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Placing Friendship in Context

Personal relationships have long been of central interest to social scientists, but the subject of friendship has been relatively neglected. Moreover, most studies of friendship have been social psychological in focus. *Placing Friendship in Context* is a unique collection bridging social psychological and social structural research to advance understanding of this important subject. In it, some of the world's leading researchers explore the social and historical contexts in which friendships and similar informal ties develop and how it is that these contexts shape the form and substance the relationships assume. Together, they demonstrate that friendship cannot be understood from individualist or dyadic perspectives alone, but is a relationship significantly influenced by the environment in which it is generated. By analysing the ways in which friendships articulate with the social structures in which they are embedded, *Placing Friendship in Context* re-describes such personal relationships at both the macro and the micro level.

REBECCA G. ADAMS is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She has published widely on friendship, including two books with Rosemary Blieszner, *Older Adult Friendship: Structure and Process* (Sage, 1989) and *Adult Friendship* (Sage, 1992).

GRAHAM ALLAN is Reader in Sociology at the University of Southampton. His book publications include *Kinship and Friendship in Modern Britain* (1996) and, with Graham Crow, *Community Life* (1994).

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Mark Granovetter, editor

The series *Structural Analysis in the Social Sciences* presents approaches that explain social behaviour and institutions by reference to *relations* among such concrete social entities as persons and organisations. This contrasts with at least four other popular strategies: (1) reductionist attempts to explain by a focus on individuals alone; (2) explanations stressing the causal primacy of such abstract concepts as ideas, values, mental harmonies, and cognitive maps (thus, ‘structuralism’ on the Continent should be distinguished from structural analysis in the present sense); (3) technological and material determinism; (4) explanations using ‘variables’ as the main analytic concepts (as in the ‘structural equation’ models that dominated much of the sociology of the 1970s), where ‘structure’ is that connecting variables rather than actual social entities.

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For Beth Hess and Eugene Litwak,
who were among the first to place friendship in context

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Contents

<i>Notes on the contributors</i>	<i>page</i> x
<i>Acknowledgements</i>	xiii
1 Contextualising friendship	1
Rebecca G. Adams and Graham Allan	
2 The modernisation of friendship: individualism, intimacy, and gender in the nineteenth century	18
Stacey J. Oliker	
3 The gendered contexts of inclusive intimacy: the Hawthorne women at work and home	43
Stephen R. Marks	
4 Friendship and the private sphere	71
Graham Allan	
5 Rich friendships, affluent friends: middle-class practices of friendship	92
Kaeren Harrison	
6 Women's friendships in a post-modern world	117
Pat O'Connor	
7 Foci of activity as changing contexts for friendship	136
Scott Feld and William C. Carter	
8 The demise of territorial determinism: online friendships	153
Rebecca G. Adams	
9 Reflections on context	183
Graham Allan and Rebecca G. Adams	
<i>Index</i>	195
	ix

Contributors

Rebecca G. Adams is Associate Professor in the Department of Sociology at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. She received her Ph.D from the University of Chicago in 1983. Her major research interest is friendship patterns, especially as they are affected by geographic separation and by cultural and structural context. She has authored many articles on this topic and, with Rosemary Blieszner, co-edited *Older Adult Friendship: Structure and Process* (Sage, 1989) and co-authored *Adult Friendship* (Sage, 1992). Currently she is examining the cultural conventions and structural conditions affecting the development of friendships among the members of a non-territorial music subculture.

Graham Allan is Reader in Sociology at the University of Southampton, England. His research interests include many aspects of informal relations and domestic life. He has an MSc. degree from McMaster University, Canada, and a Ph.D from the University of Essex, England. As well as numerous papers on friendship, he is author of *Family Life* (Blackwell, 1985); *Friendship: Developing a Sociological Perspective* (Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1989); and, with Graham Crow, *Community Life: An Introduction to Local Social Relationships* (Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1994). *Family, Household and Society* (Macmillan), co-authored with Graham Crow, will be published in 1999.

William C. Carter is a Ph.D student in sociology at Louisiana State University. His other work with Scott Feld has examined tie strength in the contexts of foci of activity, including analyses of the effects of desegregation in schools on the development of interracial weak ties (published in *American Journal of Sociology*, 1998). He is currently working towards an

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Notes on the contributors

xi

understanding of how individual identities are affected by the surrounding network of social relationships.

