FRIENDSHIP
AMONG SOME YOUNG ENGLISH MEN AND WOMEN
RESIDENTS IN LONDON, 1991-1992

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the discourse and practice of friendship among a network of English men and women of ages between 25 and 30 years old, who are residents in London and most of who consider themselves to be middle class. This study aims at analysing concepts of the person prevalent in the discourse on friendship examined here. The definition of friendship is based on elements of sociability and of personal disclosure. 'Being oneself' with friends is the defining feature of close friendships and the aim of friendship in general. The person is perceived to have a 'true' self, which is emotive and revealed only to some people, and a controlled self, which is presented most of the time.

The process of personal disclosure is gradual and requires trust. People with similar ways of thinking and behaving, which in turn reveal similar upbringing and class background, are better able to synchronize personal disclosure. But the notion that the person is influenced by class background conflicts with the belief in having freedom of choice, which is also significant for the people studied. Hence, the general dislike for class labelling.

The value placed on friendship goes against the transience, impersonality, and predominance of market values in modern English society and especially in London. The sphere of work is associated with money making, hierarchy, and self-control. There is great emphasis on reversing these characteristics when not at work. Whether at the pub or at home, sociability with friends stresses values which are opposed to those found at work. Thus, in the context of the life in London, friendship appears to establish fixity, by keeping the familiarity of shared class backgrounds, and to reverse market and work values, by stressing sociability and personal disclosure.

To Sergio Rezende, my father.

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INTRODUCTION

When speaking of urban environments in industrialized societies, social scientists often refer to the impersonality of this milieu, with its myriad of daily interactions with hundreds of strangers, all fleeting and imbued in anonymity. In the same vein, they discuss the contraction in family size, the present instability of the family as an institution and, adding a functionalist twist, the relatively fewer functions they perform, if compared with past periods in history or with non-Western, small scale societies. In such an environment, friendship is seen by social scientists as the cherished complement to the reduced kinship system, the antithesis to the isolation and alienation of public encounters. It is my aim in this thesis to examine friendship from an anthropological perspective, in a metropolitan setting. Specifically, I analyse the discourse and practice of friendship among a group of English women and men of ages between 20 and 30 years old, all residents in London.

This investigation aims at discussing concepts of personhood prevalent in the discourse on friendship of the English people I studied. Friendship raises the issue of how personal disclosure is perceived to happen. 'Being oneself' with friends is the defining feature of close friends and the ideal aim of friendship in general for the Londoners of my study. To 'be oneself' with friends implies for them that the person has a 'true', 'real' self which is revealed to certain people and at certain times only, whereas in other contexts and companies the self presented is one which is less than 'true' (it is polished, 'polite', and controlled, 'confident'). This is a distinction roughly equivalent to that between ways of behaving in private and in public. At stake here is the perception of the 'real' self as being emotive and thus vulnerable, since it is not protected by the shields of control manifest in more public relations.

Being emotive with friends is regarded with ambivalence. It is positively valued to the extent that the emotive self is considered to be the 'real' self. Because of this positive evaluation, being emotive is taken to be the aim of friendship. Friends are there to give a sympathetic ear and to provide support in times of need. At the same time, being emotive can be problematic and negatively judged because, when little or no control of emotions is shown, one risks the danger of 'imposing' one's feelings on others. Because of the great concern for each person's individuality and space, being emotive and thus 'imposing' one's feelings on others may be met with disapproval. These are dangers, for one may ask friends to give support when they are not ready to do so. This is why the notion of 'being oneself' with friends is often merely an ideal: one can never be sure of receiving 'love' instead of 'judgement' from friends. This is also why friends need time to build up trust before they feel they can reveal their 'real' selves to each other.

The person is not only an individual with a 'real' self which is emotive but also one who is individual in choosing to whom and when to expose this 'true' self. It is important that friends make similar choices so as to synchronize their process of personal disclosure. Otherwise, one's self exposure may be rejected. One must always give recognition to the other's personal space. Friendship is, thus, a relational *process* between two individuals.

Having consideration for other people's personal space is a concern also present in the relationship between family members. Some kin can be seen at times to be 'like friends', although family relationships are also perceived to be different from friendship. Thus, in spite of their distinction, the two categories overlap to some extent. The same

can be said of the difference between friendship and a love relationship.[1] Partners are thought to share greater intimacy and closeness than friends, because of the sexual element in love relationships. At the same time, the value placed on trust and personal disclosure is the same as that which exists in friendship.

Notions about the timing of personal disclosure are, in turn, shaped to a great extent by one's 'upbringing'. For the people I studied, upbringing refers to how parents instill in their children ways of thinking (e.g. notions of gender, of freedom to shape one's life) and behaving (e.g. table manners, polite behaviour). The way in which one is 'brought up' to think and behave is considered to be the chief element of one's *class* background. Most of the people studied consider themselves to be of middle class backgrounds, while a few come from working class families but in the present interact mainly in middle class circles. People of common class backgrounds are thought to share similar upbringing and ways of thinking and behaving. In other words, people of similar class backgrounds are perceived to have similar ideas about when to be more 'personal' and 'emotive' and when to be more controlled, and are thus more likely to become close friends.

The notion that the person is to a great extent shaped by class background conflicts with the view of the person as able to choose how to behave and think. Whether one is able to 'reject' one's class background is open to question. The degree to which one's adoption of feminist principles will alter the perception of gender one was brought up with is also a matter of doubt. In the same vein, it is thought that one chooses when

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[1] I use the term 'love relationship' to refer to the relationship with partners because the people I studied often talked about 'love life' and 'relationships'. 'Love relationships' thus seems to be the most appropriate term.

and where to work because work should be personally fulfilling, although at the workplace one has to behave in socially expected ways -- efficiently and self-controlled. The conflicting view of the person as being acted upon or acting upon her or his own life is, therefore, one which appears in many and varied instances.

If having complete freedom of choice is often brought into question by actual practice, there is no doubt that, amongst the choices which can be made, personal relationships (friendship, family and love relationships) receive people's greatest investment of money, time and 'effort'. In fact, there is a deliberate attempt to reverse the values predominant at work and in market society as a whole. These market values stress efficient and disciplined behaviour so that the time and 'effort' put into work are as productive and lucrative as possible. Such an equation of time and effort is completely altered when friends are socializing. In the most common forms of sociability among friends -- drinking at the pub and cooking meals for friends -- money, time and 'effort' are spent without any interest in immediate material returns; the main goal here is to 'have a good time' together. Although reciprocity is important, especially when buying rounds of drinks at the pub, it is at best an implicit concern, one which is not based on exact calculations of how much each person has spent on one another. Underlying these forms of exchange is the notion that, in face of friendship, money, time and 'effort' lose the value they have at work and in market transactions. These elements become significant in so far as they can foster sociability among friends.

Friendship thus stands as an antithesis to market values. One of the clearest evidences of this view is the general tendency to have few friendships at the workplace. Those which are developed in this setting are short-lived relationships which often cease to exist once the person changes jobs. Close friendships, on the other hand, frequently

date back to early adolescence, to school and to one's home town. Close friends tend to share similar class backgrounds, perpetuating to a certain extent the values one has been familiar with since childhood. The ideal of friendship can thus be said to be one which resists the transience of modern life, taken to be particularly acute in cosmopolitan settings such as London. Such an ideal opposes most features associated with the market: transience, pursuit of money, impersonality, rationality. Above all, friendship privileges spending time and money on one's friends, as well as being affective and emotive with one another.

This thesis is, therefore, an examination of notions of personhood through the discourse and practice of friendship. It aims at discussing the values placed on friendship in the context of life in a cosmopolitan environment such as London, where features of the market place seem to be magnified and assume a problematic, and even negative, character.

Friendship and the English in anthropology

This thesis endeavours to contribute to the underrated fields in anthropology which study friendship and English society. The anthropological literature on friendship is very scanty, while ethnographies carried out in England have been increasing in number in recent years. However, urban studies are still lagging behind when compared to the volume of village and community studies.[2]

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[2] Strathern (1981) and Frankenberg (1966) have studied villages in England, Scotland and Wales with regard to kinship, work and ideas of belonging to the village (see also the collection of essays edited by Cohen 1982, 1986).

The little attention given to friendship is much explained by anthropologists' tendency to focus on kinship and family relationships.[3] This pattern is present in studies of both tribal and non-Western societies as well as of Western societies. In the former, kinship was often regarded as the chief set of relations upon which communities were structured. Friendship could at best be thought of as a residual category for people who were not kin nor enemies. In studies of Western societies, kinship is no longer regarded to have a central role in organizing social order. Precisely because of its greater instability and its diminished effects on social life, anthropological interest has been directed at uncovering how important the family still is as a set of social relations. Friendship is considered to be too unstructured, informal and often peripheral to be treated as the central focus of research.

It has to be mentioned that the Culture and Personality school ventured somewhat into this field, especially through Mead's (1969) study of youth in Samoa. In her observation of young Samoan girls, Mead explored the significance of peer group relations in the process of youth 'coming of age'. But with the succeeding predominance of structural-functionalist studies, attention was mainly directed at that which was seen as fairly formalized and of instrumental importance. Indeed, friendship was probably not regarded as such, its importance unrecognized explaining the lack of information on this subject in most studies conducted in the 40s and 50s. More significantly, friendship was thought to be mainly affective in character and, therefore, not of relevance. But, as I intend to show in this study, the affective component of friendship is only one of its features, and moreover it is not the most emphasized one.

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[3] According to Allan (1989), this is also the explanation for the small number of studies on friendship in sociology.

That friendship was considered peripheral to structure can be inferred from Paine's (1974) project that called for the application of structural-functional analysis to its investigation. Not seeking entirely to relinquish friendship from its supposedly universal affective basis, Paine suggests: "is not all friendship ultimately instrumental?" (1974: 118). The stress upon the instrumental importance of friendship was also DuBois's (1974) way of approaching this relationship. Thus, she discusses different types of friends according to their distinct degrees of intimacy, instrumentality and duration. This is the same tone of Wolf's (1966) comparative analysis of the different functions of friendship, kinship and patron-client relations. Thus it seems that friendship had to be ascertained as structurally significant, that is, as having instrumental functions, to have its study justified.

The few ethnographic accounts of friendship that date to this time -- from the late 50s to the early 70s -- describe cases of more or less formalized friendship relations. Thus, there are reports of friendship in Spain, Guatemala and rural Thailand (cf. respectively Gilmore 1975, Reina 1959 and Foster 1976) which mainly discuss patterns of behaviour among men friends. Again, these authors are mainly concerned with the instrumental value of friendship, such as the value of friends in the provision of aid and support.

The instrumentality of friendship was also stressed in a series of studies carried out in African urban centres by anthropologists of the Manchester School (cf. Epstein 1958, Mitchell 1969). But they stood out from previous works because of their use of network analysis through which they examined, for instance, clientship and friendship and

their relation to migration and politics (for a similar type of investigation set in Malta, see Boissevain 1974).[4]

Network analysis was developed to be mainly used in urban milieu, where the notion of the group as having a community of interests and traceable boundaries (Bott 1971) seems inapplicable. Instead, individuals assemble networks of relationships "with a variability which roughly matches that of [their] role constellations" (Hannerz 1980: 172). The way to study the behaviour of urban residents would then be through the analysis of how their network links are characterized. For instance, Mitchell (1969) proposes the analysis of morphological aspects (e.g. anchorage -- the starting point of the network -- and density -- the extent to which individuals in the network know one another) as well as of the intensity and frequency of network contacts. The goal was still to uncover some type of structured basis underlying the multitude of relationships in urban centres.

Whether using network analysis or not, few of the anthropological studies done in the last thirty years have focused on friendship.[5] Research done in the Copperbelt area by the Manchester School generally concentrated on migration and how friends, among others, helped rural migrants to settle in cities. A more recent study by Papataxiarchis (1988) compares friendship and kinship in two Greek villages. In his analysis, gender

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[4] Network analysis has been used in the United States to study gangs in large urban centres. Whyte's (1955) investigation of streetcorner gangs -- how men come to join and leave them, how leadership is formed and contested -- is one of the early uses of network analysis. Liebow (1967) has studied Negro streetcorner men and their transient friendship networks, vulnerable to the tug of economic and psychological self-interests.

[5] An exception to this is Brain's (1976) compilation of comparative data on worldwide manifestations of friendships. His work is problematic, I think, because it removes examples of friendship relations out of their specific cultural contexts for the sake of illustrating the universal character of friendship.

deeply informs both sets of relations to the extent that friendship is basically a male domain, while women are basically identified with the family. More pertinent to this thesis is Firth, Hubert and Forge's (1970) study of family relations in a middle class sector of London. Friendship is introduced as a counterpoint to kinship, each type of relationship being seen as fulfilling different kinds of functions. But they show that, in both kinship and friendship, there is the prevalent notion that one has freedom to select with which relatives and friends one wants to relate, thus pointing to an area of overlap between the two categories which has generally been underemphasized in the literature.

Firth, Hubert and Forge's work is also one of the first anthropological studies carried out in London. Many of these studies of Londoners conform to the anthropological tendency to focus on family relationships. Thus, there is Young and Willmott's (1957) research on families in East London, Bott's (1971) investigation of families and their networks of social relations, and Wallman's (1984) study of eight households in Battersea. Not restricted to an account of kinship in London, Strathern's (1992) work goes beyond the discussion of ideas about the family to unravel notions of personhood as they have developed in late twentieth century English society. Throughout the thesis, I will be discussing Strathern's ideas on English middle class notions of the person in the light of my own study.

Another tendency in urban anthropology has been to concentrate on working class and poor people, or upon immigrant communities (Sanjek 1990). This is true for the studies done in British urban centres. Thus, the work by Young and Willmot and that by Wallman were carried out in working class areas of London. Wallman's study, together with Wulff's (1988), also deal with ethnic minorities. Outside London, there is a

tendency to study the same social segments: migrants (cf. Werbner 1990 on British Pakistanis in Manchester) and working class people (cf. Hart 1986 and Westwood 1984 for ethnographies done in factories).[6] Firth, Hubert and Forge's study on family relations is therefore one of the few to have focused on urban middle class people.

Both the subjects of friendship and English society have been dealt with extensively by other disciplines. Even though there are few sociological works which focus on friendship per se (cf. Allan 1989, Bell 1981, O'Connor 1992), there is a vast psychological literature which deals with the causes for interpersonal attraction and the development of personal relationships (cf. Derlega & Winstead 1986, Duck 1991). Despite the difference in perspectives, some of these analyses are used in my discussion because they often portray Western common sense ideas. Thus, at times, they will be treated as ethnographic data.

English society has been studied in the social sciences from a variety of perspectives. In this thesis, I will be drawing especially on the work of social historians (cf. Stone 1979) and sociologists (cf. Abercrombie et al 1988) as those that provide useful background information on the specific ethnographic data I discuss.

This is a study about notions of friendship which do not stress the instrumental nor the affective components of the relationship. For the people with whom I worked, friendship puts a premium on personal disclosure because, in the public, the self has to appear controlled and protected. Such aspect of friendship has come to influence family as well as love relationships, so that these are no longer clearly distinguished categories.

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[6] There are urban studies in Britain which also focus on topics other than working class and migrants: material consumption (Miller 1988), family and mental illness (Perelberg 1983), construction of time among elderly people (Hazan 1980), local music-making (Finnegan 1989).

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The relevance of studying friendship lies in uncovering the reasons why personal disclosure has become highly valued for personal relationships (friendship, love and family relationships) in a contemporary capitalist society such as the English.

Defining the setting

The set of people I studied differed in many ways from the subjects of most anthropological research. It did not consist of a community nor a neighbourhood nor any other type of group the members of which shared common boundaries and identities (e.g. workers on a shopfloor, patients of a hospital). Instead, what connected the people studied were ties of friendship of varying degrees of closeness. Some had been friends since they were eight years old, some worked together, and some were friends of friends.

Within this set of people, I focused upon a small number of people, so that I could regularly meet them for interviews and conversations throughout the period of one year of fieldwork. There were seventeen people -- ten women and seven men -- within this core group. Through them I met and talked to various other people (flatmates, colleagues, friends, partners and siblings), often more than once, in situations such as dinner parties and outings at the pub. In this thesis, though, I will be referring mainly to the core set of people, unless otherwise specified.[7]

People's ages ranged between 24 and 30 years old at the time of fieldwork. None of them were married nor had children then, but there were some who lived with their partners. I use the term 'partner' because it was largely employed by people to refer to those with whom they were romantically involved and with whom they cohabited.

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[7] I have changed any personal information regarding the informants that may reveal their identities.

'Girl/boyfriend' was also used but less often. During one year of fieldwork, the state of these relationships changed, with some people breaking up while others moved in together with their partners.

Residences were dispersed all over London; there were as many people living on the south side of the Thames as on the north side. No one lived in East London but there were people living in Brixton, Battersea, Camden and Finsbury Park. People also moved residences during the period of fieldwork. These residences were always shared, with partners, friends or strangers, but no one lived with their parents or siblings (except temporarily when such a move was needed).

Interestingly enough, most people come from other parts of England, having moved to London within the last ten years. In general, people came to the capital to study in university courses, or to work after having finished their degrees. Nearly all of the non-Londoners were born and grew up in the Southern part of England (there are no Northeners). Within the core group studied, only one person was not English. This was an Irishman who came to England when he was ten years old and who has mostly English friends. Every person in this core group is white and comes from English or European white families.

People worked in various occupations. Some had office jobs in which case they were all in small firms, private or state agencies, not oriented for profit (e.g Twin Trading, Camden Age Concern, Environment Council). These people generally held positions as managers and administrative secretaries. Others worked as nurses and social workers. Some were artists while others traded Far Eastern goods. There were also full-time students, both at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Except for two other people who never finished their university courses, all the others had university degrees.

Most people regarded themselves as being middle class. To use the terms of a woman I interviewed, these people are better characterized as 'middle class rebels' for most of them dislike class labelling and many of what they consider to be middle class values. Only four people thought of themselves as coming from working class backgrounds, although all of these acknowledged that their present positions were quite distinct from that of their working class families. They had, for instance, university degrees, something which their parents and some of their siblings did not have. Indeed, the occupations listed above would be taken by sociologists to be a strong indicator of middle class standing. But because social class is the subject of much debate in English society (I devote one whole chapter to it), I have preferred to base myself on people's own perception of their class position.

The reasons for studying this specific segment of English society derive from my previous research conducted in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in which I dealt with urban middle class teenagers and their sociability practices.[8] Although the two studies are quite different in terms of structure and questions, it was my idea to examine a similar social segment in England in what was initially intended to be a comparative research. For various reasons, carrying out such a comparison between English and Brazilian societies was not possible.[9] I maintain, however, a broad comparative outlook throughout the thesis as a form of highlighting ways of thinking and behaving which are specific to the English people studied.

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[8] Along with my study (Rezende 1989), there are many others that deal with this segment of Brazilian society (cf. the work of Gilberto Velho).

[9] I intend to conduct a similar research on friendship in Rio de Janeiro after completing the PhD course and thus produce a proper comparative analysis.

How specific of these English people are these ways of thinking and behaving? Can they be generalized to other English people, of different age groups, social class and ethnic background? My aim in this thesis is not to study a group of people which can be taken as 'representative' of the middle class or any other segment of English society. It is more a case of providing an 'example' of English ways of thinking and behaving. As Strathern remarks about her own study of English kinship,

> none of us [English] leads generalised lives, only specific ones. One therefore always works through concrete instances, and encounters general ideas, values, norms, habits of conduct in particular forms (1992: 24-25).

The same idea can be applied to the relation between the discourse and practice of the English people studied and that of Western societies in general. The former can be a particular form of the latter. It is true that the concept of 'Western societies' is itself problematic for there is no one single 'Western type' of discourse nor of society (Strathern 1992). On the contrary, there is much diversity within and between what are called 'Western societies'. Nevertheless, some of the English ideas and practices discussed in this thesis are similar to those which social scientists attribute to 'the West'. To this extent, my study is also an 'example' of 'Western' ways of thinking and behaving.

Entering the field (see appendix)

Fieldwork began in a somewhat unexpected way in April 1991. At that time, I had been living in London for one and a half years, since the beginning of my postgraduate studies. I had had the experience of living in a hall of residence, where half of the residents were British undergraduate students in their first year away from parental home.

I had interacted more closely with British students in my second year in London, through the seminars in which I was participating.

Some of the English people I had met in this initial phase were familiar with my research topic and showed interest in talking to me about it. Among these was a woman who on more than one occasion repeated that I should interview her, since not only did she regard herself as fitting into the category of 'English, middle class and resident in London' but she would also like to discuss with me her views on friendship. She thought as well that there were friends of hers who would also talk to me, and in this way I would have an initial set of people from which to depart. Her offer to become an 'informant' was readily and happily accepted and I began conducting interviews in April 1991.

This was how I had planned to proceed, through what some sociologists have called 'the snow-ball technique'. In getting to know one person, I would ask to be introduced to friends willing to be interviewed and from there on, coming to know a network of friends. This method differs considerably from that of community studies on which anthropology tends to be traditionally based. It is a methodological choice directly connected to the fact that my study is set within a large-scale urban environment. The snow-ball technique also implies in general the use of the concept of network and of network analysis.

But I depart from this approach because I was not interested in studying friendship in the terms of network analysis. That is, I did not want to discuss the notion of friendship derived merely from my observations of how often people saw each other, what they did together, how people provide support to one another and of the variance of contact, intensity and help within the network. Rather, it was my intention to study

practice as associated with a discourse of friendship. Thus, data on frequency of contact, exchange of aid, among other things, was to complement the set of ideas that the people with whom I talked held about what friendship should be and how friends should relate. Network analysis, with its usual focus on observing behaviour and not on studying discourse and concepts, was limited as an approach for the research aims I had set to do.

Because I was interested in people connected as friends, I chose to focus first on the topic of friendship and then observe how it related to geographical areas, reversing the usual procedure of anthropological studies. Instead of selecting a community to study the friendship relations within it, I preferred to begin with people who were friends and then examine whether they tended to live or work in the same area of London. Moreover, from what I had learned in the eighteen months previous to fieldwork, it was my impression that, among middle class people, living in the same neighbourhood was not a decisive factor in the establishment of friendships, a notion that was confirmed by the people with whom I talked.[10]

My fieldwork also contrasted with traditional anthropological studies in that I did not live with the people studied. For one thing, the set of friends itself lived scattered in different areas of London. And, as with neighbourhood, I had also learned that one can share a house or a flat with complete strangers and that the relationship could be anything from hostile to very friendly. Thus, I could not pre-arrange a situation in which English people took me as a friend so as to conduct my research within the traditional framework of participant observation. There was no coherent community, geographical or otherwise.

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[10] In contrast, some studies such as Young and Willmott's (1957) and Bott's (1970) point to a greater connection between friendship and neighbourhood among the working class.

The difficulty in applying participant observation when studying large urban environments is not new. Basham (1978) remarks that, as it was fashioned to be used in small-scale community studies, participant observation had to be readjusted to urban research. Thus, in what he calls microethnographies within cities, it is seldom possible to share in all the aspects of the group's life as one generally can in a small village. It is rare, for instance, to a find a neighbourhood in a metropolis in which all of its residents work in the same place, which makes it difficult to follow what happens in the workplace. Or one can choose to study a particular work environment, as Kondo (1990) has done in Tokyo, forsaking to a great extent life outside work. In other words, participant observation in urban studies is carried out within clear constraints.

I therefore concluded that beginning with interviews would be the way of establishing initial relationships with people and, with time, I could become in some way part of a network and do proper participant observation. The fact that I was studying friendship in London was used by my first informant to introduce me to her friends and it was adopted by all the others when referring me to their friends. Their awareness of my purposes was a fact to be handled throughout the fieldwork, a problem that I discuss later in this chapter.

There was a set of topics I wished to cover in at least three interviews, if not more, with each person. I would begin by eliciting comments about friendship in general, such as their definition of friendship, the different types of friends, how friendships were formed and developed, the difficulties and problems with friendship. Then there were questions on cross-sex friendship, generally discussed in comparison with same-sex friendship and love relationships. Crucial to all of these were life-history questions which would enable me to observe how friendship definitions and patterns changed and how a

notion of the person was related to different life-stages. The order in which these subjects were tackled often varied from one person to another, as it was fundamental to allow enough flexibility for individual ways of thinking. And, of course, new issues arose after the first meetings, such as the importance of trust as a defining element of friendship, which then required to be unravelled.

I was also interested in acquiring general information about their life-style, views on politics and other public matters, their relationships with family, so as to place into context notions of friendship and of the person in the discourse studied. Thus, if our first encounters were more or less formalized into interviews, the following meetings came to assume a greater character of conversation, in which I took part as much as they did and where there was no pre-selection of topics.

The frequency and the duration of these meetings depended solely on their availability of time and their willingness to see me. Because nearly everyone in the group of informants worked during the day, I generally met them in the evening for an average of two hours of interview. In later occasions, when meetings became drinks at the pub or meals at a restaurant or at their place or mine, conversations would normally last for at least four hours. The location was always decided by them and varied between pubs or coffeehouses and their homes.

With most of these people, our meetings transformed after the first couple of times. By then, they had talked about many of the topics I had selected as well as acquired more information about who I was and a feeling about how we ourselves related. It thus became possible to call them, arrange to go out for drinks or for a meal and carry out conversations about a multitude of subjects. With three people only did I maintain an interview format in our encounters, mainly because there was less rapport.

Thus, most of our meetings flowed quite easily, in a friendly atmosphere. I was somewhat surprised by their frankness in talking with me about difficulties they were having with friends, partners and family on a first encounter. But I was told afterwards in more than one occasion that it is often easier to 'pour one's heart out' to a stranger who is willing to listen but who will not become part of one's life, which in many ways was the role I played.[11]

Indeed, I was caught in a double-bind: because I was researching friendship, I was rarely seen as a person genuinely interested in developing friendship with the people under study. From the very beginning, I was perceived as a researcher, doing my work, and this role was never dissociated from my person (I discuss perceptions of work and how they affect friendship in chapter 7). Even the way I came to meet them was different from how most people meet other friends. I would phone them once they had been contacted by friends who had already talked to me, in order to explain better what I was doing and to set a meeting. Thus, because the relationships I established in fieldwork were first and foremost associated with my research work, they did not develop into friendships. Only after telling people that I had finished fieldwork did some relationships begin to change.

The way relationships were established in my fieldwork raises, in turn, an important issue: was this the best way to proceed? More explicitly, should I have found another way of meeting people without revealing that I was researching friendship? Initially, this idea would have never crossed my mind, since I had done a similar type of research with teenagers in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and the results were satisfactory. But

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[11] For reasons such as this, Agar (1980) has referred to ethnographers as 'professional strangers'.

after ten months or so, I was unsure if I had structured fieldwork in the most productive manner. Soon afterwards, though, I realized that the option of concealing my research interests would have limitations as well, if not more serious ones. More important is the ethical issue raised if I were to mask my intentions.[12] Not just because of possible professional repercussions, I would be putting the whole research at stake, for the trust established through the reciprocal disclosure of personal information is one of the most fundamental elements of friendship as perceived by these people. Were I to befriend them, not telling them that I was researching friendship, I would be betraying their trust.

These problems, however, do not detract from the validity of researching friendship among English middle class people in an urban environment. If my opportunities for conducting participant observation were not as great as in studies of so called urban villages, they were nevertheless sufficiently frequent and productive to support or raise questions about the material based upon discourse. And these limitations themselves become informative about friendship within this social segment. When relationships are firstly established because of work, they generally do not become more than short-lived friendships. It is only when the basis of the relationship is no longer (solely) work but fundamentally sociability and personal disclosure that friendship can be firmly developed.

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[12] There have been many debates on this topic, both within sociology and anthropology, and basically there are factions who condemn concealment and other who do not.

Outline of the thesis

The thesis can be seen as divided into two broad parts: the first deals with aspects of the discourse on friendship while the second focuses more on the practice of friendship. But, in all chapters, there are elements of both discourse and practice.

The first half of the thesis discusses ideas and notions of friendship. Chapter 1 presents the definition of friendship given by the people I studied. The elements which define friendship in general and the specific types of friends are analysed, with close attention to the notion of the person revealed through this discourse. One of the defining features of friendship is personal disclosure, and yet many people feel that 'to be oneself' with friends is only an ideal. Thus, I examine why personal disclosure is difficult and yet so important.

Chapters 2 and 3 discuss respectively the distinctions between the categories of friends and partners and those between friends and family. In Chapter 2, the issue of gender is introduced and I examine how same-sex friends are perceived in comparison with cross-sex ones. For instance, why is sexuality considered an obstructive element in cross-sex friendships? If partners are thought to share greater intimacy and closeness than friends, at the same time love relationships should be modelled on the trust and personal disclosure basic to friendship. Thus, are these categories so easily distinguished? A similar question is raised in Chapter 3. In it, I present how people relate to parents and siblings today. The quality of these relationships is thought to be affected by the phase of life one is in and, because of this view, I examine how people think of their adolescence. In the present, the relationship between parents and children and that between siblings are regarded as being relationships between adults and equals. At times, parents and siblings are 'like friends'. But what are the features which keep friends and

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family apart? Again, this is a distinction which can often be vague and I discuss the overlap between the categories of friendship and family.

Chapter 4 discusses how class background is regarded to affect relationships and, in particular, friendships. In order to do so, I analyse how class is perceived and talked about and what people take to be 'middle classness'. To recognize the effects of class background on ways of thinking, behaving and relating to other people is an extremely problematic issue. The people I studied strongly believe in the individual's freedom of choice regarding ideas and behaviour. And yet, they also discuss the extent to which 'upbringing' and class background can shape a person's way of being. Thus, they present conflicting views on the relationship between individual and collectivity.

The second half of the thesis covers friendship practices in the private and public domains. Chapter 5 looks at the flatmate-based home and at the relationship between flatmates. Flatmates may be friends, in which case the maintenance of privacy and personal space can become a problem. This is an instance in which the issue of the boundaries of friendship comes to the fore. When sharing the home with friends, how does one balance the elements of sociability, attention and support given to friends with one's need for privacy? Despite the need to create privacy, the home is an important setting for sociability between friends. In Chapter 6, I pay special attention to dinner parties and the food and drink exchanges between friends. For the people I studied, gift-giving was rare, whilst cooking for friends was very frequent. Why is commensality so meaningful for friendship? The issue here is one of showing the time and 'effort' people invest in their friendship.

The significance of putting time and 'effort' in sociability practices with friends becomes clear once we understand how people relate to their work. Chapter 7 discusses

people's perception of work and the relationships they establish at the workplace. Friendships do not generally thrive at work, because work is taken to embody values which are opposed to friendship. In many senses, this is the opposition between public and private, with work being associated to the former and friendship to the latter. But the two spheres are not equally valued, and stronger positive values are attributed to the private domain, with its personal relationships (one of which is friendship). One could then ask: why is the pub, which is part of the public, so important for the English? As I analyse in Chapter 8, the pub is, for the people I studied, a major setting for sociability between friends. Through the reciprocal buying of drinks, values of the workplace tend to be reversed in favour of the value placed on friendship. Moreover, the alcohol consumed in pubs fosters personal disclosure between friends, which thus alters behaviour in public. The pub becomes an instance in which the self may be disclosed in a more personal/private manner.

I conclude with a brief discussion of sociological views of modernity and postmodernity. We live in the times of flux, fragmentation and behaviour purely based on individual choice, as many sociologists say. But is life really so bleak? I suggest that, for the people I met, friendship is a relationship which stresses the values of the private -- intimacy, informality and familiarity -- against those of the public -- impersonality and formality. In so doing, friendship appears to counterbalance the transience and anonymity of a cosmopolitan environment such as London.

CHAPTER 1.

THE DEFINITION OF FRIENDSHIP

Julie answered me promptly by saying that a friend is somebody she 'can be herself with', with whom she doesn't 'have to put an act on', somebody she 'can rely on'. She said she tends to go through 'melancholic moods' and it's important to have friends to rely on during these phases. A friend is also somebody who is 'trustworthy' and 'loyal' to her.

