

Footnote: Inter-Gender Friendship

Societal undertones impose a tangible awkwardness upon the notion of a separately married man and woman being one-on-one friends. To my mind, this wrongly denies, to so many of us, access to the better half of our world of potential friends. [PDF]

Men and women are equally sentient beings. All are equally precious. Each of us - male or female - has the same 200 billion neuron brain, which is the vessel of a mysterious entity that is *his* or *her* individual [conscious self](#). It is the myriad unique [relationships](#) that can form between our conscious selves that are the fundamental elements of reality. The highest and most beautiful form that these relationships can take is [friendship](#). Friendship is what life, [the universe](#) and everything is all about.

Despite the large [culturally induced dichotomy](#) which currently exists between the genders, men and women share identical feelings, fears, hopes and aspirations. They simply view the world from slightly different gender-specific perspectives, which, in their natural state, free from the religious and commercial pressures of modern society, would be *complementary* rather than [divisive](#).

A variety of strong healthy intergender friendships is a basic human need, which sadly modern society denies to so many. Men have a basic need for stable dependable female friends. Women have a basic need for stable dependable male friends. Consequently, the contemporary phenomenon of male seeking female and female seeking male friendships via the Internet is not the seedy pastime it is made out to be by the prudish mainstream. It is a healthy psychological (and often physiological) need that - in the increasing social isolation of our modern bland impersonal suburbias - can only now be met in any practical sense through the Internet.



Conditions For Friendship

The first vital requisite for friendship is equality. There can be no master-slave element in true friendship. Male-female friendship is only possible when man and woman regard each other as completely equal. Each must be determined to rejoice in the other's strengths and support the other's weaknesses with uncritical love - particularly when these strengths and weaknesses are the opposite way round to their society's gender stereotypes.

Notwithstanding, being equal as peers (in the sense of equal value and status) does not mean that men and women are - or have to be - functionally equivalent physically or emotionally. Nature itself makes certain roles in life gender-specific. The only thing wrong is the way certain societies or cultures overwhelmingly skew the true values of these roles by imposing upon us political, religious, social and economic structures that under-value, over-accentuate or otherwise conflict with *natural* gender role-biases.

Observation suggests to me that the most firm and rewarding same-gender friendships form between people who have similar values and personalities. On the other hand, my observations suggest that the most firm, rewarding - and potentially far more profound - intergender friendships form between men and women who have similar values but *complementary* (rather than similar or opposite) personalities.

Both the anatomy and psychology of human beings make it possible for intergender friendships to develop to a far greater depth and intensity than same-gender friendships. But that does not mean that intergender friendships have to include physical sex. True friends will never push or pressure each other *in either direction* in this regard.

Love Versus Lust

There are two forces that power intergender relationships. They are both referred to as love, but they are not the same. One is love. The other is lust. Love is the desire to know, serve and share. It is the driving force that creates and sustains friendship. Lust is the desire to acquire, possess and control.

The most familiar form of so-called *love* is *Romantic love*. This is really a sanitised form of *lust*. It is the innate human drive to possess and control - an insatiable compulsion to own exclusively and permanently the looks, body, personality, mind, allegiance, attention and affection of somebody of the other gender. This *desire to acquire* is driven by the hunger that is within us all for intimate union of mind and body. *Romantic love* motivates a person to attempt to assuage this hunger by trying to *take* from the other person what is needed to satisfy it. It is the same selfish motive for gain that drives business and commerce.

Exclusive permanent possession is the principle upon which traditional marriage is based, be it by religious declaration or civil contract. Anciently, for a man, this not only included permanent exclusive possession of the woman, but also the permanent exclusive possession of her possessions.

Love, on the other hand, is unselfish. A lover (in the true etymological sense of the word) attempts to fulfil the intellectual, emotional and physical needs of his beloved. A *lover* attempts to assuage his beloved's hunger for *intimacy of mind* by *giving*. And part of what a lover gives to his beloved is the *satisfaction of giving* by gratefully receiving what his beloved gives to him. The love of friendship can only function as a completed circuit. Love has a duplex nature: it cannot exist as a simplex [or uni-directional] process. One cannot give love without receiving it and one cannot receive love without giving it.

Love is a process in which sentient conscious beings voluntarily participate. It is a binary process. It is a relationship between *two* human beings: a pair, a couple. Notwithstanding, it is neither possessive nor exclusive. Friends, however deep and intimate their friendship may be, do not seek to exclude each other from other friendships. The love between two friends is in no way diminished or perturbed by the other friendships that each may have. On the contrary, it is augmented by them.

