interview data to explain how dealing with the negative emotions of a friend at these times requires an emotional competence increasingly necessary, but not always found, within individualised societies. The article is based on 50 qualitative interviews with women and men from 35 to 60 years old and was part of a larger research project on

friendship and adult life in Italy. Rebughini uses the data to examine how negative emotions, such as rage and sadness can challenge friendship, as can the inability of friends to deal with the changes to the pattern of their friendship that such events bring. Yet people are more reliant on the emotional competences of friends within individualized societies. Such societies make it difficult to share negative experiences, restricting the ability to understand them as part of a collective destiny. It is possible that one response to these limitations is to reimagine experiences usually regarded as negative. This might be the case with the pro-Anorexics studied in the penultimate article. [Natàlia Cantó-Milà and Swen Seebach](#) agree that the core characteristics of late modern capitalist societies produce particular forms of emotionality, including forms that might allow anorexics to form virtual friendships via which they support each other in understanding their anorexia as a lifestyle choice rather than a mental illness. They share their experiences of anorexia through blogs, forums and chat rooms in order to continue rather than overcome their eating disorder. The friendships created are perceived as extremely solid and important but the shared commitment to anorexia is almost impossible to transcend online. Instead pro-anorexia communities are based around escaping everyday problems and create a personification of anorexia as “Ana”, which attains a religious-like character. These friendships may be meaningful but are maintained only by devotion to “Ana” and resemble the secret societies discussed by Simmel. Yet this reveals some of the problems of maintaining meaningful friendships, or forming new emotional ties within the conditions of late modernity. This is especially the case for those who are socially marginalised. [Ulla Bjornberg](#) illustrates the devastating effects of a lack of friends and other ties on socially marginalised asylum seeking families with children in Sweden. She explores the difficulties such families have in building social capital in friendships and other relationships. Legal and social constraints within the host country can make forming relationships with others difficult for asylum seeking children. In order to overcome these constraints trust and social recognition are important, as

they occur in both formal and informal interactional settings and in the policies and rules of host country authorities. Here we see that friendships are not simply a matter of private and voluntary emotional ties but occur within wider social landscapes which can bring private and public together in ways that may promote but can also undermine meaningful and emotionally rich friendship relations.

2.9 Overall this collection of papers provides important new insights into friendships as emotional relationships that occur across all social spheres. What is perhaps most significant is what they indicate about the ways in which individualization may weaken certain social bonds, but can also provide spaces for new kinds of relationships to develop. It seems clear that friendship is becoming more and more important in many people's lives as more traditional bonds between kin and couples undergo considerable change. Individualization does not inevitably bring disconnection but as those traditional ways of relating lose their hegemony individuals may increasingly turn to friendship as an important way of maintaining relations to others that might better accommodate contemporary expectations about autonomy and equality. Whether this promise is realised requires further exploration of the range and significance of different forms of friendship, and this special section sets out on that path.

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