This answer came to the question I posed to all the people interviewed during my fieldwork: how does one define friendship? Despite minor variations, the replies I received were incredibly similar to each other to the extent that they often employed the same expressions. These replies revolved around two major themes, sociability and personal disclosure, which express the fundamental values on which the discourse on friendship is structured.

The value placed on sociability is demonstrated in the frequent description of friends as people one likes to be with and whose company one enjoys. Sharing a sense of humour as well as interests and tastes is considered important for sociability among friends. Having common interests, tastes and sense of humour are also seen as representing a similar way of thinking, an affinity which is necessary in the process of personal disclosure.

Personal disclosure was most often expressed in the definition of friends as people 'one can be oneself with'. Personal disclosure is a gradual and reciprocal process which requires communication, honesty, understanding and trust. Such disclosure promotes loyalty and support, both material and emotional, between friends.

These characteristics, sociability and personal disclosure, are differentially associated with different types of friends. Friends are mainly distinguished between 'close friends' and 'friends'. The imprecision of the latter category is such that one woman I interviewed, Janice, was unsure of using the term 'friend' to call those who are not close

friends.[1] 'Close friends' are those whose company one enjoys and with whom one can 'be oneself', that is, this is a friendship in which there is both a great amount of sociability and personal disclosure. With friends who are not close, there is much less exposure of the self, and sociability becomes the major focus of the relationship.

These two characteristics refer as well to different stages of friendship. In recently established friendships, sociability is especially valued while personal disclosure is yet still to be developed. In close friendships, it is supposed that personal disclosure is achieved to its fullest extent, so that friends can reveal their 'real' selves to each other.

The stress on personal disclosure is such that it becomes an ideal for friendship in general. It is an ideal not only in the sense of a value which governs behaviour (Silver 1989) but also in the understanding of an ideal picture which does not always correspond to the practice of friendship. Personal disclosure is thought to reveal the 'true'/private side of the self, which is emotive and little controlled. Such lack of control is viewed as contrasting with the acting, public self, which is polite, confident and in control. Because the emotive self is both positively and negatively valued, its exposure is a source of concern for many people I talked to.

The ideal of personal disclosure is one of the main features of the discourse on friendship which I examine in this chapter. I begin by presenting the different categories of friendship and the particular relationships classified under each type (e.g. school

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[1] The ambiguity fostered by taking one type of friend, close ones, as the standard for friendship is not particular to my material but has been discussed by Allan (1989) as the problem in working with 'the native's point-of-view' of friendship in Western societies. For the definition given to friendship often refers to what is considered a close friend, but as a category, 'friend' includes more than this specific type.

friends as 'close friends'). I then analyse in greater detail the values of sociability and personal disclosure in order to discuss the difficulties with the latter.

Close friends and the others

When people spoke of friendship, they distinguished between two major categories of friends: 'close friends' and 'friends'. There is a third group of people — 'acquaintances' or 'people with whom one is friendly` — which is placed in a liminal position; they are neither strangers nor friends. This classification is based on greater or lesser personal disclosure and commitment to the relationship. Thus, to the extreme opposite of 'the close friend' stands 'the stranger' as the person whom one does not know and has no relationship with.[2]

Friends met in secondary school are commonly found in the category of 'close friend'. In general, close friendships established in school are remarkably homogenous in terms of social characteristics such as age, sex, regional origin and social class. Close friends from school are of the same sex because schools in England were mostly segregated by sex at the time the people I studied were of school age. These school friends also come from the same area of the country, if not from the same town. Another feature these school friends share is the perception of having similar class background, for the type of school one goes to — private or state, which used to be subdivided into grammar and comprehensive — is thought to be associated with class.

Together with school friends, friendships started at college or university on the whole constitute the category of 'close friend'. Making friends at university or college

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[2] Giddens (1991) remarks that such opposition is a feature of modernity. In the past, friends stood against enemies, rather than strangers, who are part of present day cosmopolitan settings.

does not always mean that people studied in the same course. Often the initial acquaintance was established through other friends or through participation in societies or student unions.

Like school friends, close friends from university tend to share the same age and class background but not necessarily the same gender. In fact, it is in university or college that most cross-sex friendships are formed. Also, friends from university often come from different areas of the country, since most people leave their home towns and parents' home to pursue academic education. It is common to find that many friends who studied together outside London now live in the capital. They might not have moved to this city at the same point in time but, once in London, the friendship tie has been maintained.

There are however other situations in which friendships are fostered and develop into close relationships. Martin and Kevin have known each other since they were eight years old from their activities as scouts and, although they went to different schools and spent some years apart, they consider each other close friends. Victor's closest friends are men from the neighbourhood he used to live in, whom he has known since he was ten years old.

The second type of friend -- simply called 'friends' -- is a residual category in the sense that it groups people who are regarded neither as a 'close friend' nor as an 'acquaintance'. It can combine friendships of different duration and intensity and, consequently, as a category it entails breadth and some vagueness. For instance, in this group are friends met in school or at university who have never become 'close friends'.

Under this class of friends are also those met in sports activities. Kevin includes as his friends some of the men from the basketball team with which he played in

university. The participation in music events is another instance that fosters friendships of this sort. Patrick, who plays the saxophone, has many friends he has made from playing in gigs and in parties.

Another group of people who fall under this category are friends met through other friends. Some of these can become close friends but, more frequently, they mainly extend one's network of friends. It is common that one meets friends of friends in socializing situations such as dinner parties and dance parties. Or, one can also meet people through one's flatmates who then become friends of one's own.

Flatmates provide an interesting case for the classification of friendship. On the one hand, there are many instances of close friends who at some point in time have been flatmates. There are also people who have moved in together with others they did not know and developed a close friendship. However, it is more common to find that flatmates who were previously unacquainted are not regarded as 'close friends' but are simply perceived as 'friends'. At times, they might not even be considered as such and become only 'flatmates'.

Much the same can be said about people met in the workplace. Some of them are described as 'friends' while others are just people one works with. The latter can be referred to as 'people one is friendly with', a category often associated with role relationships as Kurth (1970) argues. Being friendly with work colleagues entails overcoming the formality of the role, while not necessarily leading to the establishment of friendship.

The category of 'people with whom one is friendly' is not constant in terminological reference, for some people also subsume within it the category of 'acquaintances'. The term 'acquaintance' is variously used. For instance, Kevin says he

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has a large network of acquaintances, people whom he will greet in the street if he meets them, for instance, but with whom he would not arrange to do any activity together.

Perhaps one can say that, aside from the category of close friends, friendship classification is marked by a certain degree of imprecision and vagueness. A person who in one situation will be referred to simply as 'a person I know' can, in a different context, become 'my friend'. I have heard from some of the people to whom I talked that I was not perceived as a friend to them, but rather as a researcher with whom they were friendly. And yet, when meeting friends of theirs in the context of a pub, for instance, I was introduced as a Brazilian friend.

In general, friends are distinguished according to the degree of 'closeness' in the relationship. This is a notion similar to that of 'socio-emotional distance' put forward by Schneider (1968) to discuss American kinship. 'Socio-emotional distance' is explained as the greater or lesser feeling of identity, of emotional warmth and understanding experienced by relatives. In the discourse I am analysing here, the counterparts of these feelings are those related to personal disclosure and commitment among friends. Personal disclosure and commitment are greater in the category of 'close friends'. Because of the strong presence of these elements, 'close friendships' tend to survive circumstantial changes and to be, as a consequence, long-lasting relationships. Other friends are often context dependent so that the relationship is easily affected by a change of circumstances.

The values of sociability

> For Anne, a friend is first of all somebody she likes to be with. A friend
> is also somebody who understands the 'whole of her' and whom she
> understands, something which requires having common interests.

Common to all categories of friends is the notion that sociability is a fundamental element in friendship. 'Friends are people one likes to be with' -- this was a definition I often heard during fieldwork and which expresses the value placed on being in the company of friends. Because sociability is perceived to be especially significant in the initial stages of friendship, when trust and personal disclosure are little developed, I want to examine in this section what is seen as important for the enjoyment of friends' company.

When one first meets other people, there is an 'instinctive feeling' of liking them or not; it is a 'gut reaction', as some people explain. One is attracted to different people for various reasons. Some people think that having eye-contact is something which attracts them to others, for it is considered to indicate self-confidence and trustworthiness. Others find that they are attracted to 'good-looking' and intelligent people.

Together with an initial reaction of liking each other, one begins to discover what the other person is like. It is a mutual process of 'sussing each other out', as Victor says. Among the things learned in the first phases of the relationship, finding out that one has interests and tastes in common with the other is considered important in friendship.

'To share interests and tastes' is a statement which covers a wide range of things. It often means that friends use leisure time in similar ways -- going to the pub, to the cinema, to the theatre, dancing, doing outdoor activities (walking, camping, playing games), travelling, listening to music, inviting friends over for dinner, reading. Within those activities which friends do together, it is important to have similar choices and preferences of style such as shared taste in types of films, plays, music or countries for visiting. Likewise, friends should have common taste in food, dress and house decoration. They should also agree in their political and ethical convictions.

Having interests in common implies that friends will also like to talk about the same topics. When conversation flows easily, without a perceived need to control its direction, it becomes a sign of growing friendship. By contrast, when one is first introduced to another person, conversation is frequently restricted to talking about 'the weather', an expression which denotes the generality and impersonality of the discussion. People often remark that, with close friends, they may spend hours talking about 'nothing in particular', that is, hopping from subject to subject. It is implied with such a comment that conversation between close friends is more important as an instance of sociability, of enjoying each other's company, than as an occasion for the discussions of particular topics.

That friends should share all these interests and tastes is an ideal of friendship. Some friends will obviously have more in common than others. The significance of sharing interests and tastes lies in its being indicative of a similar way of thinking and a common outlook on life. Having similar preferences becomes a measure of compatibility and a necessary base for mutual understanding, a fundamental element in the initial phases of friendship.

Having common interests and tastes also indicates shared class background, a link particularly stressed by Bourdieu (1984) with respect to French society. However, this association was seldom made explicit by the people I talked to because of the difficulty in admitting how much class background influences one's life (an issue fully developed in chapter 4). But class background is thought to shape ways of thinking and behaving, consequently affecting interests, taste and consumption patterns.

Since sharing interests and tastes entails a compatible way of thinking, it means that friends will enjoy doing things together and being in each other's company. Enjoying

each other's company will often mean having 'a good time' and having a 'laugh' with friends. But these expressions, which I frequently heard, often proved to be very vague, for what does a 'good time' imply? Not every one agrees about what is considered funny and humorous. Thus, in order to enjoy being with each other, friends need to have a common understanding of these notions.

Having the same sense of humour is explained by some to be influenced by class background. Allison shares with Victor a similar class background (they both come from working class families but nowadays interact mainly in middle class circles) and feels that they can laugh about certain things that others would not understand. Janice, on the other hand, finds it difficult to have the same sense of humour as men have, something which she feels hinders her friendship with them.

Sense of humour is not just marked by background and gender but also by age and stage in life. Catherine remarks that humour was not as important to her in adolescence as it is now. I would suggest that this is so because humour contrasts with the work ethos which is dominant most of the time in these people's lives. Indeed, Fox argues that "in settings which are supposed to be serious it appears that the 'play-frame' is not allowed to obtain" (1990: 442).[3] The humorous mode then tends to be subordinate to the serious mode of making sense of reality, which is dominant. Being humorous thus becomes a form of reversing the serious, disciplined attitude people feel is needed at work.

In fact, I was surprised to find so many references to how significant a sense of humour is in friendship or how people enjoyed having a 'laugh' with friends. Among the things one shares with friends, sense of humour was often singled out to receive a

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[3] According to Fox (1990), humour can be introduced in highly structured settings (e.g. staff meetings at work) when there is a breach in the serious mode, as way of repairing the latter.

meaningful separate stress. Humour is important because it is a way of talking about people (others or oneself) which should not be taken seriously. Sarah, a woman I interviewed, explains how joking occurs among her female friends. For example, she says, when one of them compliments the other, she replies not by saying 'thank you' but by putting herself down a little. Joking is, then, not just about telling jokes but also about making fun of others or of oneself. Such a mode of communication is, in turn, part and parcel of sociability, of having fun with friends.

Humour is especially valued in situations of sociability when people do not know each other well. Whether at the pub or at dinner parties, a group of people in which not all are close friends will tend to maintain conversation above the 'personal' level.[4] Being humorous in this case expresses the self in an introductory manner, revealing *some*thing of it while asserting at the same time that it is not to be taken seriously.

Thus, humour is not a straightforward matter. People can misinterpret it and see it as 'offensive'. According to Martin in one of our conversations, if one does not understand the humorous tone of a comment, one may mistake the intention of such a remark and 'take it personally'. Thus, one may feel 'offended' in the sense of being hurt. Victor also talks of a similar problem regarding humour. On one occasion, he was talking in a humorous mode to a friend and, after a while, she became upset with him, for she felt that Victor was not taking her 'seriously'. Here, Victor's humorous tone became interpreted by his friend as a lack of consideration for her person.

Humorous comments are opposed to 'serious', 'personal' remarks. It is important to note that the meaning of 'personal' is not fixed but depends on context. As such,

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[4] In a similar vein, Wikan (1990) says of the Balinese that humour is a way of 'hiding their hearts'. For a general cross-cultural overview of humour, regarding both its stimuli and responses, see Apte (1985).

'personal' refers not to particular contents or topics of conversation but more to the boundaries between self and other, limits which change according to the relationship between self and other (e.g. an acquaintanceship or a close friendship). Family matters, for instance, may be taken as a personal topic if they are discussed at work whereas they would not be regarded as such in a conversation with close friends. In one of my first interviews, the woman with whom I was talking recounted her adolescence in terms of her relationship to friends and family, discussing as well the beginning of her sexual life. When in the end I asked her if she had found the conversation to be 'too personal', she replied 'not at all'.

'Personal' tends to have a negative connotation in the sense that this category is used mainly when the boundaries between self and other are crossed out of context or without the person's permission. Humour can be a way of trespassing such boundaries. When humour is not interpreted as such, there is the danger for it to be taken 'personally', to become 'offensive'. It is seen as 'offensive' because it is perceived as not taking into consideration the limits of the 'personal' for the recipient.

Therefore, having a similar sense of humour entails not only that people will laugh about the same things but also that they share an understanding of where the boundaries between self and other lay. This means that they will not misunderstand each other and take or give 'offence'. Sharing a sense of humour thus implies sharing a sense of what is 'personal' and of what cannot be 'personally' transgressed. It also means knowing when and with whom one should be humorous or personal. In a relationship strongly based on reciprocal exposure of one's self, it is necessary that friends have such an affinity in order to synchronize their process of disclosure.

> For Christine, a friend is somebody you can be yourself with at the end
> of the day. You can be silly, laugh, cry and there is no 'pretence'. There
> is no need to 'protect' any part of yourself. It has to be reciprocal, though,
> or else you'll 'expose' yourself on your own. Listening is also part of the
> relationship. She summed friendship up with the terms 'trust' and
> 'honesty'.

One of the premises of friendship for this group of English people is the reciprocal disclosure of the self between friends. With friends, one trusts that, in being oneself, one will be understood and accepted. With acquaintances, there is the feeling that some parts of the self have to be 'protected' because one cannot rely on their reactions.

'Being oneself' with others is a feature of friendship which is considered to be specific to a certain type of friend. As I have said, the discourse on friendship can be separated to refer to two groups of values, one relating to commitment and personal disclosure and the other to sociability and enjoyment. The latter is attributed to all types of friendship while the former pertains more to the category of close friends.

These different values are associated as well to distinct stages of friendship. According to the people I talked to, when one first meets a friend, personal disclosure and commitment are not as important as the characteristics of being sociable, pleasant and humorous. Generally speaking, intimacy and trust are thought to develop with time. Thus, establishing the grounds for such exposure is a fundamental process in the development of close friendship.

The initial period in friendship is that in which one 'sizes each other up' and gradually reveals information about oneself. This is the phase of finding out if acquaintances have interests, tastes and sense of humour in common. It is by acquiring such knowledge that acquaintances become friends and continue to build up a 'mutual understanding' of each other.

Information about oneself is disclosed in tandem, both topically and on the level of emotions. In Susan's and Daniel's view, people talk about themselves in terms of what the other talks about, creating in so doing the same level of intimacy between them. A 'gush of emotions' at the beginning of a friendship only scares people away, Susan thinks. Thus, reciprocity in the gradual establishment of personal disclosure is a requirement in the process of becoming close to a friend. Otherwise, as Christine says, 'you'll expose yourself on your own'.

Thus, as mutual understanding between friends grows, communication with the other also develops. Honesty and sincerity are much valued in communication, especially as friends discuss their own relationship. It is thought that when one is upset, annoyed or hurt with a friend, one should confront one's friend about it. Julie says that she can shout at friends and be alright afterwards. Likewise, Allison talks about 'telling friends off', crying together and making up later. But confrontation can be difficult, as I will show later in the chapter.

Together with communication, bodily contact as well as sharing information about bodily process increase as friends become closer. Because the body is viewed as constitutive of the self, personal disclosure entails not only the revelation of emotions but also the sharing of bodily functions (e.g. belching in the presence of friends) and of information about the body (e.g. talking about period pains).[5]

The general pattern among the people I studied is that touching -- whether kissing, hugging, patting or hitting -- between friends increases as the relationship develops (I reserve the gender specific patterns to be discussed in the next chapter). Kissing as a way

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[5] Shilling (1993), Giddens (1991) and Featherstone and Hepworth (1991) discuss how in contemporary society the exterior of the body has come to symbolize the self (e.g. young, healthy and fit bodies symbolizing active, energetic and confident selves).

of greeting cross-sex and female friends is considered by some to be a recently acquired bodily habit, particular to people of middle class background who have had more exposure to the Continental style of life. Although some think this habit is becoming widespread, not everyone I met greeted friends by kissing.

Such progressive bodily contact departs from a position in which strangers or acquaintances should keep their bodies apart. Thus, when accidentally touching a person, one promptly apologizes by saying 'sorry' or 'excuse me' (this is not a feature typical of the English but also of American and Northern European peoples). This attitude implies a notion of personal space which is guarded against invasion as well as being gradually opened when knowledge of the other grows.

Alongside with touching, there is a whole area relating to inner bodily processes which was spoken about with reference to friendship. For instance, Allison once said that she could get drunk with her close friends and 'piss' over them and they would still talk to her the next day. On another occasion, whilst I was chatting to Catherine, Liz came into the room and asked what were we talking about, to which Catherine replied: 'I was telling her how much you fart' and laughed. By contrast, when in the presence of non-friends, Catherine herself dislikes hearing comments, for instance, about menstruation. Patrick finds that he is becoming less tolerant with not so close friends, so that if, for example, they are picking their noses, it will 'get to his nerves'. Daniel was the most explicit of all in remarking that the more he knows and feels comfortable with friends, the more at ease he is to fart in their presence.

I shall make my point clear by bringing in a comparative perspective. As an urban middle class Brazilian, I was brought up with the notion that things like belching and farting are always to be avoided in 'public'. The notion of public here is all inclusive and

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refers as well to family, friends and partners. In other words, there are certain bodily functions that one does not share with anybody else.[6] In this sense, I was somewhat surprised to hear and see that, among these English friends, there appears to be no such a barrier. Paraphrasing Daniel, one of the signs of a closer friendship is an ease in performing most bodily functions in the presence of friends.

In order to achieve ease with friends, time is considered by many people to be a necessary factor to solidify the relationship. According to Celia,

> What is the test of friendship or what is the test of real love is time, because the people that love you are the ones that have known you over the years, they know you better, they've seen you really grotty and they're still there. Whereas the new friends haven't so... they haven't proved themselves.

She gives the example of her friendship with a woman that went through a severe crisis -- this friend had an affair with Celia's boyfriend -- which led to their not seeing each other for three years. They are now in the process of re-establishing their friendship and

> it's very relaxed 'cause we sort of know each other quite well, we've been through this whole rift and we feel that we don't have to try hard any more 'cause that person's seen the real shitty side of you and they still want to know you.

The importance of time then is that it allows the person to share various experiences with a friend, and this helps to build up knowledge of the other. The reasoning is that one comes to know the friend in many different situations which in turn makes her or him more predictable. In becoming predictable, a person is considered to become more reliable as well, for one can rely on behaviour that may be anticipated.

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[6] For example, the idea that certain bodily functions should not be performed in the presence of others seems to exist as well among the Piaroa, a people of the Orinoco Basin. According to Overing (1986), bodily excreta are regarded as potent and dangerous and people living together, who are able to contaminate one another, are responsible for preventing this danger.

Thus, one develops trust in the behaviour of friends, particularly with regard to friends' acceptance of one's self.

With long-standing close friends, the friendship is perceived to be so well grounded on mutual understanding and trust as to survive irregular and infrequent contact. Janice says that she is able to 'plug in' with friends who do not live in London and whom she may not see for five months at a time. As Allan (1989) explains, the fact that close friendships can endure despite infrequent contact demonstrates their special quality.

Similarly, in long-standing close friendships, having common interests is no longer as important as it was in the beginning of the relationship. People's interests will often diverge with time, but the trust and common understanding of each other are thought to outweigh the effects of change.

In sum, trust is a key factor in personal disclosure between friends. It is necessarily reciprocal and it develops with time. Through increasing knowledge of friends, one comes to rely on their behaviour towards one's greater exposure of the self. It seems therefore that, in establishing a friendship, one comes to accept *all* -- feelings, thoughts and bodily fluids -- that comes from friends. Or ideally, this is the case.

Personal disclosure as an ideal

> The demand of 'opening yourself up' to the other which personal trust relations now presume, the injunction to hide nothing from the other, mix reassurance and deep anxiety (Giddens 1990: 143).

According to sociologists, trust is established in situations of uncertainty (Silver 1989), specifically in those in which there is lack of information about someone or something (Giddens 1990). Because of this element of unpredictability, trust necessarily

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involves taking risks (Luhmann 1988). With reference to friendship, because personal disclosure is predicated on trust, which is built on an incomplete knowledge of friends' behaviour, it becomes the source of the anxiety Giddens speaks of. Such anxiety was expressed by most of the English people I talked to. Being oneself with friends often is stated to be an ideal people strive to achieve. What is at stake is whether friends will accept all that comes from oneself. With this goal, a problem emerges which seems to lie at the roots of their notion of the person.

I begin by presenting what type of people are thought to be more interesting as friends. Certain standards of behaviour are valued more than others. For instance, 'confident' people are perceived by many to be more attractive as friends.[7] One woman thinks that people want as a friend someone who is well-balanced, in control and funny, instead of someone who says 'I am confused, I don't know what to do". Being 'self-confident' means having eye-contact when talking to a person and behaving 'normally' in social situations, that is, being sociable, in control and conforming to certain standards of behaviour.[8] Celia, a woman I interviewed, explains being confident as "being able to talk about what you do with confidence, making it sound better than it is". In a slightly different version, Anne thinks that "if you're self-confident... you're going to talk about yourself to people and not worry about what they might think". She then adds: "I think everybody's got a confidence problem, I'm sure...".

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[7] The value placed on 'confidence' as a personal quality is regarded to be a middle class value, as I will show in chapter 4.

[8] Although confidence and trust can have similar meanings (Giddens 1990; see Luhmann 1988 for a conceptual distinction of the terms), in this discourse they are used differently: trust refers to a feeling that binds two people whereas confidence is mainly about how one relates to oneself, in other words, about self-confidence.

As Anne indicates, the notion of the 'confident' person becomes a model for behaviour which people often feel they do not meet. What it means is that any insecurity or confusion one may feel about personal matters is dealt with not as normal to human beings but as a fault or weakness, as something which hinders one's relationship to other people. This idea is particularly clear in Peter's views about personal disclosure:

> I think when you start talking about difficulties you might be having, you are taking a chance, you're opening yourself, *exposing your vulnerabilities* and if you were to get any kind of rejection then it would be a very heavy blow. But when somebody comes to you with their problems, you're not losing anything, you've got nothing at risk on your side... (added emphasis).

Here, 'opening yourself' when there are problems is equated to becoming vulnerable, defenceless in a way, susceptible to 'rejection'. Once more, to reveal personal troubles and afflictions might damage an image of the person -- summarized by the notion of confidence -- which increase the risk of being not just criticized but, more so, of being 'rejected' by others.[9]

This fear of rejection is acutely present in Celia's account:

> As soon as you start getting unpleasant, difficult or emotional, they see the real side of you and they're going to be put off with you. And that's the same whether it's a lover or a friend, you fear exposing yourself because you don't want to lose their love. You fall in love with what you... whether it's a man or a woman or whatever, you fall in love with what you see or with what you think you see or maybe with what you want to see.

Not only is there the idea that people need to be perfect to be liked and loved but there is also the notion that there are many 'sides' to the person, some more 'real' than others. Celia speaks of the *real* side of you; others have referred to friends as those who 'know

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[9] Lutz (1985,1988) contrasts this notion of becoming vulnerable when exposing one's emotions -- which she takes to be a broader, Western notion -- with that of the Ifaluk, for whom expression of emotion is a mark of maturity as well as a way of avoiding illness.

all the sides'. The person is then a being with many sides, implying that if one side is exposed there are surely others which are covered, hidden from public display (the private in this sense is almost inaccessible, to be seen only by the most close and intimate of relationships).

This notion is made especially clear in the concern expressed by most people I talked to not to mix different types of friends in one single occasion. The problem lies in the risk of letting some friends see sides of oneself which were shown to other friends only and, more importantly, which may appear to contradict the knowledge friends have of oneself. Similarly, some people think that sharing a flat with a friend may harm the relationship by revealing aspects of the friend's self one prefers not to know.

Together with the idea of a many-sided person is the belief that one of these sides is real whereas the others, by implication, are not or not to the same extent. Likewise, when people say that with X or Z they can be themselves, it is suggested that in other situations or with others, they are not being their 'own selves'. There is a notion that the emotive, 'vulnerable' side of the person is more real than the surface of confidence. To present such a confident exterior, there is the feeling that one often has 'to put an act on', as Julie says in the opening quote of this chapter. Or according to Christine in the passage introducing the previous section, one has 'to pretend' which means, for instance, not being able to be silly, cry or laugh when one wants to.

Here there is a perception of the self which is always performing roles and managing face work -- a self which basically acts.[10] Christine implicitly proposes that such a 'pretence' is usually maintained during the day, when one is generally at work and

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[10] What I take here to be a culturally specific notion of the person -- perhaps not entirely particular to the English only --is the axiom of Goffman's sociological work, as in his *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1959).

not at home. Such a distinction is frequently equated with that between the public and the private, so that the public self is that which perform roles in opposition to the private self, which is the 'real' or 'true' one. Goffman (1959), speaking in a theatrical language, refers to these domains as, respectively, the 'stage' and 'backstage' of the self.

The discussion about 'public' and 'private' is problematic for the present study because the native discourse analysed here does not explicitly resort to these concepts. Furthermore, as I will examine later in the thesis, taking these notions as part of larger Western discourse, I would suggest that 'public' and 'private' do not stand so much as a dichotomy but rather as more of a continuum, with instances in which 'public' and 'private' coexist more closely such as within the pub -- a public place where one may expose more of the self.

Suffice it to say at this stage that, among the men and women I met, there is the perception of at least two different contexts: one in which the person reveals his or her 'real' side, his or her true self (the emotive one), and another (or others) when the person exposes other sides not as true to the self (those in which emotions and bodily functions are controlled). There is the view that the latter is a more polished/polite presentation of the self ('pleasant, funny, in control'), whereas the true version carries imperfections and insecurities, and indeed it can be unpleasant, difficult, 'grotty', 'bolshie'.[11]

The 'real' side of the person appears as mostly emotive, which is something considered to be both positive and negative. As Lutz argues, in Western discourses on feeling, "emotion is, at one time, a residual category of almost-defective personal

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[11] The idea that, in being polite, one is hiding one's feelings and keeping a certain pretence figures in the work of Jane Austen, such as in this passage from *Sense and sensibility*: "Marianne was silent; it was impossible for her to say what she did not feel, however trivial the occasion; and upon Elinor therefore the whole task of telling lies when politeness required it, always fell" (1983 [1811]: 76).

process; at others, it is the seat of the true and glorified self" (1988: 56). The positive

evaluation of the emotive side of the person is shown in the stress placed on the ideal of

'being oneself' with friends.[12] Emotions are negatively valued when they are seen as

making the person difficult, unpleasant and with little self-control. In this sense, emotions

are associated to the body (hence, the personal disclosure of both emotions and bodily

functions) in opposition to the rationality which is linked to the mind. Emotions are

viewed as wild, revealing what is natural/not-cultured in the person (Lutz 1988). Because

emotions are somewhat wild and can get 'out of hand', they may provoke behaviour

which is lacking in consideration for other people. Emotions are thus particularly

problematic because they can make people transgress the boundaries between self and

other.

It is the perception of the 'wild within', as Corbey (1991) puts it,[13] which brings

forth the need for an exterior display of self-control in the form of confidence and

politeness. Politeness is especially important for it refers to the masking of one's

emotions for the sake of others, to keep from imposing one's feelings on others (Brown

and Levinson 1987). Politeness protects not only the others but also the self. In keeping

the self from imposing on others, one does not run the risk of being unpleasant and of

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[12] Cheal (1988) and Schneider (1968) show, respectively, that Canadian and American discourses on the family place the emotions of love and affection at the root of family relationships.

[13] Corbey (1991) presents an interesting discussion of how Freud's theories are built on an internalization of the stereotypical wild other. This wild other, as found in nineteenth century imagery of the 'primitive man', was impulsive, lacking self-control and intellectually deficient. "Civilization was only possible on the basis of steering and regulating, or even repressing man's rude primary impulses"(Corbey 1991: 41).

losing the respect of others. To remove the polished/polite surface subjects the person to the possibility of not being liked or loved by others any more.[14]

In view of such notions, it is understandable that some people fear that in revealing their insecurities and emotions to friends, they may impose on their friends and endanger their friendships. Again, Celia is particularly explicit about this concern:

> I turn to my close friends in times of trouble and nine times out of ten, I'll load off and then apologize "God, I'm really sorry, I shouldn't be doing this" and they always say "no, that's what we're here for, don't worry, bla, bla..." But you can't help worrying. Where that comes from is a fear that they are not going to like you any more or that you're going to become a burden to them, you know... You've always got that feeling that friends are friends as long as you're being nice, pleasant, as long as everything is going well in your life.

For Celia, there is the fear that in exposing oneself completely, one may jeopardize the love of friends. This concern is especially acute when she feels that she may be imposing on her friends:

> When I feel that people do reject me is when I just become boring and I start to tell my problems at the wrong time or when I'm not really that upset about it and I'm not taking into consideration the fact that the other person might not have been in the mood or they just don't feel like being that heavy or they're just not interested.

Thus, the fear of putting a friendship at risk appears when one feels that one is not taking into consideration the feelings of friends. In times of need, one is justified to impose on friends and ask for their support, as will be discussed later. Otherwise, one should consider the other person first.

I have talked about the fear that, in showing the true, emotive self, one may impose on friends and thus affect the love that one receives from them. A related but

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[14] Among the Hawaiians, as Ito (1985) shows, it is the quality of the affective ties which defines or negates self. Lapse of consideration or disregard for a person is taken as a negation of his or her self and of the person's existence.

different type of worry expressed by the people I studied refers to the ideal of honesty between friends. By being honest, there is the danger that one may hurt friends. Honesty is about being oneself, revealing one's thoughts and feelings.[15] But the connotation given by most of those who discussed honesty in friendship is a negative one. Honesty becomes communicating how one feels about friends, especially when the relationship is perceived to be going through a troubled phase. The problem lies in making the subtle distinction between a justified complaint about friends' behaviour and a selfish claim on the other.

Peter finds honest communication to be one of his greatest difficulties with respect to friendship. When friends do things that upset him or hurt him, he does not manage to tell them how he feels. He fears risking an important friendship which has many positive aspects. His concern is also one of not appearing too selfish, as if he did not think of others. The problem is that, by delaying the discussion of the problem, resentment builds which can further affect the relationship. But he then said that eventually things are 'worked out in some way or the other'.