Nor does the love between two friends end or diminish if later they separate and go their different ways in life. It can even thereby become stronger, each friend rejoicing in that the other has moved on to a more fulfilled phase in his life. This is captured beautifully in a verse of the song Footsteps in a [video](#) by Deanne Keanne from the album "Yesterday and Tomorrow":

True love I believe;
Is love if you stay,
Love if you leave.
Free as a bird,
High in the sky;
No holding on;
No fear of goodbye.

- Ian Levine, Ivy Jo Hunter & Steven Wagner

Types of Relationship

These two kinds of 'love' give rise to 3 different classes of intimate relationship: take/take, give/take, give/give.

All too many intimate relationships are founded upon **take/take** because humans - in the absence of deliberate considered thought - are naturally selfish. Each partner is or has what the other desires, so each partner *takes* from the other. Such a relationship is at least, for the most part, balanced, but that is the only good thing about it. Too many marriages are based on this form of relating. Each partner is simply *using* the other. This is not the love of friendship.

A **give/take** relationship is where one person, desperate to gain his intellectual, emotional and physical needs, attempts to take them from somebody who is or has what they need. The other person in response could reject the first person's demands, thus ending the potential relationship. However, the other person may, out of pity for the first person, willingly supply their needs, without reward. This is an unbalanced relationship in which one person gets used by the other. This is not friendship.

Only a **give/give** relationship is friendship. For both same-gender and intergender friendships this foundational form of love is an unselfish giving, receiving and sharing in a balanced way by both partners. The complementary physical and mental differences between the genders allow only intergender friends to develop and maintain this kind of love to its ultimate degree.

Unrequited "Love"

I don't believe there is any such thing as unrequited love. I have used the term to represent the **give/take** situation, which is generally known as *unrequited* or *unconditional* love.

What motive does a person have for bestowing unrequited love upon another human being? What need, in the lover, does unrequited love satisfy? If there be no need, then there is no motive. If there be no motive, then there is no action. If some notion called unrequited love exists, then who bestows it must be motivated by something.

The motive could be desire. The unrequited lover desires his beloved's appearance, personality, behaviour, knowledge, happiness, helplessness or any number of other human attributes and characteristics. In which case, the unrequited love is simply the lust to vicariously possess or feed upon his beloved's attributes. A selfish act on the part of the lover. If the beloved does not return love, and thereby complete the circuit, it is not love. The beloved is simply using the lover as a free source of what his lover willingly provides. A selfish act on the part of the beloved.

The motive could be worship. The lover perceives his beloved as a creature of beauty and perfection in physique and/or personality. As such, the beloved becomes the ideal essence, object or project with which the lover attempts to quench the ubiquitous Freudian void in his conscious being. He thus makes his beloved his object of worship, becoming the exclusive focus of his life. This may move him to stalk or otherwise harass his beloved, making her feel constantly uncomfortable. The beloved returns either nothing or rejection. This too cannot be love.

The motive could be pity. The lover perceives her beloved to have a personal problem. She is fired by a desire to help alleviate this problem. This is an extreme form of a perfectly normal social obligation to help one's neighbour. But in this case, the lover becomes fanatically involved with the problem of her beloved. And the problem too is typically extreme. Her beloved may be highly distressed, depressed or suicidal. He may be seriously or terminally ill. He may have reached a cross-roads in life and not know which way to turn. The lover, in order to fulfil her quest to alleviate

her beloved's pain and suffering, is prepared to sacrifice herself to the point of death and destruction if necessary. The lover neither seeks nor accepts anything in return: not even love. And the beloved is often unconcerned about the dire consequences his salvation may precipitate upon his lover.

But this too is not love. The reward of the lover's selfishness is an orgasmic sense of self-satisfaction of having fulfilled her perceived noble quest of alleviating her beloved's suffering. During this process, the lover may become inextricably entwined within the life of her beloved. But the fact that it is not love is evinced by the norm that such a relationship generally terminates - often with complete and permanent severance - as soon as the beloved's problem has been resolved. To me, this kind of relationship seems to have the systemic profile of a common affair.

But the true bi-directional love of friendship does not fade when tangible interaction reduces or stops. It stays. It is eternal. It is beautiful.

Affinity of Friendship

I said that the true love of friendship cannot exist unless it is bi-directional: unless the circuit is completed. So how can the love of friendship connect in the first place? How does the circuit get connected?

For the love of friendship to become established, the two potential participants must have some kind of affinity for each other. This is a force of attraction: a motivation to connect. But it is not lust, desire, worship or pity. It is something quite different. It is an attraction between complementary characteristics which combine to form a greater degree of completeness.

In my circuit analogy, I would liken it to the voltage - the emotional potential difference - that drives the current through a completed circuit. Notwithstanding, until both participants throw their respective switches to complete the circuit and allow the current to flow, the love of friendship between the two people is not active.