Scott Feld is Professor of Sociology at Louisiana State University. He recently edited a special issue of *Sociological Forum* (March, 1997) devoted to making mathematical thinking more useful in sociology. He is most intrigued with paradoxes of social life, including ‘Why your friends have more friends than you do’ (*American Journal of Sociology*, 1991), and ‘When desegregation reduces interracial contact’ (with William C. Carter in *American Journal of Sociology*, 1998). His ongoing work focuses upon social networks, collective decision-making processes, and applying sociology. He is currently writing a book entitled *Closely Knit: Principles of Social Networks*, and working with Katherine Rossier to study Louisiana’s recent social experiment with covenant marriage.

Kaeren Harrison is a Teaching Fellow in the Department of Social Work Studies at the University of Southampton. Her main research interests are concerned with intimacy, marriage, and women’s friendships, a topic on which she is completing her doctoral studies. She is also conducting research on marital affairs.

Stephen R. Marks is Professor of Sociology at the University of Maine, where he has taught since 1972. His published work and his ongoing interests centre on the sociology of close relationships, perspectives on multiple roles, and feminist approaches to analyses of social settings. His current research draws on a theory of ‘role balance’ to understand how married people can balance multiple roles while avoiding problems of overload. His chapter on the Hawthorne women in this volume deals with a similar matter: how did these women, who became such fast friends at work, integrate these friendships into the rest of their personal networks?

Pat O’Connor is Professor of Sociology and Social Policy at the University of Limerick, Ireland. Her publications in the early 1990s reflected a concern with mother–daughter relationships and with the emotional reality and supportive potential of friendships and kin ties. With the publication of *Friendships Between Women* (Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1992), she became increasingly concerned with issues related to women and power within relationships and organisations. These have been reflected in studies of organisational culture, ‘male’ and ‘female’ agendas, and consensual

Cambridge University Press
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Edited by Rebecca G. Adams and Graham Allan
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xii *Notes on the contributors*

control. Her forthcoming book, *Changing Places – Women in Contemporary Irish Society* (Institute of Public Administration, Dublin, 1998), marks a further move to a macro level – locating women within the context of a changing but still patriarchal society. She is fascinated by the possibilities implicit in exploring the ways in which friendship can maintain or challenge established power structures, but has not figured out how to do this.

Stacey J. Oliker is Associate Professor of Sociology and Urban Studies at the University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee. Her book, *Best Friends and Marriage: Exchange Among Women* (University of California Press, 1989), received Honorable Mention for the American Sociological Association Jessie Bernard Award. Her recent work on welfare politics and on the family lives of women on welfare has appeared in *Social Problems*, *Sociological Quarterly*, and *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*. *Caring and Gender* (Pine Forge Press), a sociology of caregiving, co-authored with Francesca Cancian, will be published in 1998.

Acknowledgements

The idea for this book developed over more than a decade. We originally met at the 1986 Conference on Interpersonal Relationships in Tel Aviv, Israel, organised by Steve Duck and Robin Gilmour. Without this venue, it is unlikely that our paths would ever have crossed or that the idea for this collection would ever have occurred to either of us. Although we both firmly believe that the most exciting social scientific research is often interdisciplinary, we have retained strong identities as sociologists. Over the years, attending subsequent meetings of the International Society for the Study of Personal Relationships and of its sister organisation, the International Network on Personal Relationships, we recognised the need to articulate a sociology of friendship distinct from the perspectives offered by our colleagues in communications and psychology. At the 1994 International Conference on Personal Relationships in Groningen, Holland, with the encouragement of Program Co-Chairs Rosemary Blieszner and Bram Buunk, we began to organise this effort. Along with Robert Milardo, David Morgan, Pepper Schwartz, and Barry Wellman, we began an interest group on Contextual and Structural Perspectives on Relationships. Under the leadership of Michael Johnson, this group has continued to meet. At this same meeting, we organised a panel on Contextual Approaches to the Study of Friendship. Many of the contributors to this volume participated. It was during the discussion at this session that the idea for this volume emerged.

We would like to thank the colleagues mentioned above for contributing to the intellectual atmosphere that inspired us to organise this collection. In addition, we would like to acknowledge our department heads, David Pratto, University of North Carolina at Greensboro, and Roger Lawson, University of Southampton, for supporting our collaboration. We would also like to thank Jackie Rives for making Graham welcome at UNCG

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Frontmatter
[More information](#)

xiv *Acknowledgements*

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