Anne thinks that honesty is a positive ideal in friendship. She would like to receive more 'critical feedback' from her friends than she normally gets. But she also has difficulties in being honest with them for she worries that she might not express herself well and would, consequently, hurt her friend's feelings.

Anne and Peter displayed a much greater concern with honesty than the other people I talked to. As I was to learn much later in my fieldwork, they were having problems with a third friend, whose behaviour had been upsetting them for a long time.

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[15] In my conversations with these English people, I was often told that they were being 'honest' with me, that is, that they were revealing to me personal information. As some people explained, I was not seen as a friend and yet I was not expected to 'judge' them either, because of my role as a researcher. Thus, they could feel free to be 'themselves' with me.

When I first talked to Peter, he spoke of his general difficulty with honesty and asked me how would I behave in such situations. Anne, in turn, repeatedly mentioned how she would like to be completely honest with friends. I only realized much later that such a stress on honesty derived from a concrete problem they were experiencing which I was told about only five months after we met. Even then the cause of the difficulty was not disclosed to me. The friend in case was someone I knew as well, which suggested to me that Peter and Anne were not sure about trusting me with this information. They, on the other hand, explained their reserve as coming from the fact that their feelings about the matter were not completely clear to them. One way or the other, their attempts to discuss the problem with me, albeit in a general form, highlight their trouble and dissatisfaction with their capabilities of dealing with honesty.

If not everyone I talked to mentioned a similar difficulty, confrontation between friends was perceived by most people as complicated. Martin, for instance, feels that he takes a long time before he can discuss anything that friends have done to upset or hurt him. But trying to repress emotions, he argues, is not easy because they accumulate and grow more intense so that they end up 'spilling out' and getting out of hand.

By and large, difficulties in communication with friends were held to be the source of most problems in friendship. Misunderstandings were common reasons for estrangements and even break-ups. I was told many times and by different people how their actions had been misunderstood by friends who had not given them the chance to explain their behaviour. In these cases, the friendships were often terminated because the episode revealed the friend's unwillingness to understand one's reasons for 'misbehaving'.

Thus, being oneself with friends refers not just to presenting the self unpolished and unprotected. It also means being sincere and honest about the friendship relation itself. In both cases, there is the fear that the relationship will suffer from such exposure because friends might not like to learn about all there is to disclose. It is because of such fears that there is such a great value placed on trust and a stress upon the time required to develop it. Trust helps to mitigate the concern and fear that friends will not accept what is shown of the inside -- not only through the exposure of the 'real self' but literally through what comes out of the body. Because there is trust between friends, there is the belief that love comes before judgement, that friends are accepting and supportive.

The obligations of friendship

> Peter separates the characteristics of friendship into two blocks: one involving mutual trust and the other involving obligations. Communication between friends is important and understood as part of having mutual trust. The obligations involved mean giving support in all situations.

Friends, and especially close ones, are expected to provide support, both emotional and/or material, in times of need.[16] Because to assist friends in time of need is considered to involve some 'effort', it is in such occasions that the boundaries between self and other are particularly thrown into question.

Support can be of various sorts. Lending money and clothes is quite common among the people I met. Helping friends when moving residences (which can involve packing, taking things by car, cleaning and painting the new home) is also frequent. For people who come from other places in the country, having close friends in London was

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[16] Willmott's (1987) study focuses specifically on friendship and patterns of support, drawing on data from working class and middle class families.

fundamental in providing support at the time of their arrival in the city. For instance, Catherine moved to London in her early adolescence. Much later, when Liz, who was a close friend from school at her home town, decided to live in London, Catherine chose to share a house with her. Some time later, May, another close friend from their home town, came to London and went to live with Catherine and Liz. When friends are going through emotionally difficult periods, support generally means making time to listen to their problems, or trying to distract and cheer them up. It also implies that friends receive 'love' and not 'judgement'.

Like the process of revealing oneself, requiring help from friends is perceived as coming with time and trust. The more a friend knows about oneself, the more one trusts that this friend will give support to one's problems. Such a belief is particularly clear when asking for support is seen as misplaced. In this case, telling friends about one's difficulty is seen as imposing on them or 'putting [friends] in a position'.

Sarah gave me good examples of 'being imposed on', which are context specific. At a party, if people she does not know well start telling her they have a drinking problem, for instance, she feels 'imposed on'. Not only is the occasion considered inappropriate -- one should have fun at parties -- but there is also the perception of 'being used as a repository for people's emotional difficulties'. Sarah also recounted to me an episode in which she was the one to 'put others in a position'. She had argued with her sister at a party and, because at the time she had been feeling depressed, she ended up by crying. Her friends 'cooled off' considerably because she was not supposed to have been so emotional at a party. She wanted her friends' support but she recognized that a party was the wrong context to ask for it.

Sarah gave me another instance of 'being put upon'. This case involved a female friend (who at the time was not on good terms with Sarah) and her boyfriend, who was also Sarah's friend. This man approached Sarah one day and said that her friend was having an abortion. Sarah was upset with him for she did not understand why he had 'put her in that position'. In her view, he had other closer friends with whom he could talk. Moreover, she felt it was something very personal, relating mainly to her female friend, who had not told Sarah of her problem.

Making the distinction between asking friends for support and imposing on them can be difficult for some people. Liz always tries to be cheerful with her friends, even if she is depressed. She keeps her problems to herself in order to 'spare' her friends from her unhappy state. She says, she'll sleep and wake up better. When Liz made this comment, she was questioned by her friend May who feels that close friends are supposed to be people who listen to one's problems.

The expressions 'imposing on' and 'being put in a position' speak of the hesitancy with which involvement of the self with an other is viewed. When the relationship between self and other is not a close one and there is a history of limited personal disclosure, one is not willing to go out of one's way for friends. Moreover, when friends 'put one in a position', it means invading one's space and requiring something which one is unwilling to give.

The issue here is one of the negotiation of the boundaries between self and other. Or rather, the feeling is that someone might be pushing one's limits. Hence, the predominance in this discourse on friendship of feelings of anger, annoyance and being upset, all of which are emotions which refer to the imposition of others upon self and the

frustration of self's will by others (Lutz 1988).[17] Similarly, the frequent references to feelings of resentment, offense and being hurt point to situations in which others are regarded as lacking in consideration and attention for one's own selfhood.

This is why the maintenance of close friendships is regarded as a dangerous matter and as demanding 'a lot of effort'. For Kevin, it is really a matter of 'investment'. One is expected to make time for close friends and, in a society which thrives on the notion that time is money, this is indeed a dear thing to ask from friends. One should 'stick one's neck out' for close friends, relying on the fact that they will do the same in due course. With these friends, it is hard to excuse oneself on the basis that one 'can't be bothered'. This is 'real friendship', Peter says:

> you'd know that you would go out of your way for them if they were in trouble, if they needed help, the situation where you would help them you would have to suffer a little bit or a lot yourself. You would to that, because the degree of your affection is such that you'd be denying something yourself if you didn't help them (...) and knowing that, having confidence that they'd do the same for you.

Thus, there is a clear notion that the person lives his or her 'own way' and that any change of course is denoted by expressions such as 'suffering', 'being bothered', 'being imposed on' and 'being put in a position' (which implies that before, one was not in any position). There was little talk of 'enjoying' helping friends. What varies is how 'going out of one's way' is perceived, whether it is justified or not. When help is seen as warranted, it is both because the relationship is important to oneself -- by denying support, one would damage the affection received from friends -- and because one trusts that friends will 'go out of their way' if one needs them to.

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[17] For analyses which show 'anger' to be an emotion which affects the group rather than the individual, see Lutz (1988), Rosaldo (1980) and Schieffelin (1985).

> Janice feels that she has very few friends whom she would call 'anchor friends'. These are friends that have 'survived' various phases, with whom she is able to go without seeing for four months and 'plug in' when they meet. These are people with whom she'll have a good time even if, before she sees them, she felt that she 'couldn't be bothered'. These are friends because of their 'intelligence, sense of humour, warmth, understanding' and her deep emotional bond with them. With them, 'love' comes before 'judgement'. These are also people she can at one moment hate, but then get over it afterwards.

Friendship throws into relief how the limits between self and other are negotiated. The process of disclosing oneself to the other develops as one feels that the other is willing to acquire such intimacy and that one will not be imposing oneself on the other. With acquaintances and recent friendships, protective measures (keeping politeness/presenting a polished self) have to be taken when revealing personal information, so that one does not impose on others and is not imposed upon by others. There is a strong notion of one's individuality and of limits which, ideally, are made more flexible only when one desires so (such as with close friends).

The individuality of persons is a notion common to most Western societies. According to Lukes, it has as its premises individual autonomy -- one's thoughts and actions are not determined by agencies outside one's control -- and privacy -- "an area within which the individual is or should be left alone by others to do and think whatever he chooses" (1973:59).

Individualism is said to be an old notion for the English (MacFarlane in Strathern 1992), dating back to the thirteenth century. In MacFarlane's observations, individualism resides on a view of "the person who can set him or herself off from the proximity to and relationship with others, and is thus created in being separated from the constraints of relationship itself" (Strathern 1992:13).

The perception of such individuality is clear when people talk of the English as being cold and 'reserved'.[18] This is thought to be particularly the case in London, where people withdraw even further into themselves. In smaller places, it is said, people can be more outgoing and friendlier. On the whole, however, the English, as Susan explains, are very reserved, caged even. This is why they take a long time to open themselves up to friends. But when they do, it is said that they become friends 'for life', so to speak.

Such a reserve appears particularly in relationships such as friendships, which are based not just on sociability but also on 'being oneself' and 'making efforts' because of friends. This is because, within this discourse, the English person has a clear notion of his or her individuality, of the limits between his or her self and others and of what he or she is prepared to do for others, something which is frequently brought to question in friendship.

In view of this reserve, the notion that friends should 'be themselves' with one another becomes an ideal that is not so easily attained. But the value placed on putting aside politeness and confidence and revealing one's emotive side to close friends is a strong presence in the discourse on friendship. It expresses the idea that friendship, once established, proves itself by placing love and the emotive self unconditionally before judgement and the controlled and controlling self.

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[18] Within Britain, the English are thought to be more reserved than, for instance, the Scottish.

CHAPTER 2.

GENDER AND SEXUALITY IN FRIENDSHIP

When gender is introduced into the discourse on friendship, all sorts of difficulties seem to appear. Firstly, there is the perception of gender differences which distinguish the friendship among people of the same sex from that between people of different sex. At the same time, there is much vagueness about these gender differences. Secondly, these cross-sex friendships are considered to be difficult not so much because of gender differences but essentially because of the potential sexual attraction women and men can feel towards each other (this is the discourse of people who are mostly heterosexuals). Sex can turn friendship into a sexual and even love relationship but the distinction between friends and lovers is not a clear-cut one. These are the main issues I want to examine in this chapter.

Western common sense treats friendships between women and men (especially for those who are heterosexuals) as complicated because of the potential sexual involvement between friends. "Can men and women be friends or does sex have to get in the way?" -- this was a question featured in the advertisement for the American film 'When Harry met Sally...' (1989), which was about the friendship between a man and a woman and its eventual development into a sexual relationship. The idea that cross-sex friendships are potentially fraught with problems caused by sexuality finds also consensus in the social psychological literature (cf. Booth and Hess 1974, Winstead 1986).

At stake in the perceived complication of sexuality is how it is dealt with in friendship, a relationship which *a priori* is not thought of as sexual. Friendship and sexuality are categories historically and culturally specific. For instance, Luhmann (1986) remarks that, from 1700 on, friendship became detached from love because of 'the

obstructive factor of sexuality'.[1] Foucault's (1978, 1988) work focuses extensively on how sexuality in the last three centuries came to acquire the preeminence it has today as a discursive subject. Taking a cross-cultural rather than a historical view, Caplan (1987) attributes to Western modes of thought the isolation of sexuality from other domains (e.g. political, economic, religious).

It is important, therefore, to understand what sexuality entails in order to make sense of the distinction made between friendship and sexual relationships. These are forms of relationships which, albeit distinct, do overlap to some extent. The view that men and women are potentially attracted to each other reveals as well ideas about gender which further affect how friendship is perceived. But it is important to note that views on gender present a lack of clarity. My task in this chapter then is to analyse notions of gender and sexuality and their effect on friendship.

Before proceeding, though, it is necessary to mention that most of the material I have on the topic of gender and sexuality comes from conversations with women. Men talked about these subjects much less. Some women, like Allison, Celia, Janice and Susan, were more outspoken than others but on the whole this was a subject extensively discussed by them. Women may have had more to say on gender but they were also talking to a female researcher, a fact which might have inhibited the men to some extent. It is worth remembering as well that this is a group of women who belong to a generation brought up under the influence of feminism. Their discourse is strongly informed by the feminist agenda and, consequently, gender is often on the forefront of their discussions. Adding to this the perception that women devote much of their attention to thinking about

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[1] See also Mosse (1985) for a discussion of the separation of sexuality from friendship.

relationships (an idea discussed below), the result is that they have more to say about the differences between women and men. Thus this is a chapter which expresses mainly the views of women.

General views on gender

In order to understand how gender affects friendship, it is necessary to examine people's perception of gender differences. By 'gender', I mean those cultural constructs regarding the distinctions between women and men. In Strathern's words, 'gender' refers to "the ways in which the distinctiveness of male and female characteristics make concrete people's ideas about the nature of social relationships" (1988: ix).

Gender differences were the subject of many discussions with some of the English women I met. These conversations tended to focus basically on how men and women were perceived to live and experience their relationships, whether in friendship or in love relationship. On the whole, the discourse on gender is marked by the issues of how definite and established gender differences are and to what extent one can change gendered patterns of behaviour because of one's will. The discussion of both issues reveal a great deal of ambiguity and vagueness in people's views on gender differences.

Both women and men discuss gender in a relational manner. That is, women are always described with reference to how men are thought to be and vice-versa. The relation between women and men is not seen so much as one of opposition (e.g. women being emotional and men being rational) but rather as a matter of difference in degrees (e.g. women being more emotional than men).

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Women consider the interest in talking about emotions to be more of a female feature and a stronger trait of friendships among women than of those among men.[2] Most women think that men need to be encouraged more than women to discuss their feelings. But they do not regard men's feelings as being different from theirs; rather, the distinction is one of how they are expressed.

Women find that they talk more than men about anything relating to the self. Feelings, activities, relationships, gossip, these are subjects women like to discuss amongst themselves, Allison says:

> That men as far as I can see in their, like, natural conversations, will talk about things much more than they would talk about other people and or about themselves and things, and women (...) with women friends, a lot of the conversation will be about ourselves, what we're doing, what we're thinking, how do you feel about somebody else, gossip. But also, not just gossip but centred on us (...) Say we were discussing John MacCarthy being freed, if I were discussing with a lot of my women friends about [him] being freed, it would be: 'oh, God, when I saw the headlines, I cried' or 'oh, wasn't it brilliant'(...) It would be things like that. If I were discussing it with a man, it would be much more likely 'yes, it's very good but now they've taken another hostage'(...).

It is not just that women among themselves converse about different things as compared to what men are imagined to do. Women can also talk about subjects that interest both men and women (e.g. the release of hostages) in a particular manner (e.g. being more emotive). But women can change their way of speaking when talking to men. As the quote above indicates, the same topic receives a more emotional and involved treatment among women whereas, in the presence of men, women's tone is more detached, more

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[2] On the whole, the women I talked to presented similar views to those depicted in the social psychological literature on interpersonal relationships. (cf. Aukett, Ritchie & Mill 1988, Rose 1985, Winstead 1986). According to this body of work, same-sex friendships are said to differ according to gender, with women friends emphasizing personal disclosure while men prefer to do activities together.

intellectual. Allison refers to a common association in Western thought, that between

women and emotion (Lutz 1988, MacCormack 1980), but notes as well that women can

be intellectual/rational too.

Because women are thought to engage themselves more on any issue concerning

the self, they are considered to be very analytical. Susan finds that women analyse people

and relationships more than men do:

> There sometimes do seem to be certain [gender] traits that really stick out
> much more, especially in ways of analysing things. I've noticed that
> especially say... but then I know men who do it too. But I think women
> delve into things in a much more complicated way, rather than glossing
> over [them] (...) Women will spend ages analysing, I don't mean just
> emotional things, but other types of things too.

Thus, women are seen as very analytical, and such an ability is perceived to involve more

than 'just emotional things'. Women like to analyse how they and other people behave

in general. But Susan recognizes as well that some men can analyse things in the same

way as women do.

Women regard themselves as better observers of people than men. Women are

more attentive to the gestures, likes and dislikes of other people. Because of this

characteristic, women think they elicit more from men in terms of their feelings than

male friends are able to do.[3] Women give more attention to other people and thus see

themselves as the nurturers in relationships.

Women also find that they worry more about the future development of love

relationships, whereas men seem to think more of the present. Allison is critical of such

a female attitude:

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[3] This is also the conclusion reached by social psychologists (Rose 1985; Aukett, Ritchie & Mill 1988), who go further to say that men derive greater support and companionship from cross-sex friendships than women do.

> Another difference which I've been noticing much more recently is that women, and (...) I'm not sure what I feel about this because politically it is very unsound, that men are much better... they take what's happening there and then as the most important thing, what is going on there and then, that's it. With women, and I think it's the same for a lot of my women friends, I think it's quite difficult to focus on there and then. A lot of the time it's thinking about what maybe will happen next week (...) and in terms of relationships, it's like progression towards something, although I don't think that very many people -- many women -- are aware that they want to progress. But men are much better in taking the present as enough.

Allison takes her opinion as 'politically unsound' because she holds strong feminist stances which value the way women, and not men, are. But she feels that women should try to have the same attitude as men have, which is to take the present as enough and not be concerned with the future.

Such a concern with the future tends to be associated with the view that women do not treat sexual relationships as casually as men do. According to Allison, after having slept for the first time with a man, women wake up and think of what will come next. Men, with their orientation to the present, are thought to have 'one-night stands' much more easily and to take them in a more casual manner (hence, the term casual sex). For the women I met, casual sex is part of the past, of an adolescent phase in which experimenting with sex was frequent and enjoyed for its own sake. Nowadays, they find that one-night stands are very unsatisfactory, besides being risky because of AIDS.

The problem women have with casual sex is that, for them, sexual attraction is generally accompanied by feelings of affection and love. Susan claims that, for women, sex interests more because of its potential emotional significance rather than for the sexual gratification itself.

> It's usually men who feel like that [you can have sex just for sex's sake].
> I haven't met any woman who seems to behave like that. Although some women do talk on that level, that, for example, 'you can have a good fuck'... (...) This is the other thing -- men and women talk very

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differently about sex: a lot of women are not that interested in the full intercourse. They are much more interested in just being held and sort of loved.

Women may talk about having sex for its own sake but, more often, they feel 'bad' about having casual sex. Reflecting upon her own experiences, Catherine thinks that her one-night stands usually happened when she was depressed and that, through sex, she really wanted to feel loved. But in the end, she always felt 'degraded' and guilty. Liz explains the feeling of guilt as resulting from the Christian tradition based on images of women either as the Virgin Mary or as prostitutes. Because of these associations, Liz thinks women feel compelled to justify their sexual behaviour as a means to create an attachment, instead of taking it as an end in itself. In spite of such reflection, Liz still finds it difficult not to feel guilty after having one-night stands.

On the whole then, women think of themselves as devoting more attention than men to all matters related to the self, paying special care to their relationship with close others, partners or close friends. Women observe more, analyse more and talk more about these subjects. It is not a coincidence that, during fieldwork, women, more than men, spent more time with me (a female researcher) discussing friendship and love relationships and how they are affected by gender. Women's discourse also values positively what are seen as female traits. Analysing and talking about oneself is something which Celia judges to be a privilege women have over men. Even though women may criticize the feelings of guilt they have about casual sex, to be more emotive about sex is not considered bad either.

How do men think of themselves? Referring to those I met, many presented a similar view to that of the women. They argued that men do not think or talk as much about their emotions as women do. Kevin says that English men have a narrow range of

emotions, but he himself prefers those who are more emotional. By 'more emotional', he means men who will discuss their feelings about their relationships with girlfriends. Some men also find that they can talk more about their emotions with women, rather than men, friends. Two of the men I interviewed said they were amazed at how much they were telling me about themselves. They understood such ease as resulting both from my being a woman, who likes to discuss things of the self, and a researcher, supposedly neutral, non-judgmental and interested in listening.

Victor agrees with the idea of men's relatively lesser interest in emotions, but he does not accept the opinion that men are worse off because of this characteristic. He does 'get an ear' from his male friends when he wishes to talk about his feelings. Daniel always sought his friend Tom's company when he wanted to discuss his feelings about any topic, whether work or love relationships. Likewise, when Tom broke up with his girlfriend, he felt very depressed and thought that Daniel, who was away on a six-months trip, would be the person to understand him better.

Some men prefer to keep any discussion of their love relationships personal to their partners only, rather than sharing such feelings with male friends. Susan's partner at the time of fieldwork would often complain to her because she talked to her female friends about their problems, whereas he thought these matters should be reserved solely to their own conversations.

Just as most men can express their emotions in friendship, there are also some whose attitude towards sex is not as casual as women think it is. They preferred not to have sex if not romantically involved with the person. Victor feels that nowadays he finds it more difficult to have casual sex and that age has made him feel a bit guilty of having sex just for sex's sake. As with women, having casual sex is more a part of the past,

whereas in the present these men are mainly concerned with (long-term) love relationships.

These men portray themselves as less different from women than the women consider them to be. They are more emotional than women think they are and they also talk about their personal lives and emotions with their men friends.[4] It is important to note that these are men who were brought up at a time when the feminist movement was gathering support and disseminating its ideas. These are men who grew up with the questioning of traditional sex roles in relationships and with changing models of masculinities (Segal 1990). Thus, these men have a perception of themselves which diminishes their difference from women.

Most people explain gender differences in terms of distinct socialization. Men and women are regarded as having similar feelings but different socialization. Thus, men and women talk about their emotions in distinct ways. Socialization explains for some women why, for instance, some men are not sexist (e.g. because they were brought up being aware of feminist issues) or why some are more analytical about their emotional life. A few others voiced an opposite opinion which holds that gender differences are in a way 'natural', from the 'species'. Susan speaks of masculine and feminine 'essences' which are not wholly attributed to socialization, even though she has difficulty in defining what these 'essences' are.

If both men and women perceive themselves to be different from each other, they are unsure of how different they are. Susan, as mentioned, speaks of 'essences' but also

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[4] Wright (1982) reports that, according to social psychological research, long-standing close friendships are face to face, emphasizing personal disclosure, for both men and women. This is also Swain's (1989) conclusions.

thinks that, if she were 'intellectual' about this matter, she would conclude that 'gender doesn't exist'.

> Sometimes there are very stereotypical types of men and women but a lot of the times I feel gender is quite a wishy washy thing. It isn't divided between sexes in an obvious way. Most people seem to think now that you can meet a man who is incredibly feminine and a woman who is incredibly masculine... I haven't really thought it through properly because a lot of the traits that I immediately say 'Oh, that's a really feminine thing to do, that's a really masculine way to behave, that's I suppose from my conditioning(...)

The issue here is the extent to which one's perception of gender is determined by socialization, or conditioning, as Susan terms it. For example, Janice's views on gender roles are very much based on feminist principles. At times, though, she finds herself repeating actions which her mother used to do -- 'cooking for men, cleaning up after men'. For her, it is hard to find the balance between loving and caring for a man and 'not falling back into all those things which I feel I've fought bloody hard to get away from'. Allison regards this difficulty as being one of 'cognitive dissonance'.

> I was seriously brought up so that if I went around to dinner at somebody's, I should insist on doing the washing up. And the men just sat at the table and things. And now I just won't do it. And that sounds like a trivial example but it's actually quite difficult. If you're brought up to think that you've got to be this nice person to everybody, (...) and if you suddenly start thinking that you're not being nice to people because of an intellectual decision, it's difficult to live with that cognitive dissonance.

Allison thinks that men can have a similar problem when trying to overcome an upbringing based on gender stereotypes (e.g. when men try not to be 'sexist').

What this discourse reveals is that gender roles may be much more ingrained than some people would like to recognize, despite their efforts to alter gender differences based on feminist principles and beliefs. Being brought up as a woman or a man, with definite ideas of how these gender identities should be, instills in people ways of thinking and behaving which are not easily modified. The view that it is difficult to change the

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way one was brought up to think and behave is not particular to notions of gender but refers to more general ways of thinking and behaving, which are seen as shaped by upbringing (see chapter 4). At the same time, people believe in the notion of the individual as having freedom of choice regarding ways of thinking and behaving. Thus, the belief in individual freedom of choice exists in conflict with the notion that upbringing influences to a great extent people's thoughts and behaviour. As a result, feminism as a body of ideas on gender differences and identities is adopted by many people but the degree to which it affects gender roles in practice is open to question.

In the discourse on gender, the person is seen as a gendered being to a great extent. Sarah makes this notion very explicit when she says that cross-sex relationships are relationships between women with female thoughts and men with male thoughts. But at times a greater value is placed on the individual per se. For example, when discussing problems they have with their partners, women are unsure as to whether these difficulties can be explained by gender or by individual (i.e. personality) characteristics. Here they suggest that gender identity is only one of other possible identities a person may take on (Riley 1988).

Gender in friendships

Because gender is perceived to explain differences between men and women, same-sex friendships are considered distinct from cross-sex ones. Same-sex friendship between women is also regarded as dissimilar from that between men, although this is thought to be more of a difference in degree than in quality. Cross-sex friendships are thought to be especially marked by the potential for sexual involvement between friends.

Female features are thought by women to be particularly manifest in their relationship with other women. Sally feels there is a feeling of sisterhood among women. Their relationships with men are often the subject of 'girlie chats'. Such all women conversations are occasions for sociability, frequently involving the consumption of alcoholic drinks. They tend to be permeated by a sense of humour which makes fun of women's behaviour towards men and which also treats men as objects by joking about their sexual qualities. Some women feel that, in these 'girlie chats', they imitate what men are said to do when they are together -- talk about women and sex.

In turn, men think they discuss their sexual life with male friends in the same way in which they imagine women to talk about sex with their female friends. That is, they can both joke about and discuss seriously the details of their sexual lives. With close friends, men feel they can converse about any sort of topic, from politics to emotions. They might also enjoy doing things (e.g. sports activity, going to the cinema, playing music together) together. But the general view promoted in the social psychological literature (cf. Aukett, Ritchie & Mill 1988, Caldwell & Peplau 1982, Davidson & Duberman 1982) that male friendships involve little personal disclosure was not found among the English men I met.

In fact, the general discourse on friendship was much the same for both women and men. They both placed equal emphasis on values of sociability and personal disclosure. Men displayed the same reasoning as women did regarding the process of exposing the self: the need for mutual understanding and trust in order to enable them to be themselves with male friends.

Both men and women perceive that, in the presence of the other sex, their behaviour changes. Some men feel particularly uneasy and unsure of what to say to

women who are not close friends. But, on the whole, women discussed their altered behaviour in the presence of men to a greater extent. Some women find that they adapt their behaviour to how men are supposed to be (e.g. less emotional). As shown before, Allison claims that, with men, women can talk of certain subjects (e.g. the release of hostages) in more emotionally detached manner.

Despite the different ways of responding to men and to women, most people feel that they can relate to cross-sex friends. Many people say they have close friends of the opposite sex. Catherine and Janice are the only persons who expressed great difficulty in having cross-sex friends. For them, differences in gender reveal distinct ways of being which affect their capability for personal disclosure in cross-sex friendship. If they cannot 'be themselves' with men, friendship with them will be compromised.

Catherine has difficulty in making male friends because she feels that, when she is with men, she is always working on the image she is conveying in order to impress them. She is never 'loud' or 'raunchy' with them, whereas that is how she would describe herself normally and how she behaves with women friends. She thinks that being 'loud' does not correspond to a male ideal of femininity and, therefore, she does not present herself as such to men. With women friends, she does not have to worry about impressing them and can show more of her true self. Because she cannot 'be herself' in men's presence, she feels she cannot have them as friends.

Janice also finds that relating to men as friends is complicated.

I don't feel as if I understand... No, understand is the wrong word. Empathy isn't there with men. I think with women I feel an automatic ease that I don't have [with men]... Oh, God, I don't feel difficult around men. I just don't find it easy to plug in, in a sense. I think with a lot of women it's far more easy for women to share a sense of humour because a lot of women's humour is about relationships with men and the ridiculous things that women do and the stupid things that men do, women being able to laugh at men...

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Janice finds little empathy and ease in relating to men in general. She thinks that they do not share the same sense of humour. She feels that the body language between them is controlled and constrained, whereas with women friends she can have a very 'physical' relationship, as she explains:

> With men, I don't feel the tactileness is there at all. If I were talking with a woman or out with a woman friend then I'd be very easy, whereas if I'd be with a man, I'd be quite self-conscious about my body language and not touching and being very aware of sexual connotations and misunderstandings and that sort of thing.

She finds that she does not trust men because of the element of potential sexual attraction. For Janice, men do not interest her except as 'lovers'.

However, most people find that, in spite of the perception of gender differences, they are able to form friendships, even close ones, with the other sex. They state greater difficulties in making cross-sex friendships in the past. According to Celia,

> I didn't really mix with boys at all until I was probably about 13 or 14, when I started going out to discos and things like that. And I suppose I didn't really see them as being the same. I didn't relate to them really, except as somebody to fancy and go to parties with, but not as male friends at that age. I don't know whether girls do at that age anyway. When I was about 16 and started going on holidays on my own, I started perceiving them as just another person, like girls were. I think I was quite threatened by them, because I went to a very strict Catholic convent school and was really taught that men were evil, you have one drink and you're pregnant, you know. So I think I was quite defensive about it.

Thus, whereas later in adolescence, men were taken to be 'just another person', at first, they were not seen 'as being the same' as women. Likewise, I have heard from some men that, in the early adolescent phase, they used to regard women as being of a 'different species'. Martin, for instance, used to feel uneasy with girls, not knowing how to behave or what to say. Having such a notion of men and women as distinct beings, with different ideas of personhood, was then considered to be an obstacle for cross-sex friendship.

Studying in single-sex schools is believed to foster such view since not only is the other sex absent but, as people say, its segregation is carried out for specific purposes - - not to distract pupils from their studies. The cause for such a distraction is reputed to an emerging sexuality, which, in Celia's case, takes on a negative image because of the Catholic character of the school. Socializing with men would inevitably lead to sexual relations and pregnancy, Celia recounts. If the nuns' precepts may seem too far-fetched, they shared with the philosophy of other single-sex schools the view that the interaction between adolescent girls and boys was permeated by sexuality and, as such, would harm their performance in school.

Although the change in views about gender is perceived to begin in the last years of school, it is actually consolidated when one leaves the family home to go to college or university. At this later stage, Celia began to think of men as not just a person like herself but also, and predominantly, as 'a sexual thing'.

> There was more sex around, in terms of more sexuality in the air at that age, I think, than there is now. There was a lot of swapping around of girls and blokes, you know... At that age, I was much more aware of men as sexual things, whereas now if I meet a man, I am much more likely to approach him as a friend... At that age there was a lot more flirtation. You related much more sexually at that age... or maybe it was just more obvious, I don't know.

For Celia then, cross-sex friendship in late adolescence was difficult because interaction with men was very flirtatious, so that men were firstly seen as sexual partners rather than as potential friends. Such heightened awareness about sexuality was considered by Celia to interfere strongly with the formation of cross-sex friendships in a way that is not thought to happen today.

This view is also shared by other people, whether they studied in single-sex schools or not. The first years away from the parental home are often marked by partying

and having casual sex. For Allison, having sex was like getting drunk and both were great fun to do. Today, she finds it difficult to have sex outside the context of a more permanent relationship.

The present phase would thus be one in which sexuality does not interfere as much in cross-sex friendship. Sexuality has become bound with emotional ties and most people say that they rarely have casual sex. But sexuality is still perceived to affect friendship. In fact, when talking about cross-sex friendship, sexuality was often a more complex matter than gender differences. Dealing with the effect of sexuality on friendship is complicated for most people, as I discuss next.