At the stage where one participant in the potential friendship has thrown his switch and the other has not [yet] done so, the relationship can *appear* as one of the above three sad situations of unrequited "love". But it is not. Of course, one participant may have some emotional or psychological obstruction within him, which causes him not to perceive his affinity of friendship with the other. This is indeed a sad situation resulting from the all too frequent psychological damage which modern society can inflict upon an individual.

Yet, through rational thought and considerate conversation, I think that any such situation can be resolved, allowing the circuit to connect and the friendship to ignite and grow.

Diversity of Friendship

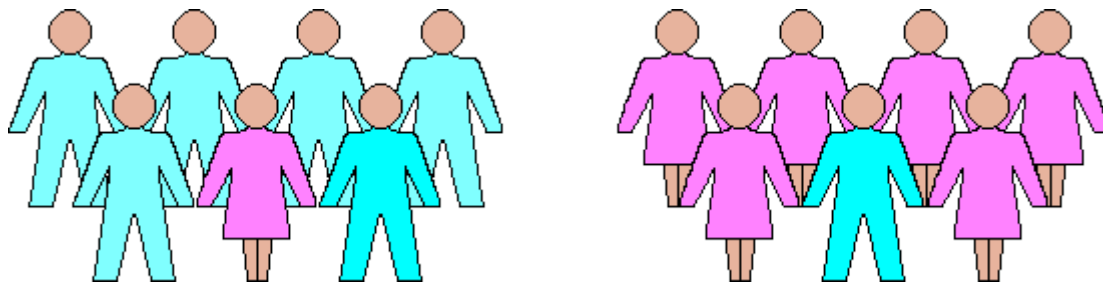
I think the best intergender friendships form between men and women who have similar values but *complementary* personalities. One friend is very unlikely to share all your values in equal measure. Nor is he or she likely to have a personality that is completely complementary to yours. It would be unfair to expect a friend to be able to fulfil all your needs of friendship. One friend will, however, be able to provide a good part of what you need. Conversely, you will be able to provide him or her an equal part of what he or she needs in friendship.

To be able to fulfil your natural appetite for friendship, you will need several friends. Each will fulfil the part of your needs for which his or her values and personality are suited. They will each fulfil a complementary part of your complete needs. You, on the other hand, will provide a vital part

of the total friendship needs of each of your friends. The proverbial Mr. or Miss Right is extremely unlikely to exist in one person. But all the aspects and pieces of him or her can certainly be found within the various personalities of several different friends.

So how many friends will you need? [Some research](#), derived from data gathered through social software systems, suggests that the ideal number of friends that can form a cohesive group is 7. A group of 7 equal peers can converse fairly together. As the number drops below 7, the group loses the critical mass needed to provide a balance of talent and ideas. As the number increases, cohesion seems to deteriorate. A group of 12 does not have egalitarian cohesion between its members and is therefore an ideal group size in hierarchical situations such as teacher and students.

Ideally, therefore, you should aim to [find](#) a group of 6 close friends, which, with you included, makes 7. If you are male, you find 6 female friends. If you are female, you find 6 male friends. These are your primary friendships.

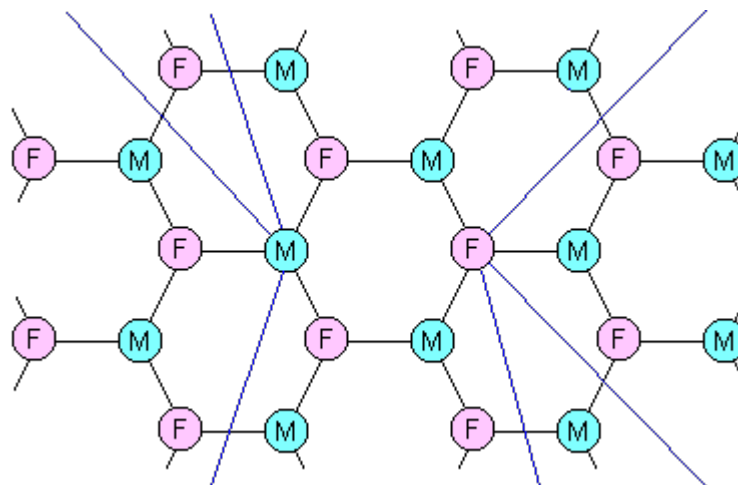


You are thus one half of 6 different intergender friendships. But each friend only supplies that part of your intergender friendship needs that he or she is best able to supply. You select your friends so that, between them, they furnish you with all aspects of intergender friendship. Furthermore, your opposite-gender friends are able to coordinate themselves as an egalitarian task-team to fill you completely and continuously, in right balance, with all your intergender friendship needs.