Sexuality in friendship

People find that, in any relationship between women and men who are heterosexuals, there is the potential for sexual attraction. The (latent) presence of sexuality between women and men is generally held to account for problems in cross-sex friendships. Sexuality is generally taken to be an 'intrusion' in friendship (Allan 1989), rather than being accepted as one of its constitutive features. The issue in friendship then is to keep this attraction absent, latent, or at the most present but in a level which does not threaten the relationship.

In fact, the possibility of having sex was considered more problematic for cross-sex friendship than the perceived differences between men and women discussed above. 'Having sex', generally signifying sexual intercourse, is one of the two different meanings usually attributed to the word 'sex' (Caplan 1987). The other sense relates to the categories of female and male (e.g. 'the female sex'). The distinction between the two meanings has become one between the physiological sense and the cultural construct (i.e.

gender). But, as Caplan argues, sex and gender are categories which are often conflated in the West (Caplan 1987).[5] Gender refers to perceptions of how different or similar women and men are thought to be, which includes among other things how men and women deal with their sexuality. That is, "gender is expressed through sexuality" (1987: 02) in that each sex has a specific sexuality.[6] As Garrett (1989) puts it, gender socialization in Western societies encourages men and women to see each other primarily in sexual terms.

Because women and men tend to regard each other as potential sexual partners, cross-sex friendship, which should not be a sexual relationship, has to deal with the problem of sexuality. Some people feel that there are different levels of sexual attraction. Patrick, for instance, thinks that there is a gradation of how intense sexuality can be. If it exists within certain limits, its effects on friendship are minimal. According to Patrick, there is a gradation in the level of attraction he feels for women: from those he is not attracted to, through those to whom he has been attracted to but for some reason did not get sexually involved with, up to those with whom he has had a relationship. With women, he thinks, there is a greater potential for the development of relationships which is natural to the species, more than there is with men.

Celia explains that, for her, some sexual attraction is necessary in her friendships with men. If she does not feel in the least attracted to a man, she is not interested in him as a friend either. The issue in friendship is finding out how much they 'fancy' her. If

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[5] As categories, gender and sexuality are constructs, historically (Foucault 1978, Riley 1988) and culturally (Caplan 1987, MacCormack and Strathern 1980, Strathern 1988) specific.

[6] Hirschon (1978) shows that, in Mediterranean societies, women's sexuality is seen as subject to their control and as something to be controlled, while men's sexuality cannot be controlled, being taken as physiologically imperative.

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they are strongly attracted to her but she does not reciprocate these feelings, the friendship can be put at risk.

Other people consider that, once love relationships have ended, sexual attraction ceases to be an interfering element, enabling ex-partners to be friends if they still get along well. Catherine and Janice, who generally experience difficulty in establishing friendship with men, have as their only male friends ex-partners. Janice explains that her friendship with her 'ex-lover' exists because of the intimacy they have after having lived together for three years. Such intimacy permits Janice to 'be herself' with this friend. At the same time, the fact that they have had a sexual relationship seems to eliminate the problems sexuality can pose for friendship. Liz recounts that she has 'ended up in bed' with male friends a few times but they realized that the sexual attraction was not enough to turn their relationship into a love one. Having tried sex and not found it to be the moving force of their relationship, Liz felt that sexuality was no longer a problem in her friendship with these men.

There are some people who use a different idiom to speak of cross-sex friendships. For example, men and women friends can be treated as siblings, such as in Julie's views.

> Julie's best friend is Neil, whom she's known since university. He was the person she used to see the most, who would always call her, and they were always doing things together. There was never anything else between them and she says that she loves him as a brother as he loves her as a sister.

Or one can 'eliminate' the gender difference by including oneself in the opposite sex category.

> Liz talked about the men with whom she works as 'the boys'. She thinks that because she's been at the office for some time, they consider her also as one of the boys. So they go out drinking together and they come and

tell her about the women they've seen. At times she reacts against this --
it's sexist she says -- and thinks that she should be defending her race.

By changing the categories used -- one relates to the other as siblings or as one of the same -- the gender relation is affected and consequently the sexual element is apparently controlled.

Thus, cross-sex friendships can be problematic because of the perception of sexuality as an element in this relationship. Despite the recognition of its presence, sexuality is not accepted in friendship and therefore needs to be dealt with by friends (which does not mean that friendship cannot be an element in love relationships, as I will show later). By regarding sexual attraction as having different intensities, it is possible to find levels of attraction which are not incompatible with friendship. Alternatively, sexuality is 'removed' from cross-sex friendships through the use of idioms which account for gender in a different manner.

While sexuality is problematic for heterosexual men and women who are friends, it seemed to be somewhat simpler for people with friends who are homosexuals. Because their own heterosexuality is acknowledged by their gay friends, sexual attraction would not be reciprocal. The possibility of turning the friendship relation into a sexual relationship is then seen as relatively non-existent. Very often, homosexual behaviour is not accompanied by the adoption of gay identity (Weeks 1987).[7] I was told by a woman who had sexual relations with women in the past that only recently has she come to see herself as a lesbian. Having homosexual relations is only one element in gay identity, which includes a whole style of life (e.g. ways of dressing and a predominantly gay circle

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[7] Sexuality here does not define a large aspect of gender identity as is the case in, for example, Brazilian society (cf. Parker 1991), where gay men are often not referred to as men. I have heard in Brazil gay men who refer to themselves using feminine gendered nouns and adjectives.

of friends). This woman's adoption of a lesbian identity affected her older friendships more than her homosexual behaviour in the past. For, together with a new identity, she moved into a different circle of friends, which excluded to some extent her older, heterosexual friends.

Sexuality is perceived by some people to appear as well in same-sex friendships. Celia feels attracted to her women friends and questions how 'sexual' is defined.

> I think that maybe in our society, because we've been brought up with the two genders so clearly defined... that we don't recognize the impulse we feel towards another woman as being possibly sexual, we don't think of it in that way. But I think that it might be the same sort of attraction as is between men and women. It depends on how you define sexual. I would say that with certain women there is a certain physical attraction -- not necessarily that I want to be in bed with them, but there is something about them, the look of them that appeals...

Celia distinguishes between physical and sexual attraction, which are often conflated as part of sexuality. In so doing, she questions what is to be defined as sexual, marking her difference in view from that of 'society's'. This stance is also taken by Victor, who thinks there is warmth, sexuality even, between men, which however is not recognized as such by society.

Thus, except for Catherine and Janice, gender differences as a whole are underplayed in favour of sexuality in the discussion of friendship with a person of the opposite sex. The perception of friends as potential sexual partners interfered with friendship more than any other gender variable.

The notion of what 'sexual' means can also be questioned, as Celia and Victor argue. Thus, sexual may refer to an intense physical attraction which does not necessarily lead one to have sex with another person. In this conception of the term, sexuality can be accepted as part of friendship -- not just cross-sex but also same-sex. It is only when

the possibility of having sex is perceived as real or imminent that sexuality threatens friendship. The difficulty with sexuality in friendship is then sex itself.

The power of sex

The distinction between friendship and love relationships is strongly based on the notion that sexual relations should happen only in the context of the latter. The presence or absence of sexual relations distinguishes types of relationships because it refers not just to the intercourse between bodies but also to the relationship between self and the other. As Stone remarks, "despite appearances, human sex takes place mostly in the head" (1979: 303). It is because sex is considered to change the character of a relationship that it affects friendship so fundamentally.

The attitudes toward sex as a bodily activity are not much different from the more general views of how the body as constitutive of the self changes with the development of friendship (see chapter 1). Thus, 'being oneself' through the body is predicated on trust that self will be accepted rather than rejected, loved instead of judged by others. Likewise, flirting, as that which invites a sexual encounter, and the sexual act itself require a similar basis of trust.

Flirting among the English people I met is an indirect process of looking at others while they are not facing. As a Brazilian used to staring as a way of flirting, I first thought that, because such a way of flirting is indirect, it could lead to many misunderstandings. But being obvious is exactly what is avoided, as Catherine explained. The ideal is actually not to reveal oneself, not to be easy, and not staring is a measure for protection against failure. Staring at someone and being noticed doing so can be quite embarrassing, according to Susan.

For women, there is an additional dimension about flirting too obviously: namely the risk of being seen as 'cheap' and 'easy'. This representation of women's sexuality is still embedded within the Christian notion of the close association between women's value and a sexuality restricted to marriage. Despite the overturn of these standards of behaviour, there remains some traces of this view in the idea that, when flirting, women have to guard themselves more, lest they be regarded as 'easy' women.

But there is more. What is clear from Catherine's and Susan's views is the notion that being an obvious flirt -- looking at the person more often, staring a bit more -- may reveal too much about oneself before one 'sizes up' the other. Thus, the problem is not so much showing an interest and attraction towards the other, as much as doing that without having received sufficient feedback from this person. In flirting, the timing in the process of getting to know each other is adjusted to a faster pace than in friendship. But there is still a perceived need to be indirect, therefore allowing one to gather more clues as to whether the other person reciprocates those feelings and, as Catherine puts it, to protect oneself against failure.

The same logic prevails for the sexual act. Having sex with another person is seen by many of those to whom I have talked, as the most *personal* experience one can have.[8] For both men and women sex brings people close together, in fact the closest they can be. According to Celia, such closeness comes from the fact of having revealed 'everything'.

> I think that if somebody that you've slept with rejects you on any level,
> or doesn't seem to care, it's much more hurtful than somebody that hasn't
> slept with you because they haven't sort of seen... you haven't given them
> so much, they haven't seen everything, whereas when you've slept with

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[8] Thus it is that the 'nitty gritty' of their sex lives is only shared with very close friends.

somebody they've seen everything, it's very hurtful. Whereas if somebody rejects you but you haven't slept with them, you think 'they don't really know me'(...).

This revelation is, thus, predominantly a visual one.[9] Through sex, one *sees* not just the other's body but also the other's self. Nothing is hidden from the other; one's privacy is no longer kept from the other.

The idea that sex is a form of pushing the limits between self and other is voiced by Allison. For her, sex is a means of expressing one's wish to get closer to another person.

> If I had sex with somebody (...) it would probably mean, whether I even recognize it myself at the time or not, it'd probably mean that I'd want something more from them in terms of seeing them more, spending more time with them...

At the same time, the intimacy of a sexual relationship can become 'stifling', Allison says. With this comment, she points at a contradictory feeling -- the desire to be special to a person and the discomfort in having the boundaries of one's self pushed.

The idea that sex can be a way of pushing the boundaries between self and other acquires a different light in Janice's views. For her, sex can become an act of 'invasion'.

> You really have to trust somebody -- for me -- to be able to have sex with them. It's such an invasion of you, of your own very being. Very physically it's an invasion and it's an intrusion almost, and to be in that position with somebody which for me... I think it's part of the whole notion of invasion and penetration and the possibility of rape, the whole notion that women can be entered in a sense (...) that's a fairly big thing to allow somebody to do to you, you know? And also kissing, that's incredibly intimate having your face so close to somebody else's. It's almost like stripping yourself bare. (...) you make yourself vulnerable in sex in a way that I don't think you can in any other way. I don't think that you get an equivalent vulnerability in any other way... it's also an area where you can be destroyed if you're having a relationship with somebody and that sexual relationship becomes part of a power game which I think

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[9] In the late twentieth century, with the key role played by electronic mass media, the prevailing language is that of visual images (Featherstone 1991, Tuan 1982).

it's so dangerous, because it is where people are so vulnerable, I think women are so more than men.

Like Celia, Janice expresses the view that, through the sexual act, lovers show *everything* about themselves, and they can see and know all about each other; it is an act where they strip themselves bare. Janice is more incisive by treating this exposure as an invasion because of women's penetration in the sexual act. The idea implicit here is that the boundaries of self are somewhat threatened; they are not just pushed but felt to be trespassed by the other.

Would such a complete revelation of the self be the case in casual sex as well? My answer would be no, for it does not involve the same degree of emotional attachment as in lengthier relationships. I would suggest that when there is no emotional involvement, one does not reveal the 'true'/emotive self through the sexual act. But, as discussed before, women find difficulty in having sex without any emotional attachment. Thus, their views tend to focus only on sex which is not casual and which is self-revealing.

Both Celia and Janice express an ambivalence about sex similar to that voiced by Allison: having sex and being special to a person is desirable. And yet, through such complete exposure and even invasion of the self, they make themselves vulnerable. Here is the same idea encountered in the discourse on friendship, namely that, in being oneself with others, one reveals emotions, weaknesses without any protection against a possible rejection by others. Hence, others acquire power to 'hurt', 'reject' and even 'destroy' one's self. To insure oneself against this possible damage, it is therefore necessary to trust the other before revealing the self in this manner.

Janice suggests that women are especially vulnerable in a sexual relationship. As she remarks, women's body can be entered in the sexual act in a way that does not

happen to men's body. There is also the view that women attach greater emotional significance to sex than men do, thus becoming more emotionally vulnerable.

Treating sexuality as the grounds of a possible 'power game' is part of the feminist discourse which addresses the personal as political (Millet in Caplan 1987). Barret and McIntosh (1982) argue that, even in today's married couples, sex happens on men's terms. "It is almost as if women's obvious sexual enjoyment were just another thing that men can demand of them" (1982: 74). Heterosexual sexuality is taken to be structured on gender inequality and on patriarchal bases (Walby 1990). In the feminist discourse, therefore, power is essentially thought to be male and to be directed at women's bodies, often in the form of battering, rape and pornography.

Such feminist discourse is partially adopted by some of the women I talked to. However, they are more concerned with a somewhat different way in which power is exercised with reference to the body and not so much with battering and rape. This is the power of sex about which Celia and Janice speak of: a power which is exercised on the body as the means for the exposure of self.

This view which attributes great importance to sex is part of a modern notion of sexuality. I take here Foucault's (1988) claim that, from the eighteenth century onwards, sexuality was placed at the heart of existence by becoming the focus of confession (first of a religious order and later as part of the psychoanalytical process). Weeks adds that sex has become "the general substratum of our existence" (1989:12). Sex is no longer tied to religion or fertility rites but instead, it has become "the supreme act of self-expression between partners" (1989:12). He remarks that the release of sexuality is seen as an element of health and its frustration can be taken for the cause of ill health. As Caplan succinctly puts it, "sex has become the explanation for everything" (1987:08).

I would suggest that it is the modern view of sex as inhering inextricably at the core of the self, a view shared by the women I talked to, which endows it with great power. What is affected through sex is not the body as dissociated from the mind, the soul, etc. as many Western dichotomies would maintain, but rather the body as constitutive of the self. Because the body reveals the self, especially through the sexual act, it becomes vulnerable to the manipulation of emotions and to potential rejection. It is this power of sex which mostly concerns the women I talked to.

Nevertheless, if women worry about sexual power, they do not regard themselves as always victims. On the contrary, even Janice admits that, in past relationships, her lack of intellectual maturity was counteracted by her power 'in bed'. Susan is particularly explicit about women's power, which is not just restricted to the sexual arena:

> I think women are very scary, women are incredibly powerful and often the power is quite manipulative, whereas men have a sort of power but it's much more basic, you know what I mean? (...) Maybe it's related to the fact that they [women] do analyse things in a different way, so they're more aware of subtle things going on so they can play games with certain emotions. Men...I've noticed that when they're trying to do it, it's so obvious.

Thus, sex can be powerful because of the potential manipulation of the emotions that are associated with a sexual relationship. Because it can touch the self, the power of sex can affect both women and men. This is perhaps why Celia uses a non-gendered tone to express her views on sex. In stripping bare the selves of men and women, the sexual act exposes and affects the boundaries between self and the other in a manner which does not come into question in friendship. Thus, being oneself with friends may imply exposing the true self to others but always with a reserve: that of the sexual body.

Friends and partners

Most men and women I talked to distinguish friendships from love relationships. A fundamental distinction lies in the idea that one does not have sexual relations with friends whereas one does with partners. But, except for the element of sex, the differences between friendship and love relationships are in fact not so clear cut.

Celia feels that there is an ideal that partners should be friends -- 'be oneself', be loyal and supportive to each other. Such an idea is discussed by Zeldin, for whom "love is increasingly developing into, or is being confused with, friendship: love's 'modernization' into companionate marriage is the triumph of friendship" (1982: 344). This 'confusion' or overlapping of friendship with a love relationship occurs because the notion of 'love' itself can have different meanings.

Social historians (Ariès 1985, Lantz 1982) distinguish between conjugal love and modern or romantic love. The first is described as developing over a long period of time and is "based essentially on feelings of appreciation, loyalty and admiration, stemming from the sharing of common experiences" (Lantz 1982: 349). According to Ariès (1985), the model of conjugal love was predominant in the past, when a more erotic form of love existed only outside marriage. Nowadays, love appears mainly in its 'romantic' guise, eroticized and based on passion. It is this type of love -- uncontrollable, involuntary -- which, according to Alexander (1978), distinguishes love relationships from friendship, which he regards as developing from choice. Such a 'romantic' love happens at first sight between persons conceived of as unique individuals, which Lantz argues is a product of the growth of individualism.[10]

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[10] For an analysis of the growth of individualism and the value placed on their affective ties in relation to the family, see Ariès 1962 and Stone 1979.

These distinctions are useful in showing how the notion of love has developed through time, but they confine 'love' to a very narrow meaning. 'Love' is taken to appear mainly in relationships which involve sex. But in the discourse I am studying here, love is present in friendships too. Schneider (1968) proposes a distinction between forms of love which takes into account different types of relationship. He speaks of 'conjugal love' as erotic love, which is expressed through the sexual act, and figures in love relationships. The other type is 'cognatic love' which exists in the blood relationship between parent and child. Except for this differentiation, both forms of love involve "enduring, diffuse solidarity" (1982: 52), which rests on trust and implies being supportive and helpful.

In this general sense of 'enduring solidarity', love is perceived as appearing in friendship (cross-sex and same-sex) as well. As discussed in chapter 1, it is the presence of love between friends which outweighs 'judgement' and permits people to 'be themselves' with friends. There is also the view that one 'falls in love' with friends much in the same way as one does with partners. Janice speaks of her most 'intense' female friendships as involving a process of 'falling in love' with them.

> I mean I think the things that attract me to lovers must [be similar to] the sort of keying in... must be the same sort of process that happens with women that you're attracted to. I don't think it's a different process. So certainly with women friends where it's a very intense relationship, that's like the process of falling in love, you know, just wanting to be around somebody and hugging them, being really excited that you're seeing them. I have that with my women friends as well, but no sexual relationship.

'Falling in love' entails intensity, excitement in the other's company and being physical -- which may or may not include a sexual relationship. Friendship could thus be characterized as the version of this process which excludes sex.

The intensity of love is not the only similarity between love relationship and friendship. As in a love relationship, there are also often feelings of jealousy and resentment in friendship, particularly when one's friend pays more attention to others (especially if these others are partners). Celia feels that

> with a woman, you get all that intensity [of a love relationship] but it's not dissipated by sexuality (...) so I think you can get very possessive about people. There have been a couple of female friends in my life who I would describe... I think it's fair to say that, though I'm not a lesbian, that I did fall in love with them.

What is absent in the love between friends is the sexual component, an element present in the love between partners, which adds a further dimension of intimacy which friends do not share.

Thus, there are considerable areas for overlap between the notions of friendship and that of a love relationship. The distinguishing feature between the two is left to sex. Even if the logic of self exposure through the sexual act is similar to that which happens in friendship, they are of a different order. Through sex, the self is not only shown 'bare' but the boundaries between self and other are pushed in a manner which does not happen in friendship. The demands placed on partners, much higher than on friends, are only paralleled by those set on the family, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3.

FRIENDSHIP AND THE FAMILY

Friends are often said to be 'like family' and the family can at times be 'like a friend'. The distinction between the analytical categories of friendship and kinship is not so firmly established in the views of the people I studied, as I intend to show in this chapter. On the contrary, friendship seems to become the standard for the relationship among parents and siblings, those kin who are generally referred to as one's family.

Yet, the stress upon the contrast between family and friends is common in both sociological and anthropological studies. With reference to American kinship, Schneider (1968) claims that the distinction between the two types of relationships lies in that one can choose friends whereas one is born with one's relatives. But friends and relatives are similar with regard to the way they are supposed to behave: both can be loyal, helpful and cooperative. Schneider summarizes the contrast by saying that "friends are relatives who can be ditched if necessary, and relatives are friends who are with you through thick and thin whether you like it or not and whether they do their job properly or not" (1968: 54).

The comparison is somewhat different in studies of British society. Firth, Hubert and Forge (1970) argue that the principle of choice functions in both kinship and friendship relations. The difference dwells on the perception of friends as people who are by definition liked, in contrast with relatives who may be disliked. They conclude that kin and friends are kept distinct, on a separate scale of values (1970: 115).

Allan (1989) portrays the family as more instrumental than friends. People rely more on immediate kin for support whereas only close friends provide a similar kind of assistance. With friends, there is a greater concern to demonstrate equality in exchange of help, while the family "can be used more unilaterally more readily" (Allan 1989: 56). However, Finch (1989) observes that the support given by the family is not as automatic

or taken-for-granted as is popularized. Although people rely more on their relatives for assistance of various sorts, the respect for each other's independence affects significantly the extent to which help is actually sought.

Indeed, among the people I talked to, their parents and siblings tend to interfere very little in their own lives, displaying a concern and consideration for one another's autonomy. In this sense, the caring relationship between relatives is similar to that between friends. On the other hand, though, family relationships at times reveal a hierarchical character which friendship does not usually have. Thus, family relations are distinguished from friendship in some respects but they are also categories which overlap.

In order to understand the distinction between family and friends, I begin by examining how different stages in the life cycle affect such differentiation. Family commitments in the present are thought to be less than in the past, when people lived with parents and siblings, and less than what is predicted for the future, if they come to have children. Friendship patterns were different in adolescence from what they are in the present. But the present patterns are also beginning to change as people become involved in long-standing love relationships and make plans about having children. I then present how family relations are considered to be in the present and how they are distinguished from friends.

Adolescent friendships

The present notion of friendship is one based on sociability and personal disclosure. Friends are people whom one 'enjoys being with' and with whom one can 'be oneself'. Friends are also people on whom one can count for support, since one is no

longer dependent on the family. This notion of friendship refers basically to a close, dyadic relationship, much different from adolescent friendship patterns. In this section, I want to examine how friendship was perceived in adolescence and how it contrasts with present ideas and practices.

According to psychologists (cf. Erikson 1977, Kroger 1989), adolescence is the period associated with the formation of a singular identity, for it is associated with the process of gaining intellectual, moral and affective autonomy. This is a phase of intense balancing and rebalancing of boundaries between self and other (Kroger 1989). The process of identity formation in adolescence tends to involve greater conflicts and negotiation between parents and children (Noller and Callan 1991), which consequently weakens family ties (Bott 1971). Rejecting parental values and attitudes is part of the search for autonomy as is the intense attachment to peer groups.[1] Identifying with the peer group becomes an alternative to identifying with the family, until the adolescent achieves a self-definition which is independent from both family and friends. The attachment to peer groups is generally intense but transitory (Schlegel and Barry III 1991).

These ideas are expressed by many of the people I studied. They generally regard adolescence as the phase in one's life when the sense of being accepted by a particular group of friends, generally from school, is most highly valued.[2] Some people have good

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[1] The close association with peer groups often leads to the creation of youth subcultures (cf. Cohen 1980, Hall 1982, Willis 1977). The formation of gangs, often with violent behaviour, is the focus of extensive psychological research (cf. Campbell 1987, Horowitz 1987).

[2] The notion of adolescence is historically specific. In Medieval Europe, the closest equivalent concept was that of 'youth', which referred basically to the state of being unmarried (Ariès 1962, Duby 1983).

memories of the time spent in school, having retained as well close friends made in that period. Others feel that the 'peer group pressure' caused them more harm than good, by forcing them to do things they disliked in order to be considered as part of the group. On the whole, being accepted by 'the group' is now perceived as the issue which concerned people during adolescence, especially in secondary school.

I begin by discussing Janice's views on her adolescent friendships and the changes she has experienced since then. Unlike many people, she has not maintained friendships made at school. The few close friends she has today were established when she was studying for her A-levels and university degree. Adolescence was a period when she used to feel 'uptight' about her friendships.

> You know, you desperately had to know who your friends were and [had to be] part of a group and you know, if somebody that was in the group was nasty to you, then it was devastating, because it was a real attack on your identity. And I suppose, when you're that age, it's so important being liked -- well, it was for me, having lots of people around you. You know, you'd always have someone to go to the disco with or go to the pub with or meet down the park with. And I can remember vividly going from junior school to senior school -- which is at 11 or 12 -- and there being big negotiations at one play time in junior school, working out who was going to be best friends with who, and it was almost like being picked and the horror of you not being picked by anybody, you know. And of somebody not wanting to share a bunk with you when you were on school camp. These were the sort of things that could destroy you as a teenager.

Friendship was not the relationship established through mutual understanding and trust between two individuals, as it is now. Friendship was more a matter of group negotiation, of some people deciding on and selecting the others who were to be seen as friends and as part of the group. Being seen as having many friends and having them around oneself was the way to construct an identity. In contrast, feeling rejected by the group was considered a direct attack on one's identity, an act of destruction even. Thus, the issue during adolescence was one of being accepted and liked by the group.

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Because these friendship ties depended on the existence of the group, once it dispersed, friends also tended to move apart from each other. This is what happened when Janice left school to go to college.

> I think we lost contact after we left school and it was sort of split between two colleges in the area. We had a very big, strong group in school and we'd all been together for 6,7 years, and after we went to college and people started to go up to university... after that it just fell apart. And as I say, most of them actually stayed in [X]. And I very rarely see any of them now. I'll see occasionally some of them down at the pub or occasionally see some of them when they're out shopping and it's just like a different world, all in their smart clothes and their small children and their husbands' income. It just feels like a completely different world to me.

Her school friendships were affected by the group's splitting up due to its members going into different colleges. Also, her interests changed and her school friends became associated with a 'world' from which Janice was distancing herself. Her involvement with politics and feminism drew her away from other women who married, had children, and were financially supported by their husbands. Her interests and values changed, therefore affecting her identity.

The change was not just one of values and identity but also one in the manner Janice related to people and to friends.

> The major change for me which really felt as if I was going from being a child to a grown-up was going to college and becoming involved in the student union. And suddenly I was involved with all those people much older than me. And I got close to a couple of the lecturers at college and they seemed ancient to me, you know. They were only 24 or 25, you know, but when you're straight from school and 16, they seemed so old. And they used to invite you around to their houses for parties and things, and it was just like going into a completely different world. So when I was 16, I started mixing with people that were a lot older than me and that took me into different groups. And because I was involved in a lot of different committees in [X] and [Y] and involved in a lot of political campaigns, I got to know huge numbers of people. I think that's what started me moving away from having a big gang of friends, because I'd just be moving in a circle of so many different people and getting a real high from that, largely from being with much older people... But at

college, I still had groups of people that I would go down to the pub with. And I think it's also a big change in enjoying doing things in big crowds of people from not finding that very interesting and getting bored with going to the nightclubs and the pubs with the big gangs of people and getting drunk... So I think that's what the big change was.

In college, then, Janice met a large number of different people, many of which were older than her. This was a change from school where groups of friends were relatively homogenous in terms of age. The people she related to in college were also associated with a variety of different groups, something which differed from the adolescent habit of having one 'gang' of friends in which everyone knew each other. Janice gradually began losing interest in going to places 'in big crowds of people' to the extent that today she often finds large parties 'boring'. Now, she prefers seeing her friends on a one-to-one basis and also greatly enjoys solitude -- going to see films on her own, staying at home reading a book when her partner is away.

The change in Janice's patterns of sociability affected as well her expectations towards friends.

I have a very sort of laid back notion of friendship from being very uptight about it when I was a kid, as lots of kids are, you know. You have to have your best friend and if they talk to somebody else or play with somebody else or go out with somebody else, this is the end. I don't necessarily expect things of friends, you know. I don't get angry if they don't get in touch because, certainly for me there is an understanding that even if you're not constantly in touch with people, when you do see them you are in touch. If you haven't spoken for 4 months that's not a problem, because there's an understanding and an affection there. And I don't want relationships that are full of guilt and misunderstandings. I have enough of that with my family and I just don't want to go through it with friends.

Thus, in adolescence, friendship for Janice had more of an exclusive and even possessive character, with more expectations and demands than it has today. Now identity and autonomy seem to be firmly marked, with friends often not seeing each other for months because of their own work and personal commitments. She accepts this lack of

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contact because it implies a mutual respect for each other's life and for the limits between self and other. Janice herself finds that she often 'can't be bothered' to contact her friends and that they are generally the ones who telephone her. The idea that one can impose one's will on another -- through demands, expectations, etc. -- becomes now restricted to love relationships and to the family, where lack of contact is not accepted with grace but can become the source of misunderstandings and guilt. Again, friends may also place demands on one another but this is something Janice tries to avoid; it falls short of her idea of friendship in which one's autonomy and privacy are very much respected.

I have discussed Janice's case in length not only because her views on friendship were interwoven with her life-history in a very clear manner but also because it introduces ideas shared by other people as well. Adolescence is considered by all to be a specific phase of life when special value is put on the group quality of friends. Even for those who were shy when younger and had difficulty making friends, being part of a group was always considered the standard behaviour for adolescents. Entering university or college becomes a transition phase between adolescence and adulthood, marking the beginning of changes in the manner of relating to friends.

For those who had many friends during adolescence (over half of the people I talked to), this was a phase of intense socializing, of seeing friends nearly every day (particularly so if they were in the same school) and of going to large parties. Friendship was mainly about 'having fun'/'having a good time' together. According to Celia, her definition of friendship used to be very broad: anyone she met and talked with on the bus could become a friend. For these people, adolescent friendship was basically regarded in terms of sociability.

Doing activities with a large number of people was significant because being part of a group, as Janice maintains, was important for one's identity. This is an idea common to other people as well. Susan recounts that, for a while, her 'gang' of friends in school 'bullied' her. She kept a 'submissive attitude' towards the gang because she was in awe of them. In the end, her mother decided to move her to another school for she thought Susan's relationship with her friends was 'unhealthy'.

On the other hand, being 'bullied' in school was considered to affect profoundly one's self-esteem and consequently one's ability to make friends and to become part of a group. Julie attributes her present lack of confidence to her being 'bullied' about her appearance when younger. Others have complained of being teased about their accents. If not the object of bullying, some people had difficulties in making friends because of their shyness and feeling 'trapped inside' or their being perceived as 'too serious'. For these people, therefore, adolescence was a period of few friendships, which have tended not to last until the present. In leaving school, they entered a phase in which there was no longer bullying and a strong pressure to fit into a group. Consequently, the changes they have experienced with the end of adolescence have been in the direction of overcoming to some extent their shyness and lack of confidence and thus being able to make more friends.

For those people for whom adolescence was a period of intensive socializing, friendship is now thought of as a different matter than before. Sociability is still, no doubt, an important feature in the relationship between friends. Catherine, for example, feels that, as an adult with work responsibilities, humour has become more important than before for it contrasts with the serious and disciplined mode attributed to the work ethos. But now most people find that large parties are often 'boring' and prefer to meet

their friends in smaller gatherings, in groups of three or so or commonly on a one-to-one basis. Whereas in the past they 'mastered the art of small talk', to quote Sally's words, which is commonly found in large parties, they have in the present little interest in maintaining this type of conversation.

The frequency of contact among friends is modified as well. Before, friends saw each other very often, if not every day, because of studying in the same school. This is also true for friends who went to the same college or university. The pattern changes when people begin to work on a full time basis, sometimes even in different cities. Thus, at present, their average frequency of contact with each friend becomes more or less once every two weeks for those who reside in the same city, at times becoming less often when friends are especially busy at work. Normally, people meet different friends three times a week, generally in the evenings to have drinks or a meal together.[3] For those who live far from one another, meeting each other may happen two to four times in the year. Telephone calls can be a more frequent way of keeping in contact, especially among friends dwelling in different cities. But many people regard these calls mainly as a form of arranging meetings rather than as an opportunity to chat. On the whole, contact among friends is not as often as it used to be in the past.

These people are also content with fewer friends. Patrick thinks that he has become less tolerant with people who are not his friends and generally less interested in acquaintances. Likewise, Celia, who had in the past an all inclusive definition of friendship, now restricts her notion of who friends are as well as her network of friends. Today, she values long-established and intimate friendships.

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[3] There are variations, of course. People like Liz go out to meet friends nearly every night of the week. Others, and particularly some of those who lived with their partners, can spend an entire week without seeing any of their friends.

The support given by friends is also regarded as having become more important than in adolescence, now that they do not live any longer with their family. Friendship is no longer just about sociability but now contains a strong caring element especially significant in difficult times. At present, friends tend to be the people with whom one shares most of one's problems, something which changes when long-term partners come into the picture.

Thus, adolescence is perceived as a phase in which one wanted to be identified with and accepted by a group of friends. By the same token, one's identity as a person was more susceptible to the opinions of others. Friendship then seemed to be more of a relationship between persons as parts of a group rather than a bond between persons as unique individuals, each conscious of their own autonomy, a notion characteristic of their present stage in life. The boundaries between self and other were constantly being pushed in adolescence, since friends were more possessive about each other. The strong adolescent emphasis on group sociability -- spending a lot of time together, 'having fun' with each other -- gives way to smaller gatherings. Meeting friends on a one-to-one basis becomes more common as a manner of not just 'having a good time' together but also as a means to share each other's problems and exchange support.

Partners versus friends

Having a partner, even if one does not live together, represents a change in friendship patterns. The relationship with partners is considered to absorb most of one's attention and time, altering the manner one relates to friends. There are also changes in the way cross-sex friendships are handled, for friends may cease to be seen as potential sexual partners.

Because one's sexual desire is basically directed at one's partner (at least, ideally), the sexuality thought to inhere in cross-sex friendships becomes overshadowed, thus posing less of a threat for friends. Victor finds that, now that he is seriously involved with a woman, the ever-present sexuality he perceives to exist between men and women does not disturb him as much, for the idea of sex outside a love relationship is less satisfactory and would also make him feel guilty. When Celia said that she now tends to approach men as friends, I asked her if the fact that she had a partner at the moment helped to suspend the view of other men as 'sexual beings'. She admitted that 'being in a relationship' may affect how she looks at other men, especially if she feels very secure about it. But she finds that, if the relationship is going through a crisis, she can easily become sexually attracted to other men.

Thus, because a love relationship is perceived as exclusive, generally based on fidelity to one's partner, sexuality is channelled to this tie and, accordingly, it is taken to be removed from other relationships. In this sense, having a partner can be regarded to smooth away the potential difficulties of cross-sex friendships. Nevertheless, as Celia suggests, when the love tie is going through a difficult phase, people become more aware of the sexuality between women and men and friends are once again seen as possible sexual partners.

Being in a love relationship also affects friendships in general. Most people explain that having a partner implies spending more time with her or him than with friends, so that close friends in particular, who tend to have more intense relationships, may often feel resentful and offended because of the lack of attention.[4] Liz, who was

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[4] Bott's (1971) study on families and their networks in London shows how couples' conjugal relationships are linked to leisure patterns. Couples who regarded their relationship as more important than any others tended to have a joint organization of

single at the time of fieldwork, was feeling different from many of her close friends who were 'mellowing out', she said, because of their life as a couple; they tended to go home earlier at night, to lead quieter lives and to be less sociable. Julie came to strongly resent her closest friend Neil, when he became seriously involved in a love relationship. She felt he was giving her very little attention and, consequently, their friendship went through a serious crisis.

For those involved in love relationships, it is not only the frequency of contact with friends which changes. The quality of communication is altered as well, since they think more demand is placed on partners than on friends. For instance, once one has a partner, one does not phone friends as much to talk about problems, which tend to be discussed with one's partner. This is a view especially emphasized by men, who think that any problem regarding their love relationships should be discussed with their partners only. With partners, it is often said that there is also more honesty in communication. There is more intimacy between partners since, through the sexual act, they expose more of themselves (or the whole self, as some women say in chapter 2). Because they can 'be themselves' with partners to a greater extent than with friends, they are less concerned with imposing one's feelings on one another and being met with criticism and rejection. But, if the love relationship is going through difficulties, it is common to find that personal matters are shared with friends more than with partners. On the whole, though, the people to whom I talked feel more independent from friends when they have partners.

The change in friendship patterns caused by a love relationship was especially made clear by women. I heard many times from them how friends had difficulties in

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domestic chores and to socialize together with friends. Couples with segregated roles in the household tended to have separate social networks and to socialize separately.

getting along with each other's partners. In some cases, this entailed not seeing each other much or else meeting on their own, unaccompanied by partners, and friendships, especially of a close sort, were perceived to suffer on these accounts. Some friends were able to discuss these problems and improve their relationship, whereas others gradually drifted apart. For instance, Susan had problems with a close female friend who did not get along with Paul, Susan's partner at the time of fieldwork. After a while, she decided that it was best to meet her friend on their own, without any of their partners. Catherine, who became engaged during my fieldwork, was experiencing these changes in her friendship with other women and concluded that, if they were not very close friends and their respective partners did not get on, they would grow distant with time. This idea does not differ much from that of a seventy years old English woman, who told me that after marriage, women keep their female friends if their husbands like each other. Catherine also had difficulty keeping in contact with her only male friend, who was an ex-partner, because of her fiancé being jealous of him.

This type of conflict was only expressed by women. It reveals that, in a long-term love relationship, not only does one devote more attention and time to one's partner but also, and specifically in women's case, that one may choose to lose some friends because of one's partner. Not every woman I met had reached such a point but most of them had, at some stage, faced problems because of conflict between friends and partners. Indeed, Allan (1989) says that women's friendships are usually more easily affected by domestic and family responsibilities than men's.[5] Women still fulfil the role of carers (Finch

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[5] The idea that married women tend not to have friends is particularly common in Mediterranean countries, where their sole focus should be the family (Papataxiarchis 1988). Uhl (1991) shows that in Spain women do have close friends but special care is taken so that these friendships do not interfere with domestic life.

1989), especially of children and the elderly, thus constraining the time and effort they can devote to friendships. Although the women I met have work careers, strong feminist beliefs and no children to care for, many of them perceive they have had their friendships affected by love relationships.

If friendship patterns are altered by one's relationship to a partner, this is not to say that all old friends grow distant but that these relationships are believed to be necessarily affected by this new stage in one's life-cycle. This feeling was confirmed by Christine, who had a six-month baby when I first met her. She was surprised -- and also disappointed -- to see that, after the baby was born, some of her old friends, who did not have children, were drifting away. On the other hand, people who had not been as close to her before, who also had babies, were becoming better friends. It was not a coincidence then that she was the only person I was unable to meet further, because of the time and attention she perceived she needed to devote to the baby.

Thus, when friends are involved with a partner, whether they are cohabiting or not, friendship patterns change. Friends receive less attention and, if they are single, they may be more easily offended and hurt than if they have partners of their own. As a couple, it may be simpler for friends to socialize with other couples but even this is not a guarantee that such couple friendship will not be influenced. For if the respective partners do not get along well, friendship is likely to dwindle. These changes sign the beginning of a new phase, of a new period in the life-cycle, in which the possibility of forming a family of one's own seems to become the priority.

Family relations in the present

In the past, friends were those one basically 'had fun with', at school or in the neighbourhood. The assistance and care one received from and gave to friends was relatively minor because, at that time, one lived with one's family who, aside from supplying home, food, clothes, schooling, etc., provided one with emotional support as well. Changes in the conception and significance of friendship are thought to happen in the period when one has left school and the family home. By the same token, relations with one's family are also altered once the person moves away and gains financial autonomy. In this section, I want to examine how the family is seen in the present and how it contrasts with friendship relations.

The use of the term 'family' generally referred only to parents and siblings and not to other kin. In very few occasions were uncles, cousins and grandparents referred to. Step-parents received more attention than these kin but much less than parents, who were the focus of much concern within the family.[6] Of the seventeen women and men I concentrated on, ten had both parents alive and still married to each other. Four others had lost one or both of their parents, most of whom had died in the previous four years. A fifth person was adopted and two others had divorced parents, some of whom had remarried and had children of this second union.

In most cases, parents did not reside in London and, when they did, children had their separate homes. It is interesting to note that, when people spent Christmas with their parents, they often said that they were going 'home' for the holidays (this remark was also made in other occasions as well). Although they have their own homes in London,

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[6] This focus on the parent-child relationship is confirmed by Finch (1989) and Firth, Hubert and Forge (1970).

parents' home seems to be still the true 'home'. Here we encounter a meaning for 'home' which is more than the place one lives in (I discuss 'the home' more fully in chapter 7). When saying that one is 'going home for Christmas', 'home' has the meaning of family abode, of where one's roots are. In fact, the frequent overlapping between the concepts of 'family' and 'home' is a general characteristic of Western societies (Hareven 1991). In this sense, while people do not have children and form families of their own, the 'home' where one's roots lay will still be parents' home.

For the people I studied, the salient characteristic of the parent-child bond in the present is their feeling of independence from their parents. There is the perception of being treated by parents as adults, a form of relating which differs from that experienced in adolescence. Parents respect their children's decisions, even if they disagree with them. The hierarchy of the parent-child relationship seems to have weakened and the prevalent tone now is one of a relationship between equals. Whereas before one had depended on parents for both emotional and material support, now most people see themselves as having acquired autonomy from their parents. Undoubtedly, there are still times when parents' assistance is required.[7] Borrowing money from parents to buy a house, having one's mother arranging the details of a wedding, getting help from parents when moving houses, using the parents' house to store one's belongings temporarily, these were situations I frequently heard of during fieldwork.

On the whole, parents are taken to interfere in people's lives much less than before or virtually not at all. Contact with parents varies according to both physical and emotional distance (cf. Schneider 1968) but, if compared with the childhood and

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[7] Finch (1989) discusses thoroughly, in her study of family and support, the distinct forms of assistance given by various kin in different moments of life.

adolescence periods, it is obviously much less in the present. On average, most people speak to their parents at least once a month. Meeting each other is less frequent and, for some people, it is often restricted to holidays like Easter and Christmas and a short period during the Summer.

For some people, having less contact as well as less interference is a motive for complaint, for it is translated into a certain absence of and lack of interest from parents in relation to them. Thus, Sally wishes that her parents phoned her more often to know how she is doing. Similarly, Julie thinks her parents do not feel any longer that they 'have to be there' for her, a position now assumed by her friends. Catherine feels her mother listens to her problems without taking sides because she tries not to meddle in her daughter's affairs. At times, though, Catherine would like to hear more of her mother's opinion.

Others find that, although they have regular contact with their parents, they would like to share more with them about their lives. Daniel feels that he is unable to talk about his personal problems with his parents, for in the past they have shown some discomfort (e.g. not knowing what to say) with this kind of conversation. Susan says that, when she was a teenager, she 'shocked' her mother with details of her sex life. She also realized that she often unloaded her problems onto her mother without taking into consideration her mother's own feelings. Today, she refrains from telling her mother everything she goes through but thinks they have achieved a balance in how much they share with each other.

The balance regarding what is shared with parents is related to the more general issue of how much is exchanged between children and parents. Finch (1989) argues that achieving the balance between dependence and independence in the parent-child tie is

particularly important when the issue is support. The often heard phrase 'I don't want to be a burden' reflects, in her view, the negotiations relating to the maintenance of parents' and children's autonomy.

> On one level that phrase indicates that it is the old person's own independence which is being guarded, but on another level the idea of wanting to remain independent in old age is a way of according the proper independence to one's children (1989: 39).

At the same time, the parent-child bond is that which, more than any other, tends to involve the most earnest feelings of duty and obligation. But, as Finch remarks, keeping the boundaries of independence between parents and children is as significant as the notions of parental and filial duty. As adults, parents and children should relate to each other keeping in mind the autonomy of one another.

If these are the general feelings regarding parents, there are specific ones which refer to the particular relationship people have with mothers and fathers. Thus, some women feel that their fathers are rather absent. Anne says that, lately, she sees much more of her mother than of her father, who is always busy and cannot arrange to meet her as often as her mother can. Liz tells me that her father was never around when she was a child. According to her, he used to think that children were good to hold and then to be passed back to their mothers or nannies. Celia affirmed categorically that from her father she receives no emotional support at all. Both Susan and Catherine lived with their mothers after their parents divorced and, for many years, their relationship with their fathers was an estranged one.

The image of the absent father is one explored in the volume compiled by Ursula Owen (1983). In many of the essays, written by women only, the father who is away most of the time can make himself even more present because of his absence, by creating a mysterious aura about himself. The mother, by contrast, becomes responsible for the

home and is often the mediator between father and daughter, a role which at times is undervalued and only later in life is given due recognition (Owen 1983:13).

In the accounts I have heard, while fathers are often absent, mothers have a prominent place. For many of the women I talked to, the mother has not only been closer in their childhood and adolescence but also has in common a gender identity, something which they value. Indeed, the idea that the mother-daughter relationship has a special quality to it is recurrent in many research studies (Finch 1989). Liz mentions the fun she has with her mother and sister when they are all together in London, which is completely different when her father or brother are around. They chat and giggle and both daughters enjoy the opportunity to take care of their mother. Likewise, Anne's mother often comes to London to visit her and they have travelled together on their own on an Easter holiday. There are many whose relationship with their mothers grow to replicate the friendship model. Susan often mentioned her mother and grandmother as women who still influence her ways of thinking.

Similarly, most of the men I talked to had closer relationship with their fathers rather than with their mothers. Martin finds his mother to be too strict and rather cold whereas, with his father, he has greater warmth and understanding. Going to the pub with their fathers is, for Daniel and Peter, special. According to Peter, they might not talk about anything in particular but, in drinking together, they reaffirm, albeit implicitly, their mutual understanding. However, whereas women often described the mother-daughter relationship in terms of a common gender identity, men presented no such explanation, attributing the closeness to personal reasons. The lack of such an association with gender seems to be part of a broader pattern in which men speak less about gender issues than women (see chapter 2).

This gender pattern was reversed in very few cases, some of which were justified because of the parent's death. Allison's mother died when she was a child and she became closer to her father. Against the working class traditions of his family, he decided to send Allison to boarding school and always stimulated her to continue her studies.

For many people, it is also important to receive parents' approval with respect to various aspects of their lives, such as work career or choice of partner. This is not to say that the lack of approval would lead people to change their behaviour or make different decisions, but rather that having parents' support is significant for them. Catherine's engagement to Antonio was initially the cause of some concern for both herself and her parents. Because they became engaged before her parents met him, she was anxious to receive their (as well as her friends') approval. And, according to Catherine, they were also interested in knowing more about the Latin American man whom their daughter was going to marry. Because her parents are divorced, she first introduced him to her father over a dinner especially arranged for the occasion. Afterwards, she arranged for her and Antonio to spend a weekend with her mother, who had already been asking many questions about the fiancé. All throughout these initial months, what stood out was Catherine's own concern that Antonio be liked and accepted by her family and friends and that he would not be treated as a foreigner. Although her decision to marry him did not depend on her parents nor on her friends, receiving their support was nevertheless significant for her.

Likewise, it was important for Sally to share with her parents and have their acceptance of the change in sexual orientation she had undergone. Having formerly gone out with men, she has recently concluded that she is a lesbian and has since been more involved with the gay community. As a sign of this change, she moved into a new house

which she shares with other gay men and women. A short time after this move, she decided to invite her parents over for dinner -- which she described as a 'coming out' occasion, one in which they would learn more about her new life, house and friends.

This type of concern for parental approval was expressed mainly by women. Some of them were, at the time of fieldwork, involved with working class men and this was perceived as a cause of preoccupation for parents and even as a deliberate act of rebellion against middle class values. Janice had in the past lived with an older man and her parents would have preferred her to have married him, instead of having a cohabiting relationship. Thus, whether trying to gain their approval or going against it, parents become significant reference points in the structuring of one's life.

The relationship between siblings, on the other hand, does not have such a character. It does not receive the same focus or attention as the relationship with parents does. If siblings get on well, it is a valued bond but, if they do not, little concern is shown to improve how they relate to each other. Thus, whereas some people complained about their parents' relative lack of interference or interest, a distance between siblings was simply acknowledged, in a matter-of-factly way. Firth, Hubert and Forge (1970) remark that the critical threshold for negative relations between siblings is much lower than that for parents. As Finch comments, the relationship between siblings is more subject to personal preferences than that between parent and child, so that "it is regarded as quite proper for [the former] to vary in the level of intimacy and the type of support offered" (1989: 44).

But the relationship between siblings goes through phases as well. Peter and Sally find that they have grown closer to their siblings in the last two years or so. They now talk more to each other and see one another more often. Anne, on the other hand, has

been feeling rather distant from her brother since he began living with his partner. Susan is more precise when saying that, at times, her sister is a friend and, at other times, she is not.

There are various reasons for not relating well to one's siblings. For Daniel, the primary cause for his distant relationship with his siblings is the difference in age; he is seven years older than his next sibling and, when they were entering adolescence, he was already living in London, away from his family. Janice finds her brother very alien to herself. For a woman with strong feminist principles, he is a completely different person. He has what she calls a 'traditional' marriage, in which he is the breadwinner in his family while his wife stays at home looking after their children.

Having said this, more than half of the people I studied had close relationships with at least one of their siblings. Very often these were siblings of the same gender and, in agreement with Firth, Hubert and Forge (1970), there were more sisters who reported such closeness than brothers. Siblings who have a good relationship meet each other for the purpose of sociability -- to go out drinking and dancing or to have a meal together. They can often give each other 'critical feedback', that is, be honest and sincere, expressing their views about one's feelings and behaviour. Siblings can be supportive not only emotionally but also practically, such as in assisting when moving homes or in providing temporary accommodation.

Some people regard these close ties with their siblings as friendship. Celia and Janice consider their sisters to be one of their best friends: they have known each other since they were born and they can rely on one another. As Liz puts it, she can have huge arguments with her sister but they know there is 'unconditional love' between them. And,

on the other hand, Patrick thinks of his close male friends as brothers because he likes his brothers as friends.

The notion of friendship is also used to characterize the close relationship between cousins, if it exists. Such a relationship is described in much the same terms as that between siblings. Thus, for Catherine her cousin is 'always there for her' and, when they go out together, she introduces her to people not as a cousin but as a friend. Similarly, Martin has been living with his cousin for the last two years and they have travelled together on holidays.

Thus, with respect to siblings and cousins, the idiom of friendship may overlap with that of kinship, if theirs is a close relationship. Not only are there the elements of sociability but also those of trust, loyalty and mutual support. Moreover, like friendship, one is selective with siblings and more so with cousins and it is only some of these relatives who are described as friends. But can kin relationships really be portrayed as friendship?

Friends and family

When I asked people whether they thought of their family as friends, the general answer I received was 'not really'. Alternatively, parents and siblings were at times referred to as 'like friends', but not as friends themselves. Thus, when comparing family relationships with friendship, we come to the view that *at times, some* kin can be *like* friends.

In my data, siblings and cousins are kin who tend to be more easily regarded as friends. As Firth, Hubert and Forge remark, their relationship lacks the asymmetry built into the parent-child bond (1970: 425). Siblings and cousins relate to each other in terms

of personal likes and dislikes, operating a selective process similar to that which occurs between friends. If they get on well, there are indeed many perceived similarities with friendship: they enjoy being with each other, they know each other well and can trust one another for emotional and practical support.

But in all cases where siblings were called friends, there was always a dissonant note -- episodes when the family bond obscured the aspects of friendship. Celia complains that her sister and brother are losing some respect for her as their older sister. Janice and Liz dislike when their sisters treat them as 'the baby of the family', apparently ignoring their independence and adulthood. Although siblings can also be friends, they are firstly connected as siblings, which means they occupy a specific position in the family structure. In this case, the family relationship conflicts with the view that siblings can be regarded as friends.

Perhaps cousins come closer to the idea of friendship. Because one is seen as choosing to a greater extent whether to relate to cousins (more than with reference to siblings) their tie to the family seems further removed. That is, in taking a cousin to be one's friend, the family tie in the relationship can be obscured by friendship to a more effective degree than can happen with siblings.

Parents, in turn, are rarely depicted as friends. There may be many elements of friendship in one's relationship with them, particularly when one is an adult. I heard from different people that they could share many things with their parents and, importantly, they could also rely on them for practical support, but they were still parents. Despite the greater informality of kinship relations in the late twentieth century (Strathern 1992), there is still hierarchy in the family. Although parents now treat their children as adults and as equals, to a certain extent, they noticeably lacked sufficient attributes of friendship

to be regarded as 'like friends'. The hierarchy of family relationships contradicts the egalitarian relationship between friends.

One of the most telling instances in which the distinction between family and friends is affirmed happens at Christmas. In the years I lived in England, I heard very rarely from English people that they enjoyed spending this holiday with their family. Although thought to be an occasion for commensality and gift-exchange, it is for many people a tense period, one in which old conflicts may resurface. The tension comes from the intensity of the encounter, which generally last three days, among people who spend most of the year apart and not all of whom relate well to each other. Perhaps there is also the feeling that, as Christmas is regarded by definition to be a family gathering, people are reunited as members of a family and not because of any friendship sentiment that they may have. On the whole, Christmas seems to produce in people many ambivalent feelings about their families.

The family is then seen as being comprised of people about whom one may feel ambivalent regarding one's liking for them, and to whom one has some obligations (e.g. expected presence at Christmas, provision of support). By the same token, people have the knowledge that they can rely on parents and to a lesser extent on siblings; there is the feeling that these kin are 'always there' for them. Some friends can be 'like family' in the sense that they are 'always there' when one needs them to be. But this is often an ideal in friendship and it is frequently the family which is considered to provide unconditional love and support. Hence, 'blood is thicker than water', as some say.

Family relations differ from friendship in some important aspects. First, there is the perception that people occupy positions in the family structure (e.g. parent, child, older or younger sibling), an idea that does not exist in friendship. As friends, people

relate to each other always as individuals independently of any other role they may have. Friends do not generally have hierarchical relationships and, for instance, would not treat a person as 'the baby of the family' as siblings and parents may do. Secondly, there is the idea that, with family, one may have to behave in accordance to duty and obligation, even when it is not according to one's will. With friends, there is the ideal that one should only do something because one wants to. There should not be among friends the 'misunderstandings and guilt' which Janice, quoted earlier in the chapter, attributes to family relations. Lastly, the family (and particularly parents) is considered to shape much of the person's way of thinking and behaving through the upbringing given to children, as I will discuss in the next chapter. Friends may or may not have a similar upbringing, but they are not part of one's 'background' as the family is.

Thus, family and friends may seem to overlap but their boundaries are kept separate by respective values of reliability and independence. Because the family is 'always there', it can require too much of the person and, as such, is unlike friendship. Friends, on the other hand, may not be as reliable but they respect one's boundaries as a person. For some people, the distinction between friends and family exists on a theoretical level and, in practice, it may be somewhat blurred.

CHAPTER 4.

FRIENDSHIP AND CLASS BACKGROUND

When I asked Anne about the importance of class for friendship, she
replied 'you know how important background is for this society, don't
you?'. She said it is really horrible and she compared it to racism. At the
same time, she continued, she's aware of the differences when she meets
people from a different background. You can tell it not only by their
accent but also by the way people dress and the way they hold knives and
forks. She wished she could erase that from her mind but it surfaces
anyway.

Discussing how social class affects friendship is a complicated matter for the

English people I studied. In general, their first reaction when I mentioned the subject was

much like Anne's, showing their disdain for any type of class labelling. But nearly every

one of them acknowledged that their friends, especially close ones, were of a similar

class background to their own. For people who believe in the notion of freedom of

choice, to admit that class influences friendship -- a relationship thought to arise out of

personal will -- is indeed difficult. The conflict between the determining weight of class

and the value placed upon individual agency is one of the major themes I explore in this

chapter.

Linking friendship to class may be problematic for these English people but their

discourse on class is nevertheless prolific. Unlike American discourse, which according

to Ortner (1991) lacks any strong cultural category of 'class' much because of the value

placed on mobility and individual achievement, the English elaborate *as much* on the

influence of class as they do on the individual shaping his or her own life.

However, when they speak about this issue, they rarely use the term 'class' on

its own. Instead, 'class' is often added to 'background' or, alternatively, the latter is used

on its own, like in Anne's reply to my question. But the terms are not to be taken as

synonyms. The concept of 'background' has a meaning quite different from what

sociologists treat as class. It includes more than the economic indicators they employ to

define the concept of class.

Thus, in this chapter, I want to examine the meaning attributed to 'background' as part of the English discourse on class. I examine in greater detail the views of Janice, who comes from an ascending middle class family, and those of Celia and Susan, who are both of solid middle class background. Most of the people I studied consider themselves to be of a 'middle class background'. They can be said to fit the category of the 'middle class rebels' which Celia talks about and which will be discussed later. These are people who dislike class labelling but who, nevertheless, are still aware of class differences when they meet people from different class backgrounds. Only one of the people I studied openly and spontaneously states her upper middle class background, as well as stresses the importance of shared class background for personal relationships in general. There are some others who come from a 'working class background' but who in the present interact mainly in middle class circles. They no longer think of themselves as being working class but they do not identify with middle class people either.

Together with the meaning of 'background', I will be analysing what it entails to be 'middle class', a notion which, as we will see, becomes inextricably related to the ideas of what is working class. Interestingly enough, the upper class figures very rarely in this discourse.[1] People have less problems defining what is the upper class: the business elite and the royal family. Movements from middle to upper class are not thought to be as common as that between working and middle classes. Because separating the latter is more difficult, the discourse on class is one which focus on middle and working classes only while it ignores the presence of the upper class. Thus, defining what 'middle class' is for these English people is a complicated task. There is little consensus

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[1] Scott (1982) makes a similar statement when he says that the upper classes have been generally neglected in social research.

about which is the distinctive middle class feature. Therefore, this chapter is an exercise in making explicit and clear views which are often implicit and conflicting.

To unravel what is implied by 'background' is a necessary step towards the understanding of people's dislike for class labelling. As I will show, it is because the notion of 'background' implies, for the people I studied, a great degree of conventional fixity that it becomes problematic for people who strongly believe in the power of agency of the person. It is also because 'background' is seen as part of personhood that having similar class backgrounds is especially relevant for friendships. For if friendship involves a particular manner of revealing the self to others based on mutual understanding and trust, it is therefore important to have similar ways of thinking and behaving -- very much explained by 'class background'-- so as to have similar processes of personal disclosure.

Class in sociological theory

Social class as a subject has been traditionally the domain of sociologists. Since Marx, class has been analysed from the viewpoint of its definition and constitution as well as in terms of the relations between different classes. My interest here is to present how some recent sociological works treat class, bearing in mind the differences in approach -- sociologists do not usually investigate 'the native's point-of-view' to the degree that anthropologists do.

The first thing which stands out from a brief look at the sociological literature is the lack of consensus on how class should be defined. Reid's (1989) study of class in Britain illustrates well the difficulty in establishing defining criteria for this concept. As a working definition, he treats social class as "a grouping of people into categories on the

basis of occupation" (1989: 06), and in this he is in accord with other sociologists who select occupation as the basic criterion in delineating class (cf. Abercrombie *et al* 1988, Bilton *et al* 1987).

He nevertheless points out that, on three different researches, British people themselves are shown to emphasize defining elements other than occupation. Thus, women and men ranked 'the way one speaks', 'appearance and behaviour' and 'way of life' as the first factor they turn to when placing a person in a class position. In two of these studies, occupation was ranked after other criteria and only in one of them did it come in second place. Reid finds that

> it is reasonable to conclude that the public sees social class as an amalgam
> of factors, importantly including but not necessarily predominated by
> occupation. This is not, of course, contradictory to the way in which class
> is viewed by social scientists who classify classes on the single criterion
> of occupation (1989: 41).

Thus, in spite of the variety of factors presented by the public, he maintains that, for sociological purposes, class is described in terms of occupation. For ultimately, as Reid explains, elements such as 'way of life', 'appearance', etc. can be see as related to income and occupation.

Another major contemporary sociological theory on class is that of Giddens (1980), whose aim is to propose a general framework for the study of class and not an account specific to British society. He prefers to speak of the structuration of class relationships rather than of classes themselves because of the problems of tracing class boundaries. Thus, he claims that class should not be considered as a particular 'entity' or as bounded social form, with a publicly sanctioned identity. "A class is not even a 'group'; the concept, as I have defined it, refers to a cluster of forms of structuration based upon commonly shared levels of market capacity" (Giddens 1980: 192).

According to him, there are three types of market capacity which are generally significant in this structuration process: "the ownership of property in the means of production; possession of educational or technical qualifications; and possession of manual labour-power" (1980: 107), which tends to form the basis in capitalist society of a three-class system: an 'upper', 'middle' and 'lower' or 'working' class. For instance, he attributes to the middle class the possession of educational or technical qualifications as its defining market capacity.

Again, like Reid, what prevails in Giddens' classificatory scheme is an economic, market-oriented view of class and class relationships. Other elements which may be seen as related to class, such as appearance, accent, 'way of life', etc., become subsumed under the category 'market capacity'. But, as Ortner (1991) remarks, it is the difficulty in keeping the economic aspect separate from the perspective of status and social ranking which often creates the confusion sociologists face with the concept.[2]

Such a combination of approaches is achieved by Bourdieu, who works in both sociology and anthropology and who, like Giddens, proposes a general framework on class. He treats class in terms of not only economic capital but also of cultural and symbolic capital. For Bourdieu, class refers to a group of agents who have "homogenous conditions of existence imposing homogenous conditionings and producing homogenous systems of dispositions capable of generating similar practices" (1984: 101). Class is not only about particular relations of production but also, and especially, he says, about

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[2] Class is not a subject restricted to sociological studies only and, therefore, there are other authors who discuss class attitudes and values. For instance, Hutber (1976) attributes to the English middle class the value of thrift, or the readiness to postpone satisfaction, whereas the working class does not tend to make such delays. He also characterizes the middle class as 'inner' oriented and individualist whereas the working class is 'other' oriented and prone to collective action, ideas which are shared by Williams (1961) as well.

habitus -- "principles which generate and organize practices and representations" which are in turn produced by "the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence" (1990: 53). Through the *habitus*, one acquires specific forms of economic, cultural and symbolic capital.

Bourdieu points at the importance of the family in the acquisition of many forms of cultural capital -- cultural practices and preferences. Thus, "although the educational system, by its monopoly of certification, governs the conversion of inherited cultural capital into educational capital, it does not have a monopoly on the production of cultural capital" (1984: 80). In other words, this cultural capital is a product of the cultural transmission by both the family and the school (and Bourdieu adds that the efficiency of the latter depends on the amount of cultural capital acquired from the family).

Cultural practices and preferences are analysed by Bourdieu with respect to taste, which he defines as that which classifies patterns of consumption. Taste is a "product of the conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence" (1984: 56) and, as such, it unites or separates according to similarities or differences in these conditions. Taste distinctions apply to a whole range of things, from patterns of art, music and food consumption to sports activities and manners. Bourdieu suggests that:

> the importance attached to manners can be understood once it is seen that it is these imponderables of practice which distinguish the different -- and ranked -- modes of culture acquisition, early or late, domestic or scholastic, and the classes of individuals which they characterise (1984: 02).

Thus, distinctions based on taste are classifying distinctions, that in turn create a ranking among different life styles.

Together with manners, the relation of the person to the body is another dimension of the *habitus* for, as a systems of dispositions, it structures "a durable way

of standing, speaking, walking, and thereby of feeling and thinking" (1990: 70).

Perceptions of gender are, likewise, structured by *habitus*, as Bourdieu explains:

> sexual properties are as inseparable from class properties as the yellowness
> of a lemon is from its acidity: a class is defined in an essential respect by
> the place and value it gives to the two sexes and to their socially
> constituted dispositions (1984: 107).