Of course, you will be a member of each of 6 groups of 6 people of the same gender as yourself who are the opposite-gender friends of each of your opposite-gender friends. So you are, in effect, a member of a community of 37 friends: 6 of the opposite gender (your primary friends) and 30 of the same gender (consequential friends), plus yourself. You and your 6 opposite-gender friends could meet together and do things together. Similarly, you would be one of the 6 same-gender friends in the corresponding groups of each of your opposite-gender friends. In each case, perhaps the one person of the group who is the opposite gender to the rest of the group could be the co-ordinator or mediator.

Friendship Network

It is easy to see that if this arrangement be extended indefinitely, the whole world would become a network of friends. For clarity, the following diagram shows *all* 6 of the friendship links for only the male and female at the centre of the network. Note that 3 of the links for each of these is off the diagram. These are long-reach links to distant friends. This is a characteristic of what is called a small-world network, which has the characteristic of increasing enormously the mutual proximity of everybody in the friendship network.



Such a network of intimate friends would be a very robust form of society. It would be difficult for an external force to destroy, control or exploit.

The Kiss of Friendship

True intergender friendship is a beautiful thing. It should therefore be conducted according to a protocol of mutual respect. This could include a convention of salutation for when a pair of mixed-gender friends meet or part in company or in public. I call it the *kiss of friendship*. The female comes close to allow her male friend to hold her while he kisses her gently on the forehead. The forehead is the seat of the intellect and abode of the emotions, so a gentle kiss thereon is symbolic of their joint recognition that true friendship is firstly of the mind, wherein it will always kindle or refresh the eternal flame of friendship rather than the fleeting fire of infatuation, so easily ignited by the touch of lips.

It can therefore serve always, whatever the inner heights, depths, ebbs and flows of a friendship. It is also very hard for onlookers to interpret, which makes it fairly gossip-proof. Yet it *does* have a sexual dimension. After all, it is not something same-gender friends would find comfortable to do. However, that sexual dimension is a beautiful open, honest intergender peer-to-peer love, which is essentially non-erotic.

It is so much better than the social cheek-kiss with its awful after-taste of foundation. I think the kiss on the cheek is for aunts, in-laws and other guys' wives (sometimes). Society has totally de-valued the kiss on the cheek to the extent that it is usually given as a reluctant expectation, and amounts to no more than kissing the air. I hope against hope that the forehead *kiss of friendship* will always be reserved for those special friends and will never become socially de-valued in this way.

What About Sex?

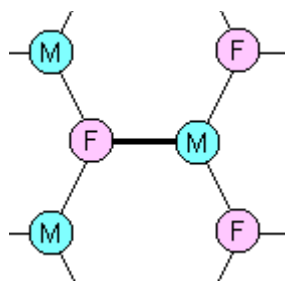
All intergender friendships involve sex in the broadest sense. The whole essence and dynamic of the friendship is significantly determined by the inherent differences in emotional and intellectual perspective between the two genders. But this does not mean that every - or even any - male-female friendship has to include physical intimacy. True friends never push or pressure each other *in either direction* in this regard.

On the other hand, some degree of physical intimacy can provide many intergender friendships with that extra wide-band channel of emotional communication through which they can greatly enhance the quality and intensity of their friendship. The form this intimacy takes can be anything from an occasional hug to regular intercourse, depending on the interpersonal affinity and the shared values of those involved.

Ultimate MF Friendship

Taken to its ultimate conclusion, intergender friendship transmutes into permanent co-habitation and economic inter-dependency. This is still marked most frequently by traditional marriage, the terms of which are pre-determined by church or state. Unfortunately, these terms are based upon possession and exclusivity, which is socially isolating. Increasingly, however, couples are taking the initiative to think out for themselves the formal terms they want for their stable unions.

Whether or not this should result in each partner then withdrawing from his or her other intergender friendships is a matter of the views and values to which a particular couple subscribes. In current Western culture one is officially expected to withdraw. I think this is a sad loss. Fortunately, a couple entering into stable union are perfectly free to draft their terms to be inclusive, thus preserving their diverse friendships.



Of course, the male-female bond of a stable union will be much broader and stronger than those each member has with other opposite-gender friends. But this does not mean that the other bonds have to be severed or disappear. If they remain, they should supply external fuel and stimulus that could actually enhance and strengthen the primary pair-bond. They would be the ever-open window that lets in the fresh air of social diversity to prevent the primary relationship from ever becoming isolated, incestuous, stale or boring.

If, even after stable union, couples were to continue to nurture their external intergender friendships, I think society as a whole would become much stronger and less open to religious enslavement, political oppression and economic exploitation. Only a robust polyamorous network of intergender friendships could link all humanity together at the grass-roots through the unbreakable connective force of genuine love. This would create an ideal conduit for culture, knowledge and trade. I believe that only upon such a foundation could a fair and equitable society be founded and sustained.

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