Thus, Bourdieu's treatment of class departs radically from other sociological approaches. He includes a host of practices and dispositions outside the economic sphere within the constitution of class positions through the mediation of *habitus*.

In many ways, Bourdieu's explanations are similar to those put forward by the English people I studied. According to Strathern, "a whole focus of interest within English culture lies in spelling out again and again that one's place in the scale of riches does not necessarily determine one's place in terms of social status" (1982b:270). Thus, class in England is understood as more than its economic sense, because it comes associated with the category of 'background', as I present next.

The category of 'background'

As already mentioned, when the English people I studied talked about class, they normally added the word 'background' to class. Thus, class was seldom spoken of in its own terms but rather was used to qualify 'background'. The category of 'class background', in turn, was specified by naming the type of class -- upper, middle or working class -- which described background.

'Class background' is used in the sense of social and economic origins. As such, 'background' points always to the past and not to one's present class standing. In fact, I rarely heard expressions such as 'class standing' and there were few references to people's present situation with respect to class. Such a feature of discourse has important

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implications for social mobility, as I will discuss later in the chapter, for the focus on background/origins seems to obscure social and economic changes experienced during one's lifetime.

But what constitutes one's background? I use Janice's description of her background, shown below, to answer this question. Janice comes from 'an aspiring middle class' family and, as she says, her background is quite a 'strange' one. She is the youngest of her family and, as such, she had privileges her older siblings did not have access to. This account was her reply to my inquiry about whether class interfered with friendship or not.

> You're always or I'm always very aware of different backgrounds, you know, and backgrounds I usually consider to be middle class background and working class background. But that's actually a distinction difficult to maintain, you know, like most labels, you actually know what it means but when you pin it down to individuals it actually means nothing, because it's only one part of an identity. And I think my own class background is quite confused in a sense, that I am certainly a child of the middle class but my father, my mother, my brother and my sister have got a very different class background in a sense, which is very strange. My mom and dad were brought up right in the city centre in Liverpool and were from very working class backgrounds. You know, you sort of have this purity test of class, one of them is you didn't have your own toilet and neither of my parents had their own toilet and there was one toilet in the street. These are the sort of tales you get into when you start talking about class, you know. My grandparents were all manual workers but by the time I was a kid -- there is 8 years between me and my sister and 13 years between me and my brother -- so by the time I was growing up, it was a time when my dad had a business that was quite successful and we lived in quite a posh area, and so I had all the benefits that a middle class child would have. And I think that even though my friends have different... their sort of class position in terms of economic background is different, what is the same for all of my friends is that we all come from families where kids were read to and encouraged to read books and certainly, my father who left school at 14, who was never educated, he had a really powerful drive that all of his children should be educated and that we should all want to learn things and that we should all be very grateful that we had enough money to have clothes and holidays.(...) So I think we were all brought up by lively minded adults. (...) It was much more of an issue for me when I was younger, I was very self-conscious about my own background. And I think, because of my upbringing and because of my

dad's -- I feel -- his origins are very strongly working class, and I was never brought up in what would be easily identifiable as very bourgeois upbringing. It was quite a self-conscious upbringing because we were the aspiring middle class, that I got taught at a very early age about using proper knifes and forks and he used to make me drink wine, which I hated, because that was the sort of thing you had to do. And I got sent to elocution lessons when I was young, so that I didn't speak with a [X] accent.

Whether middle class or working class, in the beginning of Janice's account, 'background' refers chiefly to the economic situation of one's childhood and adolescence. Thus, unlike herself, Janice's parents and siblings have a working class background because they did not have the material benefits and financial conditions she had when they were growing up.

It is with this meaning that she describes a working class background with reference to having a manual labour type of occupation and lacking some household facilities. Middle class, on the other hand, implies 'benefits' such as house in a 'posh' area of town and enough money for clothes and holidays. This is certainly a contrast to the past, for working class houses today not only have toilets but many other consumer goods such washing machines, televisions, etc.. Indeed, lack of wealth no longer characterizes the working class, thinks Allison, who comes from a working class background.

There is also another sense Janice imparts to 'background', which is the values of the family one comes from. Here 'background' alludes to 'upbringing' -- the way one was 'brought up' by one's family during childhood and adolescence. It is with this idea of family background that she regards herself as similar to her friends, despite their different economic/class positions, since they all 'come from families' who encouraged their children to read books.

In fact, the two meanings given to 'background' (the economic sense and the family values aspect) are generally conflated. Thus, Janice talks about her own class position in a family idiom -- "I am a child of the middle class". And this view comes from the fact that she had the benefits a middle class child normally has because her father had a successful business when she was growing up.

Janice is one of the few people I met who discussed the economic aspects of one's family background. Others tended to take the economic situation of their families for granted. In general, the category 'background' carried predominantly the sense of family values, in other words, of 'upbringing' -- the ways of thinking and behaving one was 'brought up with'. As Janice explains, being middle class meant not only having material advantages but also being encouraged to read books, using knives and forks in a particular way and drinking wine with meals. More than any of these, the sign which epitomizes middle classness and which is generally acquired through upbringing is speaking with a middle class accent. Janice was not the only one to express this view nor is accent an epitome of middle classness only. Accent is taken to reveal a person's class background in general.

The link between accent, family background and class is particularly clear in Martin's narrative of his upbringing.

> *Martin:* I come from, I suppose you'd call, a middle class, upwardly mobile family. And my father is a graphics designer and my mother runs a charity foundation... and I'm 30 now (...) in social terms they're both very middle class. And as I was growing up I went to school and people did say that I spoke slightly differently, but I didn't realize that in school. -
> I grew up in North Wales (...) and I went to a local comprehensive school after about the age of 11(...)
> *CR:* What do you mean you spoke differently?
> *Martin:* I went to a very culturally mixed school, I mean, it's middle class and working class, but they're probably predominantly more Welsh accents. Now my mother is from Leeds and came from quite a high society family in Leeds and my father was like not really working class

although again his parents... his father died when he was about 14 and his mother was a shopkeeper and they both worked very hard and he was a little bit victimized because they tried to make him well-to-do, respectable, and all the rest of it, so he probably took a little bit of stick for that, being slightly different there. So when he was becoming a graphics designer, going to college (...) he'd been in that intellectual environment and he'd lost his accent to a certain extent and he even puts it on sometimes (...) So in a way they were both accent-less to a certain extent, which made me accent-less to a certain extent, although I went to local school, I still picked up a bit of an accent from living in North Wales.

Martin indicates that class is not only about being a graphics designer or a shopkeeper but there are also 'social terms', he says, which define one's class position. And, in view of the focus he places on it, accent seems to a particularly relevant marker of class.

Thus, in recounting his father's social trajectory, Martin matches the investment in education -- going to college, spending time in an intellectual environment -- with a change in accent. These changes are spoken of in terms of a 'loss' of accent, so that in the end Martin and his parents have become 'accent-less'. Implicit here is an assumption that the middle class way of speaking does not really embody an accent. The middle class accent becomes the 'standard' Honey (1989) talks about in his discussion of accent in Britain, and around which all other accents are classified and ranked.

According to Honey, British English accents are divided mainly into 'standard' English and regional accents.[3] The fact that there is a 'standard' implies a classification

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[3] Honey remarks that this 'standard' English accent came to be established around the seventeenth century. What was then considered to be the 'correct' pronunciation was not just the accent of a particular region -- the South, with London as its centre -- but also of a specific social group (the Court, the gentry and the educated in Oxford and Cambridge). With the emergence of an educated class and later with the development of the boarding school system, this 'standard' accent spread, becoming associated to a great extent with a public school status. Around the 1920s, with the establishment of radio broadcasting, the media came to share with the public school system the guardianship of such an accent (hence also known as the BBC accent).

of accents, which turns out to be, as Honey remarks, a hierarchy with the 'standard' accent on top. Associated to this ranking is "a tendency to attach to particular accents certain generalized assumptions about the values and attributes considered typical of certain social groups" (Honey 1989: 65). Thus, the 'standard' accent tends to be linked to qualities of educatedness and competence, whereas many of the regional ones come to be tied to notions of sociability and solidarity. Although the latter are considered positive values, the former rank higher and, consequently, the strongest value is placed on the 'standard' accent, whereas regional accents are often stigmatized.

Honey says, it is claimed that such a prejudice about accent is directly linked to class prejudice. Although he himself seems doubtful as to whether fully support this explanation, he does acknowledge that the most stigmatized accents (Cockney from London, Scouse from Liverpool, Brum from around Birmingham, and broad Glaswegian) are those exclusively identified with the working class of large industrial urban areas. Furthermore, foreigners, and especially English speaking ones, tend to escape the judgement of their accents according to educatedness because they are "perceived as standing outside the social-class hierarchy which partly explains the scale of evaluation of our own British accents" (Honey 1989: 72).

Despite Honey's reluctance to regard accent as a class marker, the idea that accent reveals one's class background remains a common notion among the English people I studied. Stories like Janice's and Martin's father's show that the issue of accent is more complex than it appears. People can change their accents through elocution lessons or by going to university (although the latter does not necessarily alter accent) and, in this respect, mask their class/family background. But it is because the association between

class and accent is recognized that people with ascending trajectories may endeavour to alter their manner of speaking.

Together with accent, table manners -- e.g. if one sits at the table for meals, how one holds the cutlery -- are thought to be specifically telling about one's upbringing and, hence, class background. Pete, who comes from a working class family, says he grew up having meals with the plate on his lap in front of the television. Sitting around tables is, for him, a middle class habit. Likewise, the type of school -- state or private/boarding -- one goes to is also indicative of class. Although some of the middle class people I met studied in state schools, going to private and especially boarding schools is regarded as a middle class (and also upper class) feature.

But there are many other things which are said to be part of one's upbringing even if these are not explicitly linked to class. These aspects of one's upbringing are not generally stressed to be as indicative of class background as accent and table manners are, but people still associate them with class. Many of these features correspond to what Bourdieu (1984) calls 'extra-curricular' and avant-garde culture, referring to cultural capital acquired from the family which is specific to middle and upper classes. Thus, Sally explains her liking for French cuisine because of her parents, who owned a restaurant for many years. Likewise, Susan directly associates her appreciation of art films to the way she was brought up, since her father is a film maker. Her knowledge and liking for art films became a class issue in one of her arguments with her working class partner, which is discussed later in the chapter.

Another area which is perceived to be connected to upbringing and class background is a person's relation to the body in general and to sexuality, in particular. Sally likes to kiss and hug her friends and considers that to be taken after her father, who

was always cuddling her. Kissing and hugging friends is thought to be more of a middle class feature. Allison, who comes from a working class family, says that working class people do not tend to greet their friends with a kiss. This is also Janice's view:

> I certainly wasn't brought up in a household where you felt good about your body and having contact with other bodies. I was never spoken to about sex, I was never told anything about it. I'm sure that somewhere that's still with me and that I still hold on to bits of that somewhere (...)

Janice also attributes her notions of gender, especially her ideas about domestic division of labour, to how she was brought up. Together with Janice, Allison and Sarah feel they were brought up to help with domestic chores and keep things clean and tidy in a way that their brothers were not. Such clearly defined gender roles are attributed to be a particularly strong working class characteristic.

Thus, middle classness involves various features: going to private schools as a child, having university education and a non-manual labour type of occupation, speaking with a middle class accent, holding forks and knives in a particular way, among other things. Accent receives the greatest emphasis as evidence of class background but the other aspects are also considered to be relevant indicators of upbringing one has had and, consequently, of the class background one has.

If we consider that family background is perceived to be closely associated to class, we find that the views on upbringing expressed by the people studied here are very much in tune with Bourdieu's. For instance, linking how one relates to the body with upbringing resembles Bourdieu's (1990) idea of the embodied *habitus*, of dispositions that structure one's relation to the body which are themselves associated with a specific class of conditions of existence. Similarly, connecting notions of gender with how one was brought up ties in with Bourdieu's claim that "a class is defined in an essential respect

by the place and value it gives to the two sexes and to their socially constituted dispositions" (1984: 107).

Thus, 'class background' in the discourse analysed here is practically synonymous with 'family background', which in turn is constituted by one's parents' economic conditions -- type of occupation and income -- and principally by upbringing -- the ways of thinking and behaving one was 'brought up' with during childhood and adolescence. The stress placed on upbringing ties in with the sense of 'background' as social origins, directed to the past and not to the present. These notions are significant for people's perceptions of social mobility, for unless one was brought up with, for example, middle class values one is not middle class. This is what I examine next.

The 'rejection' of one's background

In the discourse studied here, social mobility appears as the 'rejection' of one's class background. For the English people I talked to, working class people 'reject' their background when they decide to pursue a university degree and/or when they mainly 'mix' with middle class people. Middle class people can also 'reject' their background by not behaving according to middle class values and this is Celia's case, which I analyse in this section.

Celia comes from a middle class background and only recently, she says, has she realized that most of her close friends share the same background. According to her, this is explained by the fact that they met in middle class contexts: boarding school and university. Before, she used to 'pride' herself in thinking that she could get on with people of all classes. In the recent past, she has been mainly going out with working class men. She thinks that middle class men are so 'educated' into not expressing what they

think and feel that she prefers working class men, who are more direct in saying what they feel. She also regards her preference as an act of rebellion against her background. She sees herself as a 'middle class rebel'.

The whole issue of 'rebelling' or 'rejecting' one's background is a complex one, as Celia reveals below. She is talking about how working class men who have 'rejected' their background compare to middle class men. These working class men have university education and, more importantly, mainly 'mix in middle class circles'. At the same time, class background is perceived as defining to a great extent a whole way of *being* and the degree to which one can actively interfere in this process is felt by her to be questionable.

> *Celia*: I think the main difference between the working class guy and the middle class guy who is not a professional is that the middle class guy moves in social circles and social occasions like dinner parties, drink parties, with a lot more ease and confidence than working class blokes because working class blokes haven't been brought up to socialize -- I mean they socialize in going down to the pub -- it's a very middle class phenomena having parties and having people out to dinner...having that sort of organized social life, where you invite people for pre-determined dates... and that's very middle class. So I think middle class blokes behave in a more easy, relaxed fashion in that sort of situation whereas most of the working class blokes I know, when taken to drink parties or to dinner parties, will feel uncomfortable about it. They feel they haven't got the social skills. Either that or they get angry, you know, they say 'oh,I can't be bothered, these people are so pretentious or they've got two faces or whatever' because they actually feel quite threatened because they don't have those skills basically.
> *CR*: What are these skills? The way you go and talk to people?
> *Celia*: Yes, small talk, chit chat, that sort of whole thing that comes from being an educated middle class person, you just know how to react and how to talk to people you never met before with ease and confidence, whereas working class blokes... I suppose in that sense they are more honest because they can't put up with it... Personally I find that easier to relate to. I sort of meet them somewhere in the middle, the working class blokes that have rejected their background,'cause I've rejected very strongly my middle class background. So I think we meet in the middle really. We both reject or have rejected the middle class values: them because it's not their background and they can't do it and me because I hate it.
> *CR*: What sort of values are you talking about ?

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Celia: On a social level, for example, I invite 20 people around to this party and everybody wears quite sophisticated clothes, and they are all professionals, they are either lawyers or doctors or writers, they've all got proper jobs, and they all stand around talking to each other, and I always want to sit down and crash down on the floor and be a bit of a slob. I'm just no good in standing around making conversation with a glass of a wine in my hand, I just don't enjoy it. Is that what you asked ?
CR: Yes. I meant those things that you've rejected.
Celia: Well yes, it's like keeping up the social politeness that comes with going to all those sort of social parties. What are middle class values? Being polite all the time, being nice and charming and I don't think this pressure is on working class people, they don't put themselves under those pressures. You know, always having to appear that you're confident, in control, being able to talk about what you do with confidence, making it sound better than it is, just basically that you have a role to play in society, you have a place where you fit... You know, I have a right to be here (...) I think that middle class people have been brought up to think that they can have anything they want, if they wanted anything, they would have the means either through education or through your contacts or whatever that would enable them to get it. (...) You have a right to do anything in the world, you have a freedom of choice, whereas, I think, working class people are not brought up to have the same expectations, they are not told 'you can do any job you want, you can live in any country of the world'... I'm not saying that middle class people can get anything they want but (...) it's freedom of choice and that's where the privilege comes in...

Celia builds this discussion about class by focusing on ways of socializing, which are seen to be a result of upbringing. Throughout her narrative, she describes what it means to be middle class with reference to what she considers to be working class. As Pieterse says, "representations of otherness therefore are also indirectly representations of self" (1991: 200). Her definition of each class is thus relationally constituted.[4]

According to her, middle class people go to parties and have pre-determined dates and organized lives. Here she points at a specific relation to time in which people pre-arrange events rather than allow them to happen merely spontaneously. With this, Celia implies that working class people do not organize themselves in the same manner and that

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[4] The relational aspect in the definition of class as found in American discourse has been noted by Ortner (1991).

going to the pub -- which she sees as their way of socializing -- can be a last minute decision.

But the differences are not only one of what one does or where one goes, but also of how one behaves. Middle class people prefer to move in parties rather than to sit in one spot or to 'crash down on the floor'. Not only do they circulate in parties but they do it 'with ease'. Thus, here Celia speaks of class in terms of the movement of the body in space -- move, sit, crash down -- and how it is qualified -- moving 'with ease' or crashing down and 'being a slob' (in the sense of being slovenly, careless). And we find once more a similar idea to Bourdieu's notion of the class *habitus* structuring ways of moving the body.

Class is not only associated with the body and its movement in space but also with specific ways of conversing. Thus, middle class people 'make conversation with a glass of wine in their hands'. The expression 'make conversation' is interesting, I find, because it suggests that conversation does not flow or arise spontaneously but has to be produced self-consciously. Moreover, in a situation where it is frequent to meet people one has never seen before, conversation should be of a specific kind: small talk, chit chat, which excludes any topic considered to be 'personal'.

This view ties in with what Celia calls 'social politeness', which entails behaving in a specific manner: being nice, charming and in control of oneself. Here Celia is not only alluding to the sense of politeness that implies showing respect for, not being rude to and not imposing on others.[5] She is referring as well to politeness as a way of

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[5] Brown and Levinson (1987) contrast the meaning of politeness in English and Japanese societies, where it implies not hindering people's individual will (i.e. not imposing on others), with that of Latin societies, where being polite entails being inclusive, making people feel part of the group.

behaving typical of middle class people.[6] In this second sense, 'being polite' comes close

to the idea of 'being confident' discussed in chapter 1. That is, it means being funny and

pleasant (in other words, charming and nice) and in control of oneself, instead of being

'boring' and problematic which may imply imposing on others. 'Being polite' implies

being constrained and presenting to others a polished self ('polite' and 'polish' both come

from the same Latin word, *polire*). We find here a similar idea to that of cultivation, of

improving one's own nature, characteristic of eighteenth century English middle class

(Strathern 1992). "Polite society thus regarded itself as the proper enhancement of

nature", summarizes Strathern (1992: 92).

However, from the point of view of working class people, as Celia says, being

polite and appearing confident become transformed into being pretentious and two-faced.

Instead of placing a value on politeness, working class people would prefer honesty and

integrity. In this sense, Celia sides herself with working class people because she dislikes

those middle class values which stress politeness, constraint and confidence.

It is because of these different values that the working class men she knows feel

angry or uncomfortable in middle class parties. But Celia also thinks that these men may

feel 'threatened' because they do not have the skills to socialize like middle class people.

She may be pointing at the ambivalence experienced by these working class men, who

are not sure of their feelings about the middle class. They have moved out of their circle

-- they mix with middle class people -- but they have not adopted middle class values and

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[6] The Oxford Dictionary (1989) presents two definitions for 'polite', similar to the meanings given by Celia. The first refers to "having or showing that one has good manners and consideration for other people". The second takes 'polite' to be an attribute "(typical) of a superior class in society", which also means to be 'refined'.

skills. To paraphrase Celia, such values and skills are not part of their background and because of that they cannot put these into practice -- they cannot *do it*.

Nevertheless, Celia assumes that these working class men lack middle class values and skills because they *cannot* adopt them, rather than thinking that they might *not want* to share these values. Here is an attribution of (superior) worth to these middle class values. With this assumption, Celia reveals a certain confusion in her position as a 'rebel'. She agrees with working class views that middle class people are pretentious but she also finds that working class people lack in social skills. Where does Celia stand? She feels she has rejected these middle class values which she hates and this is to be seen in her description of how she would behave at parties as well as the fact that she goes out with working class men. But, in remarking that these men lack social skills, Celia reveals that perhaps her rejection was not a total one, or otherwise she could have characterised them as having different social skills, instead of none. Having no middle class skills becomes equated to having no skills, a view which discloses a feeling of superiority of middle class values in relation to those of the working class.

Unlike working class men, Celia has the middle class skills and she can use them, if she wants to. In a later passage in this same interview, she was talking about a party to which she had gone where she had met a woman who, like herself, was not interested in 'keeping up the social politeness' regarded as appropriate to the situation. She goes on to say:

> I know I can do it. I've done it in numerous occasions and, if it's required, I can do it terribly well. But it's just that recently I've been less in the mood to do that than as when I was younger, I was more wanting to impress, to show that I was part of things. Whereas now I'm much happier just sitting on my own on the sideline, just watching.

If before she felt the need to be seen as part of the group, she now seems to prefer a rather detached position -- once more, she speaks in physical and spatial terms -- of being on her own and on the sideline. Nonetheless, the skills to socialize in the middle class way still exist and they attest to her middle class background.

What is at stake here is Celia's desire to be able to choose whether to use these skills or not, to behave according to middle class values or not. Thus it is that 'if she is in the mood', 'if she *wants* to impress', 'she *can* do it'. 'Rejection' becomes a matter of choice. Here is a stress placed on individual will and Celia is aware of how a middle class upbringing can instill in the person the feeling that one 'can have anything' one wants. Middle class people believe that freedom of choice presides in their lives. They do not always get what they want, Celia adds. The ability to do so, she says, also depends on education and contacts.

At the same time, she is uncertain if middle class people have to adopt the values of social politeness because they are pressured to do so (they *have* to) or because they put the pressure on themselves (they *want* to). Here is a fundamental ambiguity in her discourse: the extent to which willing agents can shape their lives independently of their education, their contacts and their background is not established. It is this ambivalence which also explains Celia's conflicting views on her working class friends who have 'rejected' their background. As people who have 'rejected' their background, she is like these working class men in their exercise of choice. When her middle class background weighs more than her rebellious views, she talks of these working class men from the point-of-view of a person who feels not only different but also privileged for she possesses things (skills) that they cannot have nor do. In the end, and this is a view

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shared by other people as well, background seems to outweigh individual will in the constitution of personhood.

The importance of background in relationships

The discussion about the possibilities of 'rejecting' class background points at how deeply instilled in one's being are values, ways of thinking and behaving acquired through upbringing. In examining the close association of different ways of being to class, the issue of how people of different backgrounds relate to each other come to the fore. In the previous section, Celia discussed in a general way the problems found by some working class men when going to parties with middle class people. At present, I want to examine another case of relations between people who come from distinct class backgrounds.

In the following passage from an interview with Susan, she discusses her relationship with her partner Paul, with whom she had been living at the time of fieldwork and who was described as coming from a working class background. Susan regarded herself as being middle class and their different class backgrounds was often a cause of problems. In the quote below, Susan talks about perceptions of class background from the point-of-view of three persons: herself, her partner Paul and his friend Fred, who is also said to come from a working class background.

> *Susan*: (...) In a way [Paul's] rejected his background quite heavily and yet he's working with people from his background. The only people he's meeting out of his background are people through me at the minute. He's friendly with quite a lot of my friends, so he's like in between. The people he meets at work he goes out drinking with but he finds them very limited. It's quite difficult for him to know... I don't think he really knows what he wants.
> *CR*: Does he think of studying something?
> *Susan*: You see, Fred's [a close friend of Paul's] done that. Fred's gone to night classes to do his O and A levels and is now going to try and go

to Drama school. (...) Paul's got a real chip on his shoulder about [this] he thinks he's really stupid, as far as academics goes. But I think he should [do his O levels] really. He recognizes it. He says the only thing he's really angry about is he hasn't got an education (...)

CR: Does Fred encourage him about studying?

Susan: I've spoken to Fred about it and Fred actually told me to be careful. Because of the way I've been brought up, it's taken for granted that academic education is the way forward, and it isn't for some people and Paul isn't... he's not like that and he's not ever going to be like that, so don't try and push him. The only thing is that's fair enough, but Paul has acknowledged himself that he'd rather have education. He just feels he can't do it but I think he could. Fred doesn't feel Paul should... But Paul is incredibly lazy. I don't think he would do it anyway. It's like a funny split between him being very lazy and also lacking... he's got very little confidence (...) But I often think it must be very odd for him not having any academic education and then mixing with my friends. And he's very rude about it, he's very rude about my friends. He thinks we have a very odd way of talking about things and going about things. He thinks it's really weird, all completely removed from any type of reality... I think I'm overconcerned with education 'cause I find... (...) when I meet people it seems to be really important if they're educated or not, which I think, on one level, I think it's rubbish, that it shouldn't be but sometimes it does seem to matter.(...) I think it's really refreshing to mix with people who are like [Tom, a friend who has not gone to university] or like Paul (...) It's like a brainwashing that goes on this type of academic intellectual knowledge is right or it's more powerful, 'cause I really don't think that's true. There are so many different types of intelligence.

This is the other thing: because of this block about education and stuff, certain things that Paul is quite interested in but he won't talk to me about because... maybe I've been rude to him in the past, maybe I've really hurt him. Fred told me that he talks a lot to him about music and history and all these things and he can to Fred because Fred is from his background and he doesn't feel threatened by his education or whatever.(...) I've been brought up thinking about things in such a different way and it's suddenly difficult to drop all of that and start talking in the way he wants to. So we always end up having massive arguments [she was referring here to an argument they had had about the value of contemporary art films].(...) I feel really burdened by education 'cause you're almost pushed into a way of looking at things and you accept that something is good because you've been told by x,y,z, that it is good without really... He, because he hasn't got any of that on his shoulders he can just... but then he hasn't got maybe the developed way of analysing, I don't know.

In this narrative, upbringing appears as defining specific ways of thinking, of talking and of 'going about things' as well as forming 'different types of intelligence'.

These ways of thinking and behaving are given different evaluations according to people's

class background. Susan reports that Paul finds middle class ways of talking 'odd' and 'weird' because they seem 'completely removed from any type of reality'. Susan, despite pondering about middle class values, affirms at some point that maybe hers is 'the developed way of analysing'.

Together with being evaluated, upbringing is perceived to instill such forms of thinking in a deeply entrenched manner so that it appears to be very difficult to modify them. Thus, Fred is reputed to have said that academic education is not for Paul, that 'he's not like that and he's *not ever* going to be like that' (my emphasis). Likewise, Susan explains that she was brought up with a particular way of thinking and that it is hard to 'drop all of that' in order to start talking in a different manner.

The issue of changing the ways of thinking that one was brought up with becomes particularly sensitive in relation to 'education'. When people speak of others having an 'education', they mean specifically having a university degree. Since education in England is compulsory until the age of 16, pursuing an academic education becomes optional to a certain extent, for Abercrombie *et al* (1988) show that it is mainly people from the middle and upper classes that get accepted into universities. It is not by chance that university education is also called 'higher' education, being valued by many people as a way of social advancement.

University education is perceived to affect one's accent, as discussed by Martin in one of the previous sections, and also one's way of thinking. At times, Susan thinks that academic education can 'push' one to look at things in a particular form and may even be 'like brainwashing'. Whether it is considered good or bad, academic education is thought to alter and distinguish one's way of thinking from those of people who have not gone to university. And this is why many people -- both middle class and working

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class (I refer back to Janice's father discussed earlier in the chapter) -- see academic education as a 'way forward', as a means of social and economic advancement for those who come from working class backgrounds.[7]

But such value placed on education is far from receiving consensus. According to Susan, Fred thinks that university education is 'the way forward' for some but not all people. He does not take the value of education for granted like middle class people do.[8] Paul is said to find the lack of education limiting and a cause for anger but, at the same time, he considers some educated middle class people to have a 'weird' way of thinking. Susan, in turn, alternates her views on education. In some moments, education seems to be so important for her that she sees herself as being 'overconcerned' about it. In others, she thinks it is all 'rubbish'. Moreover, she states that the value placed on academic education creates ranking that differentiates ways of thinking and the distinct types of intelligence.

This dispute over how valuable education is reveals how people of different class backgrounds may relate to each other. Susan and Paul not only had different class backgrounds but they had as well different levels of education: Paul had no O levels whereas Susan was studying for a Master's degree. Both Susan and Paul alternate between agreeing with each other and having 'massive arguments'. At times, Paul, like Susan, is said to value academic education and to feel angry because he has no academic

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[7] This is an idea which dates back to the nineteenth century, receiving expressive force from Matthew Arnold among other English thinkers (Williams 1961).

[8] Willis' (1977) study is a classic example of the reaction by working class youth against the middle class value placed on education. For the working class students he studied, teachers have not seen 'the way of the world' and theory is useful in so far as it has some practical application.

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education. Similarly, Susan is not sure about how important academic education is and, like Fred and Paul, she questions the idea that going into university is 'the way forward'.

At other times, Susan thinks that Paul is lazy and not confident enough to enrol in night classes. She also wonders if her academic education does not seem threatening to Paul, who prefers to discuss music and history with Fred instead of Susan. When they do talk about such topics, they often argue with each other. Moreover, Susan finds that Paul is rude about her middle class friends, who have a way of thinking and talking which is seen as different from his. In these moments, Susan's and Paul's different upbringing become more salient, for it is difficult to put aside their own way of thinking in order to try and talk like the other.

On the other hand, when people have a common background, it becomes a weighty element in personal relationships. The fact that Fred has more years of formal education than Paul seems not to affect their relationship; rather, what appears to matter in their friendship is their coming from a working class background. In this sense, Paul can discuss music and history with Fred and they understand each other, whereas, with Susan, these conversations often turn into arguments. They also share the fact that they related mainly with middle class people (like Paul, Fred had a partner from a middle class background).

The friendship of Paul and Fred is not the only example of a friendship maintained because of common background, despite the difference in education. Victor was the first in his family to get a university degree and, despite feeling different from his family, he retains working class friends made in his adolescence.

Thus, from this account, we see that having a common class background can be significant for relationships in the same way that coming from distinct backgrounds can

become a problem for them. What is at stake here are the ways of thinking, talking and doing things which can be so different, in cases of distinct upbringing, as to make communication and understanding very difficult. Education may bridge this communication gap formed by working class and middle class backgrounds, but only in so far as it radically alters the ways of thinking instilled through one's upbringing.

The conflicts about background

The discourse on class presented by the English people I studied focuses on 'background' as the social and economic origins one comes from rather than on one's present social and economic conditions. It is because of the stress upon the past that such a discourse differs enormously from sociological concepts of class, many of which are based on economic indicators only and refer to people's present situation.

Class background alludes to the family one comes from: to both the economic situation of one's parents and the values upheld by them which are then transmitted through upbringing to their children. The strongest element in one's background is upbringing, for it is perceived as defining to a great extent one's whole way of being. Such emphasis is further illustrated by the various references in my conversations with these English people to the way they were brought up as a form of explaining their behaviour, thoughts and feelings.

Because class is thought of in terms of background, which in turn is taken to constitute a person's way of being, social mobility is considered to be a complicated and difficult process. Thus it is that, instead of using words such as 'change' or 'mobility', people talk of 'rejection' of one's background. One cannot 'change', for instance, one's working class background into a middle class one; one may have a present middle class

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status but one's background will always be working class. To 'reject' one's background means denying one's upbringing and acquiring a different way of being. This is not to say that social mobility is not possible. But, as I have discussed throughout this chapter, this is regarded as difficult by the people I talked to.

But acknowledging that the past has such a clear hold on the person clashes with the notion of the individual as a free willing agent. Recognizing the difficulty in 'rejecting' one's background goes against the idea of individual freedom of choice regarding behaviour and beliefs. This is what Strathern sees as the prevalent question in mid-twentieth century:"the extent to which persons either act or are acted upon" (1992: 127). This conflict is well expressed by Janice:

> You know, it's only been in the last few years that I've realised just how strong parental influence is, that it doesn't matter how much you fight against it when you're younger, there is still so many bits that you will always carry with you but... that doesn't mean to say that you then reproduce them and that you behave the same way to your kids, but you're always aware of these strange things that you never choose to believe in but... Very bizarre!

The value placed upon individual choice and the issue of parental influence/family background have been discussed by Strathern (1982a) in an earlier work. In her study of a village in Essex, she suggests that ideas about family and relatives can be used as a model for categories of class and status. These ideas revolve on notions of ascriptiveness and option, openness and closure. Thus, 'birth' (closed) stands in opposition to 'marriage' (open), so that one's relatives by birth become part of one's 'background' contrasting to "the friends and connections created for oneself" (Strathern 1982a: 93).

In a different essay, Strathern (1982b) further explores this opposition with relation to class and to ideas about the relationship between 'individual' and 'society' present in what she calls English folk philosophy. She argues that, in the village she

studies, as well as in England in general, classes are perceived to be fixed but at the same time individuals are thought to be able to move between them. The contrast lies between the fixity of class, to which one is tied through family background (becoming also a class background), and the possibilities of mobility, represented in the connections one can establish for oneself. Thus, fixity of the social order -- at the 'group' level -- becomes opposed to mobility of the economic system -- at an 'individual' level. Ultimately, "this structure is repeated in our definitions of person: that a person is a mixture of what he is and what he does, both moulded by background and created afresh by his unique achievements" (Strathern 1982b: 271).

Although my analysis echoes much of Strathern's, the opposition between fixity and mobility is not as clearly resolved for the English people I have met. Rather, such opposition becomes more of a source of conflict about one's power and ability to move away from one's background. This conflict is particularly acute for the middle class people I talked to.

Up to now, I have discussed this discourse on class background without distinguishing the views of people who defined themselves as middle class and those who said they came from working class background. This has been so because the use and meanings given to background were the same for all people. But the issue of mobility has different bearings according to which class background one has. Middle class people do not become working class whereas some working class people want to achieve a middle class status (Janice's family is a good example of the latter). Thus, although mobility is a significant issue for people with a working class background, it is the middle class people who seem to throw social change into question. Long debates such as Celia's and Susan's, about the weight of background on one's life, were discussions I only had with

middle class people. On the other hand, those people who came from working class backgrounds experienced change in their class situation.

All the four people I met who came from working class backgrounds had a university degree and some of them were the first one in their families to have done so. For them, one of the chief means of mobility is to pursue university education. All of these people perceived themselves to be different from their families and other friends who had not undertaken as much education as they. Going to university made them distinct from the others because university is not only considered a 'higher' form of qualification but also because it is regarded as a means for changing one's way of thinking and even one's accent, as I have shown before. These changes are taken to negatively affect people's communication with their working class families and friends who have not gone to university. Identifying with the middle class is complicated as well, for, despite having a similar education, their upbringing is different. Thus, these people who come from a working class background do not think of themselves as being middle class nor identify themselves any longer with the working class.

On the whole, the general standard of life of the English working class improved much from the 1940s until the late 1970s. With government policies directed to social welfare during these decades, many investments were made in education, housing, health and other social services. For example, the proportion of working class people possessing their own homes expanded tremendously (Abercrombie *et al* 1988). The improvement of living conditions, together with changes in the occupational structure which show a decline in the number of manual workers and an increase in white-collar categories, is such that sociologists debate whether there is not a convergence between the working and the middle classes. Despite this controversy, sociologists affirm that middle class types

of occupation (e.g. clerks, employers and managers, professionals) have grown in number during the twentieth century (Abercrombie *et al* 1988, Bilton *et al* 1987).

Thus, general differences between working class conditions of life and that of the middle class have decreased. In face of such changes, middle class views are confused. Working class mobility reveals individual will and achievement, values held by the middle class. Based on such values, many of the middle class people I talked to abhor the idea of being tied to a class label; it goes against the idea of the person as agent and acting upon his/her life.

At the same time, working class people who 'reject' their background are seen as approaching the middle class. Celia's working class friends interact in middle class circles and Janice's family has actively sought to become middle class by adopting middle class values and behaviour. There is also the assumption that middle classness is the standard (Williams 1961: 311), especially explicit in the idea that middle class people are 'accent-less'. Within this perspective, the person is part of a social order consisting of fixed status groups. When middle class people stress upbringing as the overwhelming factor that defines one's way of being and class background, they emphasize what does *not* change, what is part of the *past*. Such emphasis casts doubts on working class people's abilities to move up the social ladder. In so doing, I suggest that they reveal a certain concern about losing their own distinctiveness and their own identity as middle class.[9] For example, images of the working class as lacking social skills (cf. Celia's views) as well as a 'developed way of analysing' (cf. Susan's views) only emphasize the superiority

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[9] In the nineteenth century, the English middle class concern was becoming involved with working class struggles and violence (Williams 1961).

of the middle class.[10] Thus, representations of otherness are still being stressed as a way of reinforcing identity and of reproducing social inequality (Pieterse 1991).

With such an awareness of distinctions, people have difficulties in forming friendships between people of different class backgrounds. In this respect, my analysis departs from Strathern's (1982a). She speaks of friendship as representing 'openness', where choice seems to prevail in opposition to the fixity of one's background. But for the people I studied, sharing similar backgrounds is very important for friendship.

As discussed in chapter 1, friendship is about sociability and personal disclosure. In order to enjoy the company of friends, it is important that people share a sense of humour as well as interests and tastes, all of which are acquired to a certain extent through upbringing. Learning about the other's interests, tastes and sense of humour is part of a process of disclosing information about the self and of building a mutual understanding, which in turn is a fundamental element in the formation of friendship. In understanding and trusting one another, friends feel that they can 'be themselves' with each other.

If upbringing is thought to mold ways of thinking and behaving, having common interests, taste and sense of humour become translated into sharing family/class background. Upbringing will also affect how personal disclosure is carried out. Proper personal disclosure entails a particular form of politeness which is valued by the middle class. Since politeness entails a form of presenting the self which is not only 'polished', but in being so also does not impose on others, as a middle class value it pertains to a middle class way of revealing the self. People who relate differently to this particular

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[10] Corbey argues that, in the nineteenth century imagination, representations of peasants, workers and women held them "to be less capable of rational thinking, to be more like animals and closer to nature" (1991:42).

type of politeness will, consequently, disclose themselves in a different manner. Because friendship is based on a synchronized and reciprocal personal disclosure, it is necessary that friends have similar ways of thinking and behaving so that such exposure can happen. If people of different class backgrounds are perceived to have different ways of being, the possibility of establishing friendship between them becomes very remote.

CHAPTER 5.

SHARED HOMES AND FRIENDSHIP

One of the notions common in most Western societies is that of the home as the realm of privacy. It is set against the concept of a public world, in which relations marked by impersonality, transience and market values dominate. Thus, the home is constituted not only by the physical space of the house but also by a constellation of social characteristics: one decides whether or not to have any schedule, whether or not to do any specific tasks.

Privacy, in turn, has to considered in conjunction with sharing, for the home is also perceived as a shared environment. This quality is generally attributed to the family, to the extent that 'home' and 'family' are notions which frequently overlap. But, among the people I studied, home was shared, but not with the family. Some lived with their partners but most people shared their homes with flatmates, a category which can comprise friends but not necessarily so. Living with flatmates is, of course, different from living with the family or with partners. Because the relationships are distinct, flatmate-based homes are peculiar in the way space is arranged and decorated and, more importantly, in the form of dealing with privacy. In this chapter, I want to describe this pattern of living, very characteristic of a stage in life for young people living in London, which nevertheless is a subject little explored by sociologists, geographers and urban planners.

In my discussion, it will be shown that the interplay between the values of sharing a home and retaining privacy can be particularly problematic if the flatmates are close friends. Close friends are expected to support each other in time of need, and these demands are thought to increase if friends live together. At the same time, being constantly asked by friends with whom one lives for support may be seen as lack of consideration for one's privacy. Thus, having friends as flatmates involves much

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negotiation in order to maintain privacy whilst at the same time sharing the home with them.

The home in London

The English people I studied live dispersed in different areas of London. Most of them reside in what geographers treat as the inner city of London (see fig. 1). The group is evenly distributed between the south and the north sides of the river Thames, in areas such as Herne Hill, Brixton, Camberwell, Battersea, Camden, Stoke Newington, Finsbury Park and Kentish Town. There were also some people living outside this inner city, in Chiswick, Ealing and Gatwick (this person worked and socialized with friends in London).

Since the beginning of my fieldwork when I met these people, half of them have changed residences. Most of these have stayed within the side of the river they used to live in. That is, they moved into neighbouring areas, such as from Kentish Town to Tufnell Park or from Stoke Newington to Finsbury Park.

The choice of residential area is based on various factors. The average rent price of a neighbourhood is generally an important element taken into consideration when selecting the area to live in. Most people felt that they could afford a weekly rent price of at the most £50. The pleasantness of the area (e.g. whether there are parks and greens) was as significant a factor, and therefore not every one was satisfied with the area they lived in. Some people would like to move away from where they live into areas which they find more agreeable (e.g. having more nature around), although these might have high rent prices. Liz, for instance, dreams of living in a house with a garden in South

Figure 1. Inner London
    Source: LSE Drawing Office

Kensington. Kevin, on the other hand, is concerned with the quality of the natural environment around him and, therefore, would like to move to Highgate or Muswell Hill, which he thinks are 'healthier' areas to live in.

Others feel particularly attached to the areas they live in because of all the services provided. Allison has been living in Camden since she finished her university degree. She likes the liveliness and the diversity of the area. Aside from its weekend markets, which attracts many tourists and people from other areas of London, Camden has local pubs where one can, for instance, find Irish, Greek and Polish immigrants. When Allison decided to buy a flat with her partner, they chose to stay in Camden. Peter and his partner have been living in central London since they arrived in the city three years ago. They praise the closeness to theatres, cinemas, their workplace, besides spending only thirty minutes to reach most of their close friends who live in northwest London. Despite recognizing a lack of residential atmosphere in the area they live in, they have no wish to leave it.

For some people, living near friends is valued but it is not thought of as a significant factor when choosing residential areas. When I first began fieldwork, Liz, Catherine and Celia lived in the same neighbourhood in north London, within walking distance from each other's house. Some months later, Catherine moved to south London to live in her sister's house (her sister had gone abroad for one year). Liz was initially concerned that Catherine would feel 'lonely' away from her friends, but they continued to see each other nearly as often as they had before.

If choice of residential areas was often discussed in terms of pleasantness, rent prices or services offered, it was never examined in relation to social class or status. Any comment on this association had always to be elicited by me. In a sense, this conforms

to the more general pattern of seldom introducing the issue of class into conversation. There is also the feeling that London's boroughs are very socially diverse. This diversity is discussed as a fact by urban geographers who remark on the different types of housing tenures (Hebbert 1991) as well as on the ethnic mixture (Jones 1991) in nearly all areas of the city (for instance, the strong presence of West Indians in Brixton and part of Stoke Newington, Irish in Ealing and Camden, to mention only a few).[1] Within each area, rent prices will often vary according to the proximity or distance of houses to the underground stations. Thus, some of the people I have spoken to find that any close identification of a residential area with a specific social class is hard to establish without simplifying this diversity and slipping into a stereotypical classification (e.g. Brixton as a 'rough' area, especially after the riots in 1980).

But status associations are made nevertheless, some of them receiving consensus more readily. For instance, Hampstead, Highgate and Chelsea are perceived as 'definitely well-off', upper middle class areas, whereas the South and the East of London are seen as concentrating more working class people. With regard to the neighbourhoods where they themselves live, most of them are considered to be mixed zones, with some middle class pockets as well as 'rougher', poorer parts. Some people also acknowledge that the

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[1] In this sense, it is interesting to contrast London to Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Rio is divided into two zones, north and south, whose boundaries are marked by a group of hills. The south zone comprises middle, upper middle and upper classes neighbourhoods and is relatively small in area, since it is squeezed in between the hills and the sea (this social homogeneity is broken by the slums located in the many hills that dot this area). The north zone is constituted by lower middle and lower classes and covers a vast stretch of land, merging with suburbs and nearby towns. One of the strongest indicators of social mobility in Rio is when a person or a family moves from the north to the south zone. In the same vein, the residents of the south zone tend to restrict their movements to this area and they very often know little of the rest of the city.

run-down aspect of areas such as Brixton has a certain 'groove' and is attractive to a younger, more 'alternative' middle class (then again, some will say this is a stereotype).

As I have remarked, these associations were never made spontaneously in a conversation but were always answers to questions I had posed. But what appeared very frequently in general were inquiries into where people lived, generally phrased in the same way: "whereabouts do you live in London?", "do you like the area you live in?". At first, it seemed to me part of the process of becoming acquainted with another person, of placing him or her on the physical map of London. But, as a foreigner with little initial knowledge of the socio-economic geography of London, it was only much later that I realized that such questions were also tentative ways of placing a person in the social map of the metropolis. An English friend has said that such questions are frequently just a piece of conversation, like talking about the weather. But she admits that it also tells one about the choices a person makes (in this case, choice of residential areas in the city), in other words, about taste.

In associating choice of area to live in with taste, the link with class is re-established, for taste functions as a marker of class. It is relevant to mention Bourdieu's theory again. According to Bourdieu (1984), consumption involves an act of deciphering and decoding, which presupposes practical or explicit mastery of a cipher or a code (acquired from home background and formal education, which are set within the context of a particular class), thus giving rise to different tastes. Because taste is produced by conditionings connected with a particular class of conditions of existence, it brings together those who are the product of similar conditions while differentiating them from the rest. In creating distinctions among social groups, "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier" (1984: 06), that is, individuals, as products of specific conditions of

existence, reveal their position in the objective classification through the taste options they make.

Thus, although choice of residential area is only of the many possible spheres where taste operates, it does help in the reading one makes of what other people are like. Of course, there are other things as well. Labelling and categorizing a person, as Celia explains, results from a combination of "everything: the way you dress, the way you talk and look, what you say, where you go, who you mix with, what kind of job you have...". And, even though she is not concerned with what other groups (e.g. 'punks', 'sloanes') think of her, she does care about how people like herself -- which she identifies as 'middle class rebels' -- will regard her. In other words, she describes in her own way the mechanics of how taste functions as proposed by Bourdieu.

Celia is perhaps the most explicit of all in acknowledging her insertion within a group of people with a specific life-style. In so doing, she presents the idea of the link between life-styles and social groups or class which is said by sociologists to have weakened in the age of consumer society. Featherstone (1991) remarks that the adoption of certain life-styles is generally seen as no longer associated with fixed status groups, being instead actively sought by the individual. Similarly, Strathern (1992) argues that the late twentieth century is characterized by the exercise of choice in the style displayed by the individual. "Style and taste are exercised in public, but for their own sake, without polite society as an arbiter" (1992: 162). These ideas may well underlie the message of advertisements and of Conservative politics, but people like Celia feel that the life-style they have is still much associated with particular social groups (which in her case is 'the middle class rebels'). In this sense, their discourse resembles more (and once again) Bourdieu's theory on class and taste.

People do, of course, recognize and value the element of individual choice in their consumption patterns.[2] Choosing a place to live, for instance, involves considerations about pleasantness and the services that *one* finds important to have in a residential area.[3] But such a selection is also influenced by taste, which varies according to different social groups (e.g. 'sloanes', 'middle class rebels'). Friends, who might not live in the same area, choose areas in terms of a comparable taste, which reveal the common class background they share. Having a common taste is also evinced in the way houses and flats are decorated, as I discuss next.

House decoration and individuality

Most people live in rented accommodation and only two of them own their flats (these have been acquired during the fieldwork period). Every person from this circle shared their house or flat with other people, be they partners, close friends or people who were originally strangers. The main reason for having flatmates is attributed to the high rent prices, for most people could not afford to live on one's own. But some have acknowledged the gregarious factor, which means a perceived need to have other people around to share experiences with (I explore the issue of sharing in the following sections of this chapter).

Nearly everyone lived in terraced houses, some of which were divided into separate flats. The only rather different type of housing I went to visit was a large boat,

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[2] Even the idea of freedom of choice is seen by Celia as a middle class value (see the discussion of Celia's views on class in chapter 4).

[3] It is important to note that the factors affecting choice of residential area may change if people have children (for example, the presence of good schools in the area may become significant).

which had eight single rooms, aside from the common areas and was stationed near Battersea bridge. Except in the case of couples, every person I interviewed had their own room but had common use of the bathroom, the kitchen and the sitting area, which also tended to be the place where people had their meals. These places were usually rented furnished, which could mean at times the basics only (kitchen appliances, tables, beds and shelves) or could include amenities such as a washing machine, television, video recorder, curtains and carpets.

To describe how such houses were decorated is not an easy task for a foreigner, since, of course, my ability to distinguish and classify styles will be different from that of a native English person. In discussing this problem with more than one person, I always received the same answer: you have to be English to notice all the differences and be able to associate them with specific social groups and their life-styles. Thus, one person commented that furniture and curtains are particularly revealing of decoration styles (e.g. net curtains are generally associated with the lower middle and working classes) and, until I heard that, curtains had gone unnoticed to me. Therefore, bearing in mind these limitations, I will describe the houses I visited in terms of what was uniform among them and what attracted my attention as a foreigner.

Sitting rooms in general had mainly a table with chairs around it, a sofa (which at times was substituted by a mattress) and, in most cases, a bookcase or a set of shelves. Furniture was usually limited to these pieces and I never saw items such as coffee tables, armchairs, ottomans or sideboards. But sitting rooms often looked crowded because they were usually small (e.g. four square meters) and there were always many objects on the few pieces of furniture. Thus, shelves normally had more books than could actually be fitted on them, frequently storing as well sound systems, records and cassette tapes. Both

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tables and sofas served as repository for things like newspapers, mail, handbags, etc. On the whole, sitting rooms never seemed tidy, but this state of some disorder often appeared to me to have the character of a deliberately created or maintained informal atmosphere.

This impression was confirmed by Daniel, who remarked that middle class homes are always messy and cluttered with things. If one owns them, there are always repairs which have been started but are still unfinished. By contrast, commenting on a house we had visited together, Daniel said one could readily see it was a working class home because every decorative object was absolutely in place and shelves had books neatly arranged according to their sizes (middle class people, on the other hand, might arrange them by subject or author or give no order at all).

Another interesting thing about sitting rooms was uniformity in the type of decorative items people had. Sofas or mattresses were normally covered with textiles and cushions, often of Far Eastern or Indian origin. Walls at times were bare, especially in houses with a high turnover of occupants who saw their residence in a more purposive way, that is, as mainly a place to sleep and keep one's things. But, when they were decorated, it was often with reproductions of contemporary art or of black and white photographs. Candlesticks -- be they in Mexican pottery style, African woodwork or old fashioned metal -- were very popular, placed on tables or mantelpieces and nearly always used when there were guests over for an evening meal. Pots of plants, arranged on shelves and on the floor, could almost be said to be a necessary presence (according to one woman I interviewed, one can always find room in the house for plants).

Regarding kitchens, they were also generally small, with no room for table and chairs. They consisted basically of sink, cooker and refrigerator more or less surrounded by fitted cabinets. Some of these were quite tidy, with cleared and clean surfaces, while

others often had pots and pans piled in the sink and on the cooker. On the whole, they seemed to have chiefly an instrumental aspect, with little investment in terms of decoration and virtually no space in which to socialize (I often heard that people tend to congregate for conversations in kitchens when they are larger and have a table in it).

If bathrooms provide less variety in structure (all had sink basins and bathtubs, with some having a separate small room for a toilet), their decoration lies in the assortment of toiletries and cleaning products arranged in baskets, shelves or on the surface of the fitments. Although people differed in terms of how many bottles of shampoos and lotions they had, they were incredibly homogenous in their choice of brands, all in the 'cruelty free' line: environmentally safe cleaning liquids and powders (frequently of the Ecover mark), and beauty products not tested on animals (Body Shop products ranked very high among the people I met).

As a guest, I was generally taken into the sitting room and saw very little of the bedrooms. The ones I did see resembled the sitting rooms in terms of a certain aspect of clutteredness. They were furnished with a wardrobe and a chest of drawers, shelves and the bed, which in most cases consisted of double size mattresses placed on the floor. Perhaps the distinguishing feature was that objects were more personal: clothes lying on a chair or on the bed, personal photographs on the wall or on frames, books, records and cassettes which one chose not to keep in the sitting (common) room.

The few gardens there were seemed to be rather neglected. In some, the small patch of grass was trimmed but there were rarely any flower beds or any other sign of gardening. Because it is only warm to stay outside during a few months in the year, most people saw gardens as being of limited use -- as a place to have meals or sunbathe but

not as an object for gardening, commonly considered to be a favourite English pastime.[4] And, even in the summer, they might still not be used all that much.

This general description applies as well to houses shared by couples. If rented with furniture, the main difference was the feeling that all decorative objects were carefully chosen by the couple. But they were no tidier than houses shared by unrelated people. The few owned houses had been purchased recently and were still in the process of being furnished and decorated, but they followed the above pattern. However, in two of these houses, the kitchens were larger (both had a table with chairs around it) and were decorated in a specific style (one of them followed a rustic style, with pine wood all over, and the other was all in black and white).

In discussing how houses are decorated, we are faced again with the issue of taste. People made continuous references to class differences, once again based on how middle class people imagine working class people and their houses to be. Class qualifies the objects present in the house as much as the way of thinking which lead to their consumption.

For instance, there is the concern with the environment which influences the purchase of 'cruelty free' products. Also, these are people who consume Third World crafts. In many cases, these were either gifts brought from relatives who had travelled abroad or items they themselves had purchased in their trips to these countries.[5] It is important to note as well that many of these things, if bought here in England, can be

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[4] The absence of gardening here might be explained by the young age of the people studied and their high rate of mobility.

[5] Nearly everybody had lived for six months or more in a foreign country. Often, this was in Continental Europe -- Germany, France, Spain and Italy. There were two people who lived for a year in Mexico as part of an Arts project. At least half of them had travelled on their own or with a friend to countries in South America, Africa and Asia.

quite expensive (e.g. an Indonesian textile can vary between £50 and £200, if not more). Having such foreign decorative objects reveals not only that people possess the means to acquire these crafts here or to go on far away trips, but also that they have the interest in such places and their art to begin with.[6]

This is also a group of people who not only read books but value them enough to keep and display them on the shelves of their sitting rooms (showing that one reads books can be linked to the value placed on education, which in turn is strongly associated with middle class background). Even if they are 'carelessly' placed on the shelf, books are nevertheless stored in the most public of the rooms in the house.[7] Allison, who perceives herself to come from a working class background, suggests that this is a middle class characteristic. When she was a child, the only books in the house were cowboy stories which her father borrowed from the library. She contrasted this to the quantity of books she found in her school friends' houses.

Together with the objects themselves, their untidy arrangement in the house is also seen as a specific middle class characteristic, that is, as yet another sign of taste. Very often, in our conversations, people remarked on this aspect without mentioning any reason for the untidiness of houses. It is true that some of those who share houses or flats with others do not spend much time at home, frequently seeing it in mostly instrumental terms -- a place to sleep, keep one's things and have quick meals (the size of kitchens

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[6] Once more, Allison compares working and middle classes perspectives. Her family does not understand why she likes travelling to Africa and Latin America because, if they go abroad at all, their choice is to go to the south of Spain, an area notorious for its popularity among British working class holiday makers.

[7] As a contrasting example, I can think of many Brazilian urban, middle class homes where one does not see any books in the sitting rooms. Rather, there are paintings, various objects -- porcelain vases, clay artifacts, etc. -- and plants, whereas books are generally kept in a study room.

often do not stimulate anything more elaborate). Nevertheless, the 'messy' aspect was present also in the houses of those who did like to stay at home and invite their friends over for a visit.

Now, this is an interesting fact which contrasts with the view that the sitting room, as the area reserved for visitors which forms a transition between the public and private worlds, has to be kept tidy, clean and 'presentable' (DaMatta 1985, Prost 1991).[8] One possible explanation for the 'messiness' of these houses is the transitory character of these homes. These are rented places and people do move often, something which is associated with their present stage in life.

Another way of explaining 'untidiness' is that ideas of what 'presentability' means for the people I studied also differ from the views of DaMatta and Prost. The only person who did offer any explanation for 'untidiness' said it might be a question of priorities, that keeping the house in order was not important. 'Presentability' for these people thus acquires a meaning of what is relevant for oneself rather than for others.

Here we find the notion that it is individual choice which prevails. This idea is also present in the literature which discusses the meaning of home in contemporary Western societies. According to Pratt (1981) who writes on home decoration in Canada, the house becomes an expressive medium for the self, as an arena for individual creativity. The home is seen as the place where any order is imposed not from outside but from within. Hareven (1991) notes that, as the antithesis of the public world, the

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[8] In Brazil, a tidy living room is very much the general norm. Middle and upper class people usually have maids who clean the house everyday, but, when friends are invited for dinner, it is thought that the house should be especially tidy and neat. In poor people's home as well, there might be only one room and the walls may be made of cardboard material, but the floor is swept, pots and pans shine and the whole impression is one of cleanliness.

home represents privacy and freedom of behaviour, in that schedules and rules are created as one wishes and in one's own particular manner. Thus, the home as one of the major areas where sociability between friends happens has to be presentable in so far as it presents the 'true' self, keeping in line with the ideal of personal disclosure in friendship.

At the same time, the fact that all houses I visited look the same points to the element that, although one perceives the home to be presented as one desires, the 'true' self is still a social self, coming from a particular class upbringing and maintaining a specific set of social values. In other words, how one decorates one's home is very much the product of a taste, which is not merely idiosyncratic to self, as many people themselves acknowledge. Choosing things like foreign decorative items and environmentally safe products indicate a specific taste, which as Bourdieu (1984) has shown is produced by practical conditions of existence associated to class. 'Untidiness' becomes part of whole cluster of values, among which is the lack of concern in the display of material things, tied to a negative evaluation of money (ideas and values regarding money are explored in chapters 6 and 8).

However, at the level of discourse, there is a strong value placed on the freedom attributed to the individual to act mainly according to his or her own will, especially at home. Thus, the home is not kept tidy for others to see unless one likes it this way. But this is an ideal which is often put into question when one shares a house with other people. One's will has to be negotiated with that of the others, as I examine in the following section.

Sharing the home

As a Brazilian, I always found the practice of sharing a house with people one does not know or only barely so an interesting phenomenon. In Brazil, until very recently (ten years or so), people lived with their parents up to the time they married. Even if they had well-established work careers, it was uncommon to find individuals living on their own. Nowadays, especially in major cities like São Paulo and Rio, it is not unusual to meet young middle class professionals living either with their partners (but not married) or by themselves. The high rent prices make this practice still one restricted to a very small proportion of the middle class. But many of those who can afford to move out of their parents' home will often choose not to share a flat with other people. According to some friends, their social life is already too busy and they feel the need to have some space and time of their own.

Curiously enough, although shared accommodation is not uncommon in London, the literature on this type of housing is extremely scarce. It is true that, in relative proportions, the sharing phenomenon is still restricted to a small group of people: in Britain, only 3% of the households are constituted by two or more unrelated adults (Social Trends 1990: Table 2.3). In London, the percentage is greater -- 11.8% -- but it refers to a wider category of 'others', which include also households formed by cohabiting couples (London Housing Statistics 1990: Table 1.3). But this proportion increases for certain boroughs (London Housing Statistics 1990: Table 1.3), such as Kensington and Chelsea (20.8%) and Camden (17.6%), which are recognized by the people I studied as mostly middle class areas.

Urban planners and geographers tend to concentrate mainly on housing for the urban poor and on the growing numbers of homeless people. Also very common are

studies on housing for the elderly, who account for a large percentage of people living alone (Social Trends 1990). Young middle class people are not dealt with in these studies. When destitute sectors of the urban population are not the focus of research, it is the increase in proportion of 'alternative' family households (e.g. single parent households) which is stressed and discussed. Thus, to write on flat sharing by young working people is treading on new territory.

For the people I studied, sharing a house or a flat with other people always involved much more than just the joint use of a physical space. Douglas (1991) presents an intriguing view on the home as a kind of space, characterized as an 'embryonic community' where efforts, tasks and budget are coordinated and regulated. However, she makes no reference to the type of relationship (e.g. kinship, friendship) among the people who share a home, a factor which I think explains much of how coordination of tasks, for example, occurs.

Meeting and getting to know the people who will be one's flatmates is as important as assessing the physical conditions of the place. With people who are replying to an advertisement, informal interviews are part of the process of visiting the house. When Sally went to see a room in a house that she had seen advertised in a newspaper, she was invited twice for a meal in order for her to become acquainted with those who already lived there. She found them friendly and enjoyed being with them during the meals, which influenced her option to take the room. Sometimes potential flatmates can be indicated by a friend or relative, as was the case of Susan in relation to Liz and Catherine, but even so it is still necessary to find out how one initially gets along with them. When Catherine and Liz learned that Susan, a friend of Catherine's cousin, was interested in a vacant room in their house, they arranged to have drinks together as a way

of getting to know each other. According to Catherine, they had a good time out and laughed together, so that Susan decided to move in. Kevin claims that he can quickly tell if sharing a place with a particular group of people will work by noticing if the washing up has been done and if the house is clean. He also thinks the experience of living with people he does not know is 'an interesting but not very deep one'.

Flatmates can be either of the same or of the opposite sex. Large houses with four or more residents tended to be shared by people of different sexes. Smaller flats shared by two or three flatmates were generally occupied by people of the same sex. The exception was Allison, who shared her flat with an ex-partner. I would say that choosing or not to live with people of the same sex was associated to how people related to cross-sex friends. People who had difficulty in having cross-sex friends preferred to have flatmates of the same sex. On the whole, most of the people I studied had the experience of, at some point, having shared a flat with people of different sexes.

Despite the risks of moving in with people one does not know, I have heard many times that sharing a place with one's close friends can be more difficult. With strangers, one can either build a friendship or not. If not successful, the experience of not developing a relationship will not involve any feeling of loss. With close friends, one already has an intense relationship which can become more solid or else suffer from daily contact. Celia prefers to share flats with people she barely knows or even with strangers to close friends. She thinks it would be easier to offend friends by not giving them the attention they want, because she values the freedom to isolate herself in her room whenever she wants to. Liz has lived with a close friend while in university and found it a complicated experience. According to Liz, this friend was often depressed and would try to persuade Liz, despite her busy social life, to stay at home and keep her company.

Another friend with whom she shared a flat also felt that Liz did not give her enough attention when she needed it. For example, one night, when Liz was about to leave the house to meet some friends, her flatmate had an argument with her boyfriend over the telephone. She became upset when Liz would not give her emotional support. Although Liz apologized, her friend spent some days without saying much more than 'hello'.

In both the cases of Celia and Liz, there is the feeling that when close friends live together the demands for attention and support they place on them are greater than they wish to bear. As discussed in chapter 1, to give support to close friends is often perceived as 'going out of one's way' for others. When friends are flatmates, one may find oneself constantly imposed on by the feelings of the other. If support is denied or not given in the way it is expected, one may offend and hurt friends. At the same time, if one thinks too much is being asked too often, one feels that friends are not respecting one's privacy and individuality.

But some people say that living with friends can have a strengthening effect on the friendship. Liz and Catherine have been friends since early adolescence, and living together in London is something which both cherished and miss now that they are living separately. Although a third friend has remarked on the problems Liz and Catherine had as close flatmates, what they themselves stress are the memories of having nights of endless conversations and many bottles of wine, of taking care of the garden together. On the whole, however, that close friends should get on well as flatmates was seen by most people interviewed as a rather exceptional case.

Together with the issue of who one's flatmates are, there is the question of how to divide maintenance activities and household costs.[9] In most of the cases, flatmates will share the expenses of buying cleaning material and some foodstuff, such as milk, coffee and tea, aside from electricity, gas, water and telephone bills. Telephone bills are worked out in different ways: some telephones have meters which register the duration and cost of each phone call, others have a notebook where the residents write down the long-distance calls they have made, still others have coin-operated telephones.

With regard to cleaning activities within the house, the distribution of tasks varies in terms of how close are the flatmates, irrespective of their sex. If, for instance, there are five or more people who do not know each other well, they will normally cook for themselves and clean up the kitchen after using it. Likewise, each is expected to clean the bathroom after use. When flatmates are friends, they might cook for themselves but will generally offer food to others if they are around. To do otherwise is to risk being seen as 'stingy'. Cleaning is often done as a joint venture when one of the flatmates judges the house or flat to need tidying up. As an example of a more communal pattern of distribution, where Sally lives, each flatmate contributes £12 a week to cover all the costs of buying food and other materials. Whenever one of them cooks, he or she will cook for the others who are present in the house. Sally thinks this arrangement works well, even if she does not often eat at home.

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[9] Among couples, all activities and costs are in theory divided between the two persons. In practice, there are complaints that one's partner does not help at times or does not clean the house properly. These were mainly issued by women, who explain these domestic problems on the basis of gender differences (e.g. men have a lower standard of cleanliness if compared to women).

This is roughly the general pattern of how flatmates organize their life together, but on a day to day basis things are more flexible. As I have been told, there are no explicit rules of what each flatmate should do. Rather, there is an implicit understanding that each person should clean up after themselves. Being implicit, of course, the distribution of tasks can sometimes give rise to misunderstandings. When Catherine shared a house with Liz and other friends, she would often buy cleaning products and not ask to be paid back. In this house, flatmates often cooked and ate together. The problem in Catherine's and Liz's view was that one of their flatmates, Laura frequently ate before the others and, when they later arrived with friends to have a meal together, she would neither go to her room nor eat with them but would simply 'sit there'. Laura neither withdrew completely nor shared her food with the rest, thus standing apart from the other flatmates. Also, Liz, after cooking, often preferred to clean the kitchen much later in the evening or early in the morning, but at times Laura would not wait and would do the washing up for her, something which would upset Liz.

The problem here is one of negotiating what each one should do and the 'efforts' to be made by each. There is an ideal that living together should happen without any one person imposing on the others. Sensitivity to others is required, especially in respecting the boundaries between self and other. This ideal refers back to the notion of polite society, where individuals contained the knowledge of right acting because rules were internalized (Strathern 1992).[10] To phrase the issue in slightly different terms, flatmates should be polite with one another in the sense of not imposing upon each other's privacy.

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[10] Strathern (1992) argues that today the idea of the individual as knowing how to act right reveals not rank nor good-breeding but the ability to make choices. Such an idea is the premise of present Conservative politics, in which government intervention is reduced because the individual can make his or her own moral decisions.

Perhaps, such an ideal explains the lack of explicit rules about the tasks each flatmate should do in the house. Such 'rules' tend to be stated only when there is a problem with the organization of household tasks. What prevails is, thus, the notion that each flatmate should know, without being told so, where the limits between self and other lie and be able to respect them.

Shared home and privacy

Flat sharing involves constantly balancing sociability with autonomy and privacy, especially if flatmates are friends. The ideal of the home as 'the realm of privacy' is, thus, one that needs continuous working upon. In this section, I want to examine the concept of the 'home' and its relation to privacy in the context of flat sharing.

The notion that present ideas of the home are linked with privacy is generally taken for granted in the sociological literature. For example, Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton say that

> few English words are filled with the emotional meaning of the word 'home'. It brings to mind one's childhood, the roots of one's being, the security of a private enclave where one can be free and in control of one's life (1981: 121).

Here they present two notions of 'home'. One of them pertains to the idea that 'home' is much more than just the physical place where one lives: it is also 'the roots of one's being' (cf. Rykwert 1991), the place where one belongs to, the environment where one was brought up. Such a relational view of the 'home' is also presented by the people I studied. For them, 'home' can point to a specific region of the country or even to one's country if one is away from it. It can also mean the place where parents live, which is often where one grew up, as well as their actual residence in London.

The other notion which Csikszentmihalyi & Rochberg-Halton allude to is that of the 'home' as a private seat of freedom where one has control over one's life in contrast to the situation in the outside world. Such an idea of 'home' is connected to "the emergence of the family as a private, emotional entity" (Hareven 1991: 284). In pre-industrial society, Hareven remarks, the family was chiefly marked by sociability rather than privacy and its public and private functions were not separated. The family house was a 'big house', always open to non-relatives; no rooms were particularly assigned to be bedrooms, for instance. The growing separation of public and domestic spheres, of workplace and household, led to new living patterns within the home. The internal structure of houses became more spatially differentiated towards the seventeenth century, with rooms being designated as more or less public/private (Tuan 1982). Thus arose the concept of the 'home' as a private retreat, with some areas of the house being more private than others.

This is not to say that the 'home' exists unaffected by public affairs and market values. As Hareven points out, the home "became an institution of industrial capitalism, with its characteristic equipment, organization, management, and cast of characters" (1991: 265). Notions of industrial efficiency became employed as well in the home. However, even if such influences are felt in the domestic sphere, the predominant view is that of the home as contrasting with the public domain, in particular with the workplace, where there is little or no freedom to organize one's life independently of others.

The contrast between home and the public domain is implicit in the views of the people I talked to. Home is the place where they can relax and be comfortable, where

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everything is familiar. One does not need to do any face work at home. When the home is shared with others, these qualities may be attributed to one's room only.

In shared homes, privacy has to be created through flatmates mutual respect for each other's personal space. Ahrentzen claims that "a 'shared' space can take on different forms depending on the type of sharing and the desired balance with privacy" (1989:xiv). In one of the few studies on flat sharing by young people, Franck (1989) stresses that very often sharing means only joint use, as frequent social interaction is not expected between the occupants in this sort of housing. For instance, Franck comments that shared houses and flats frequently have small kitchens and eating areas (as I have noted about the places I visited), a feature she regards as not encouraging interaction and group activities. Nevertheless, together with the cost savings from sharing certain rooms and facilities, it is precisely the possibility of choosing the degree of interaction which Franck (1989: 245) argues to be one of the social advantages of living in this particular manner.

Having such a choice over whether to interact is significant for the people I talked to. For Celia, the ability to shut herself in her room when she feels like being on her own is important and influences her choice of where and with whom to live. Thus, she considers it problematic to live with close friends, with whom relationships can be too intense in their demand of attention. Because at times she comes home too tired to 'be bothered' to talk, she thinks she could end up hurting her flatmates if they were close friends. Similarly, Janice rents, together with her partner, a big enough flat so that each of them has their own bedroom into which they can retreat when they want to be alone.

If Celia and Janice stress their need for privacy when sharing their living space with other people, there are some who emphasize the importance of interacting with flatmates. Tom considers his flatmate to be a 'pig', always leaving margarine all over the

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house. He often complains about the state of the kitchen and the difficulties of cooking a proper meal in it. But, on the other hand, his flatmate is a friend he has known since school and with whom he still shares many experiences. In the end, Tom says, the positive side of having a friend to talk to balances out the negative aspect of his lack of cleanliness.

I have described above other examples where flatmates interact frequently, always cooking for each other, for instance. It is also interesting that many times I was asked by some of these people if I did not mind living alone (during fieldwork, I rented a small studio in a family house). In asking this question, they reveal that the reason for sharing a house or a flat with other people, regarded as friends or not, involves more than just financial considerations. Having people around, even if the degree of interaction is not high, is important for them. The level of interaction may vary. Thus, in one extreme, there is Kevin who will talk to his flatmates if they are present in the common areas but who does not share meals nor carry out any other activity together with them. In the opposite situation is Sally, whose flatmates buy and cook food together and often go to the cinema and the theatre together. Two of them have influenced Sally in her decision to become qualified in aromatherapy. Her living arrangement approaches the communal housing type described by Ahrentzen (1989).

In acknowledging the importance of social company in flat sharing, we return to the issue of how privacy is maintained. There are different arrangements, to be sure, and different people have distinct thresholds of when they feel their privacy has been intruded upon. Perhaps more to the point is what privacy entails for each person and what happens when people feel they are not able to maintain some privacy.

Through the views shown by Celia and Janice, privacy can take a very physical form: having one's own room in which to retreat when so desired.[11] But space can have more than just a physical meaning and take on a social dimension as well. Thus, privacy becomes one's space in the sense of the ability to do what one desires. This can vary from wanting to be alone or with somebody else, but it is the ability to do so because of one's choice, without feeling imposed on, which matters. In a sense, privacy can almost be defined negatively, as the domain which is not intruded upon by other people, unless one allows intrusion.

The problem created by sharing one's home with close friends narrows down to the difficulty of maintaining one's privacy. Because close friends are perceived to share many personal details and to have the right to demand attention, the limits of how far they can go are made very visible when living together. For most of the people I talked to, continuous demands for attention between flatmates who are close friends harms the relationship. Perhaps Liz is the only person who has often been in this position of living with close friends who do demand more attention from her than she feels able to give. But she does not manage to draw her own limits. Although upset by her friends who cannot understand her other commitments, she finds herself giving excuses for her 'lack' of attention. After a while, though, she 'solves' the problem by moving to a different house, with different flatmates.

Thus, despite the ideal of supporting close friends in time of need, most people have clear limits of what they can do for others. These limits are, of course, negotiable

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[11] This idea is particularly clear in a passage from Arnold Bennett's *Riceyman Steps*: It was the first bedroom she had ever in all her life had entirely to herself.(...) Elsie had never slept alone. She had had no privacy. She now gazed on every side, and what she saw and felt was privacy ([1923] 1991: 86).

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to some extent. Different friends, different contexts, different moments in life, all affect how much one feels one can do for others. On the whole though, the frequent use of expressions such as 'I can't be bothered', 'I can't afford the time' and 'having to make an effort' indicate how relating to other people is often seen in terms of how much one has to do for others, of how much others interfere with one's personhood.

In sharing a house or a flat with close friends, what is at stake is both the daily contact, which can intensify the relationship (this can be both positive and negative), and the sense of privacy which is due in the home. Because privacy refers to the personal space whose boundaries should be respected by other people, the attempts to maintain one's privacy may go counter the ideal of supporting friends. The negotiations between self and other in order to ensure privacy happen as well among flatmates but these are not as complicated as those among friends.

But the home is very much thought of as a shared environment. In spite of the troubles one may have to maintain privacy in a shared home, people avoid living alone. Sociability is a value also in the home, even if with more distant flatmates it exists to a limited degree. The home as a site for the sociability between friends who do not live together is especially cherished by people, something which I explore in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 6.

SOCIABILITY AND COMMENSALITY IN THE HOME

The home is the setting for a major occasion of sociability among friends: dinner parties. No matter how small or how informal, inviting friends for a meal happens very frequently among the English people I studied. Such preference for socializing in this way is important considering that these are people who have full-time jobs and who often ask their friends over for dinner during week nights. Thus, despite feeling tired after a day's work, they are willing to prepare a meal for their friends as a way of entertaining them and being in their company.

My aim in this chapter is to analyse how these dinner parties become a significant context for sociability among friends. I am basically restricting the discussion to dinner parties rather than extending it to encompass other forms of entertainment at the home. Large parties -- including dance or not, celebrating a birthday or other special events -- happen quite infrequently, and not every one I met had houses or flats large enough to organize such gatherings. Moreover, dinner parties are especially significant as the major occasion for social and material exchange -- food and drink. The commensality of food and drink between friends was all important to display friendship, while gift-giving, for instance, was not.

In the literature, dinner parties have often been associated with middle class, rather than with working class, patterns of socializing with friends because the presence of such material exchange requires a certain amount of financial resources (Allan 1989). Perhaps more than economic considerations, what also operates is a different relation to the home, with a greater tendency of working class people to socialize outside it. Hence, the pub's traditional standing as the centre of working class socializing habits (Adler 1991). In fact, among the people I met, those who came from working class backgrounds used their homes less frequently as a place to socialize with their friends.

The consumption of food and drink may be studied from various perspectives. Consumption can be studied from the point-of-view of social class. Dinner parties can be analysed, for instance, as events typical of middle and upper classes. The kinds of food and drink consumed can also be examined in terms of their value as signs of a certain status, as markers of a particular taste (Bourdieu 1984). The consumption of food and drink may also be discussed as a set of meanings which are part of an information system, hence communicating messages (Douglas and Isherwood 1978). For instance, "a household's expenditures on other people give an idea of whether it is isolated or well involved" (1978: 11). The consumption of food and drink may also be seen in relation to exchange. The sharing of food can mean hospitality and the desire to establish good relations (Sahlins 1972).

This is by no means an extensive listing of the different approaches to the analysis of food and drink but more a presentation of those particular perspectives on which I base the following discussion. My analysis of dinner parties draws on elements of these previous studies but departs from them in not concentrating on the consumption of specific food items or alcoholic drinks. Such a decision was motivated by the fieldwork material itself which points at meals not as the focus of attention but more as an excuse for meeting friends. I suggest that the material basis of dinner parties is important because it shows the time and 'effort' which go into the preparation of a meal for friends. Although a necessary element in these meals, the presence of money is underplayed because of its negative evaluation in people's views. On the whole, I would say that, through their investment in dinner parties, essential resources for the capitalist world of work -- time, 'effort' and money -- have their value modified because of their use in stimulating sociability among friends.

Time and 'effort' in the preparation of meals

> Meals are prepared as quickly as they are consumed: canning, freezing,
> freeze-drying and pasteurization have made it possible to transfer to the
> food-packing plant tasks once performed in the kitchen. Everyone is
> pressed for time (Vincent 1991: 245).

One of the first things which amazed me about London was to see, at lunch time,
people eating sandwiches while walking in the streets. It conveyed to me their sense of
pressing time, of having to eat and run errands in the short period of one hour or so. At
home, meals can be prepared and consumed as quickly or as slowly as one wants. The
abundance of frozen food at supermarkets and of restaurants with take-away service in
London enables one to have little or no work at all in making one's meals. Although one
can resort to preparing all the food oneself, most of the people I studied arrive home tired
after a day's work and prefer to cook an easy and quick meal, if not making use of some
ready-made dishes. But when friends are invited for a meal, a certain amount of time and
work is required for its preparation.

Dinner parties are pre-arranged events. They are often set a week or so before
hand. Although some time is needed to buy the necessary foodstuff and prepare them,
the pre-arranged character of these meals is a feature common to most sociability
occasions (e.g. going to the cinema or to the pub) among friends. As shown in the
discussion about class (chapter 4), Celia thinks that such a feature is characteristic of
middle class people. Pre-arranging meetings can be linked to what Celia thinks is a more
general middle class tendency: underplaying spontaneity in favour of controlled
behaviour. I have also heard that living in London requires settling meetings in advance,
for distances are great and people would not risk dropping in on their friends without
knowing if they are at home.

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Inviting people to have a meal at one's home is seen by many people as marking the development of friendship. Kevin feels that asking friends over for dinner is a sign of their growing intimacy. This way of thinking is the cause of much confusion for English people who go to the United States, as I have been told by an American friend. Americans often invite people for dinner as a form of showing hospitality, without necessarily there being any bond of friendship between guests and hosts. This hospitable behaviour would be mistaken by English people as indicating growing friendship.

The significance of inviting friends for dinner lies not so much in the idea of opening the house, a private retreat, to outsiders. As a stranger myself, I met many people for the first time in their own homes (and this was not a sign of developing friendship). Boundaries between the more and less public rooms in the house existed but they were easily crossed at times.[1] On a few occasions, I was taken to visit all rooms in the house and twice I conducted interviews in people's bedrooms. These initiatives to go beyond the sitting room came always from women, who were also more readily disposed to have interviews in their homes.

The meaning of dinner parties for friendship revolves around the desire to put some of one's time and 'effort' into preparing a meal for friends. This is especially important if we consider that friends are often asked to come for dinner on week nights, when there is not much time to cook since people work until five or six in the afternoon. Not everyone is inclined to spend time and 'effort' in cooking a meal for friends. Kevin finds that he does not 'invest' in asking friends over for a meal because of his greater commitment to work. Anne has met some people who she would like to know better and

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[1] Kondo (1990) says that in Japan one can evaluate one's progress in getting to know a family by where one is allowed to go in the house.

thinks that inviting them for dinner would be an opportunity for developing their friendship. But she claims that she would need to put some 'effort' into it and that she often lacks the time for it. However, when it comes to inviting her close friends for a meal, she manages to find the time to cook. Here is the same notion of 'effort', which entails 'going out of one's way' to do things for others, found in the discussion of exchange of support between friends. Thus, when friends are entertained at home, it is one way of showing how much time and 'effort' are 'invested' in friendship and how important friends are for oneself.

The work involved in the preparation of a meal is displayed in many ways. First of all, there is the manner in which help throughout the dinner -- i.e. bringing plates from the kitchen, clearing the table, washing up -- is organized. If flatmates are preparing a meal together, they share all the tasks. Very often washing up the dishes is left to be done after guests are gone, so as not to interfere with sociability. When dinner is offered by a couple, the general tendency I have observed is for women to cook while men help to clear the table and do the washing up. Anne and Peter were amused to see their guests' reactions when they reversed the roles. Peter cooked a meal for a couple who was described as being 'traditional' in their domestic division of labour. Throughout the night, these guests directed compliments about the food, not to Peter, but to Anne.

On the whole, there is the feeling that all the work should be done by the hosts and that guests should not do anything, that they are there to enjoy themselves. Guests generally take something to drink (e.g. a bottle of wine), whether they are asked to or not, but, more than anything else, they are told to 'bring themselves'. However, helping the hosts with the work varies with the greater or lesser closeness between guests and hosts, as well as with the formality or informality of the occasion. When guests are close

friends, they may help with any cooking that still needs to be done, with setting the table and clearing it afterwards, as well as with washing up. When I had Liz over for a meal at my place, she convinced me not to transfer the food into serving dishes and to leave it in the saucepan. Thus, among closer friends, the work entailed by the meal may be shared to some extent so that the host/ess can participate more in the social event. Whereas on a more formal occasion guests tend not to involve themselves with any of these tasks.

Another way of displaying the 'efforts' of making a dinner is through the structure of the meal, that is, the number of courses served. Most of the dinner parties I went to consisted of starters as a first course, followed by a main dish with accompaniments. Dessert, which was always present, was generally ready made -- ice cream or frozen pies, for example -- or constituted by fruit only. There were occasions in which someone would leave the house briefly in order to buy some chocolate bars for desserts. In all, I often had the feeling that dessert was unnecessary and was considered more like an additional treat (hence, the furtive trip to the corner shop to get chocolates).

As important as the preparation and structure of the meal is the constitution of the courses themselves. The time and work put into the preparation of the meal can be displayed through the relative elaborateness of the dishes. When invited for meals during fieldwork, I was often given stir-fries -- a variation of the popular Chinese dish, which retains the technique but not necessarily its basic ingredients (soy sauce, sherry and ginger). These dishes are quickly cooked because most of the work needed goes into the chopping of vegetables (and meat, if it is used), while cooking through frying takes about five minutes only. Another common dish, which does not require much time either, is pasta with sauce, inspired on Italian cookery. While the pasta cooks (more or less in ten

minutes), the sauce is prepared or heated up, if it is ready-made. Salads are yet a third

option among dishes whose preparation is not time-consuming. Whether using only raw

vegetables or including boiled potatoes or tuna fish, for instance, it is a preferred

accompaniment. It may be even a main course. Or salads can be used as first course, if

the meal includes one. In this case, there is normally a special attraction -- such as

sardines, salmon, smoked herring -- which relegates the salad to the status of

accompaniment or even garnish.

This choice of dishes displays a taste for international cuisine akin to the

preference for foreign decoration objects (cf. chapter 5).[2] Together with the selection,

there is the fact that most of the people interviewed eat very little meat. They normally

do not buy it for consumption at their homes, for moral reasons.[3] Although such

restrictions on meat are not recent (Mennel 1985), they have always been associated with

middle and upper classes tastes and follow the same reasoning which lead people to buy

'cruelty free' beauty and cleaning products for their homes. The liking for foreign

cuisine, on the other hand, has become more of a widespread preference. As Mennel

explains, since after the Second World War, the tendency in England has been one of

increasing varieties of food (Chinese, Indian and Italian food, among others, are added

to the meat and potatoes staple) and diminished contrasts between the tastes of the

different social classes. The working class is now consuming some foreign food and,

therefore, is not as different from the middle class as it was before.

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[2] Working class eating habits are said to display less variety in the choice of meals, generally structured around potatoes, meat and vegetables (Douglas and Nicod 1974).

[3] Meat eating habits in Western societies have been examined by Sahlins (1976) in terms of general cultural patterns of likes and dislikes (see also Douglas 1966).

The ease and little time required in the making of these dishes are also factors which turn them into favourites among the young people I studied. I re-emphasize that they frequently invite friends for dinner on week nights, when they come home from work not more than two hours before guests are due to arrive. In this sense, there is a limitation of how much time and 'effort' they can devote to the preparation of the meal. This contrasts greatly with the situation of an older couple, friends of mine since my arrival in England and both of whom are retired. All the meals I had at their place were on the whole very lavish, with three entirely home made courses (including pâtés and bread, items which are generally bought ready-made), which reveals the greater time and effort they can and want to put into preparing dinners.

The preference for quick dishes may not be just a feature of modern times. As Mennel (1985) suggests in his comparative study of cookery in England and France,

> a less marked concern with economising in the kitchen among French cooks than among English, and a willingness to spend time may well be a simple extension of the same attitude -- an attitude towards cookery rooted in a cultural inheritance running back into the age of court society (1985: 263).

The value placed on time is shown by Le Goff (1980) to date back to the fourteenth century, when the calculating morality of merchants began to be disseminated in Europe. Wasting time thus became a serious sin. With the advent of Protestantism in the European countries of the North, any indulgence of sensual pleasures was severely admonished while a complete devotion to work was exhorted (Weber 1976). Cooking became a matter of spending enough time to prepare food which fulfils a specific function, a view which some of the people interviewed recognize as part of a general English attitude towards cookery.

Despite such a stance and the busy routine of these young people, there were some who liked to take greater trouble in preparing meals. Those who have flexible work schedule may go home earlier in order to cook more intricate and time-consuming dishes. Or the investment can go into trying new recipes, which require more attention and care because of their novelty. Over the weekend, one can spend more time on cooking for friends. For example, making Indian dishes, not an uncommon choice, may be more of a weekend option, since they not only need chopped ingredients but also have a much slower cooking process. Alternatively, weekends can be used to prepare dishes in advance for a Monday meal.

Regarding middle class patterns of sociability, Allan (1989) proposes that making elaborate meals may be a way of displaying culinary skills to friends. When friends are invited home, he says, not only is the home presented in its most public fashion -- i.e. clean and tidy -- but meals can also be intended to impress guests with the host's or hostess' culinary gifts (1989:141). Because Allan speaks of middle class patterns of sociability in very broad terms, he fails to attend to the variations within such a social segment. Thus, among the men and women studied here, the home tends not to be ordered for public presentation, as I have discussed in the previous chapter. Likewise, their intention, as revealed in their discourse, is not to make of the meals they offer a statement of how well they cook. Which is not to say that they do not appreciate receiving compliments from their guests. It is only that the emphasis is not placed on such a display.

An episode recounted by Sally illustrates well this point. Her mother is a professional cook and, through her teaching, Sally acquired the skills and taste for cooking. Friends of hers have remarked to me how creative and demanding she is as a

cook. Thus, regarding one of the dinners she was preparing for a group of friends, she discussed with her mother what she planned to make and spent most of a Sunday cooking the meal. When her friends went over on Monday night, they issued endless compliments as she brought from the kitchen the dishes she had prepared. She was very flattered, she told me, but wished that they would stop praising the food. She could not explain why she felt like this. It was not that she doubted how genuine these comments were but only that they were in excess.

Sally's purpose was not so much to give her friends a favourable image of herself as a cook but to please them with the food she had prepared *for* them. There is a fine line between these two views but the stress falls on the latter, not just for Sally but for others as well. My friend who is retired always tells me that she likes to *give me* something different each time I visit her. Peter and Allison expressed their intentions even more emphatically by saying that they are not concerned with what people think about their cooking. Rather, what matters is the quality of the whole encounter, of the sociability among friends.

Thus, the time and effort which go into cooking for friends show the investment made on an occasion in which sociability is paramount, a view which Allan (1989) acknowledges as well. Time and 'effort' figure in these people's lives as resources which are especially valued in the capitalist world of work. At home, they can be manipulated according to one's wishes as elements of one's personal space, of one's privacy. To put one's time and 'effort' in preparing a meal for friends symbolizes the importance of friendship for oneself. These ingredients seem to become as significant as the food itself, so that inviting friends over for a meal turns into an occasion for expressing how much one invests in friendship as well as being a situation of commensality.

> In middle-class circles few gifts are as generous or as complimentary these
> days as the taking, on one's friends behalf, of time and culinary trouble
> (Visser 1986:18).

Visser equates meals prepared for friends with gifts. She characterizes them

through the elements of time and trouble spent in preparing/buying something for a friend

as well as by the expenditure of money. But for the people I talked to, giving gifts was

considered different from giving dinner parties. In fact, whereas invitations for meals

abounded, the exchange of gifts was rare.

In order to examine the reason why food was privileged over gifts, I begin by

referring to Cheal's (1988) research on gift-giving in Canada. Cheal conducted his study

among middle class residents of a large urban centre (Winnipeg), focusing on the practice

and discourse surrounding gift-giving. In their view, gifts express the love, interest and

concern people feel for one another. They are believed to keep alive the memory of a

person (the gift-giver); as an interviewee says, "give [people] something to remember you

by" (Cheal 1988: 69). Thus, at the level of discourse, the motives for gift-giving in this

Canadian setting belonged mainly to the realm of emotions or, as Cheal describes it, to

an ideology of love.

Since gifts are vested with emotional motives, the act of giving gifts acquires a

strong personal character. That is, a gift is selected by one particular person to be given

to another specific individual. According to this reasoning, money should not be

presented as a gift because it is impersonal. In the words of a woman Cheal quotes,

> [money is] kind of cold. It's spent usually on nothing in particular, and
> when it's gone the memory is gone (1988: 76).

What is significant in buying gifts is the 'effort' and 'thought' put into choosing a suitable

present. Since money requires less thought or time, Cheal concludes, it cannot symbolize

a caring relationship (1988: 131). Thus, although without money nothing can be purchased, the stress falls on the time and 'thought' taken to select specific items as gifts.

This line of reasoning is similar to that found among the English men and women studied here, but *only* with reference to the preparation of meals for friends. When it comes to gift-giving, various reasons are brought forward to explain why it is not a habit among friends. Celia and Peter say they do not have money to buy gifts. Sarah criticizes the excessively commercial aspect of Christmas which stimulates gift-giving and thinks friendship should not be involved in it. Other people simply said that presenting friends with gifts was not something done.

I discussed the matter more extensively with Celia. On the whole, she does not buy presents for her friends. Perhaps if she sees them on their birthdays, but not otherwise. She emphasizes though that, if she had more money, she would get her friends presents whenever she saw things they would like to have. However, she has begun exchanging Christmas gifts with her close friends two years ago.[4] It has been a rather erratic exchange, with her receiving presents one year and reciprocating the following year. She explained that, previously, she used to send her friends Christmas cards only because she never had much money to buy presents.

It is interesting to examine how this gift-giving began. Celia said she felt 'a bit bad' when she was first given Christmas gifts by her two closest female friends, since she had not bought anything for them. But she did not think of getting them a present straight away as it would seem that she was only reciprocating the gifts she had received. Instead, she bought them Christmas gifts in the following year (1991). When I saw Celia

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[4] According to Cheal's findings, Christmas was the major occasion in the year for gift-giving, which was directed mainly at family relatives but also at close friends.

in January 1992, she had not given her friends their presents yet, but she had a strong feeling that this time they would not give her anything. I then asked her how would she feel if that was really the case and she replied that it did not bother her.

If Celia felt somewhat uneasy about giving presents to these friends, this was not the case with her two flatmates, with whom she had lived for over one year. In 1991, they decided to celebrate Christmas and prepared a Christmas meal for themselves. As part of this celebration, they gave each other gifts.

Thus, Celia stresses that not having money is the main reason why she does not give presents to her friends more often. But there is also the idea that gift-giving should not be obligatory, a view present in Cheal's study as well. Instead, gift-giving should be motivated by the personal desire of giving a friend a present.[5] With respect to Celia's flatmates, the gifts given were part of the Christmas celebration *they decided* to have among themselves.

There are two issues which seem to pose problems for gift-giving. The first deals with reciprocity. I suggest that people feel confused between having a more 'generalized' or a more 'balanced' form of reciprocating gifts among friends. Sahlins (1972) explains that 'generalized reciprocity' entails an altruistic character for while assistance is given, returns are not stipulated by time, quantity or quality; "the expectation of reciprocity is indefinite" (1972: 194). Returns are made "when necessary to the donor and/or possible for the recipient" (1972: 194). Obligation to reciprocate is implicit and any reckoning of debts is not overtly done, since the material aspect of the transaction is outweighed and

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[5] Buying Christmas presents for the family was not questioned, however. Perhaps because Christmas is for most people a family occasion -- nearly everybody I met spent Christmas at their parents' home, exchanging gifts with siblings and parents becomes part of 'tradition'.

subjugated by its social character. By contrast, 'balanced reciprocity' refers to exchange which is direct and without delay. Equivalence of quantity and quality is important in the transaction, imparting to the exchange a 'more economic' and 'less personal' character.

'Generalized reciprocity', Sahlins argues, is usually found where there is little social distance (e.g. close kinship). This is the idea of reciprocity which prevails in the discourse on friendship studied here. Close friends think of support as reciprocal and help is given when one or the other is in need, without any explicit account of what each has done for the other. Likewise, friends are invited to dinner without any overt reckoning of whose turn it is to ask the other to come for dinner.[6] When I asked Susan if she was concerned with reciprocating invitations for dinner, she replied negatively, adding that she asked her friends over because she liked them and wanted to see them. She only thinks about it when people whom she does not like much invite her for a meal, for then reciprocity becomes the sole reason why she returns a similar invitation. Furthermore, not all friends know how to cook nor live in a place large enough to receive guests, reasons which generally excuse them from having to reciprocate dinners. In general, reciprocity is an implicit concern, for what should predominate is the bond of friendship and not calculations of what each has done for the other.[7]

When it comes to the exchange of gifts, reciprocity seems to become an overt issue. Although Celia did not reciprocate at once the first Christmas gifts she received, she did admit to feeling awkward for not having bought anything for her friends. Moreover, in the next year, she took the initiative of getting presents for her friends, not

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[6] Reciprocity can be more of an explicit concern when having drinks at the pub, an issue which I discuss in chapter 8.

[7] Finch (1989) comes to a similar conclusion regarding support exchanged within the family.

knowing and reportedly not minding whether they had done the same. Perhaps she was not concerned with receiving anything because she was reciprocating those she got in the previous year.

Christmas appears as an occasion in which 'balanced', rather than 'generalized', reciprocity would be expected. Such form of reciprocity is problematic because of the explicit concern with a gift exchange which, as Sarah puts it, seems very 'commercial'. It is as if the motive for gift-giving ceases to be based on the desire to give to become one arising out of an obligation to give. The explicit concern with reciprocity contrasts with the discourse on friendship, which is based on principles of individual volition and not on any type of normative tenet. Moreover, it raises exchange to a position which may overshadow the worth of the relationship, as Sahlins has remarked; material considerations can become more important than friendship itself.

Birthdays and individual celebrations do not call forth such direct gift exchange. But most people did not give each other birthday presents either. The only situation which featured gift-giving was when a friend was going abroad for a long period (one year or more). The gifts given were mostly items which people thought their friends would use in their trip. In this case, gifts seemed to materialize the support people would normally give to friends if they had not travelled. As with support, expectations of reciprocity in this instance of gift-giving were 'generalized' and not likely to dominate the feelings of friendship.

The difficulty with most forms of gift-giving also reside in how gifts seem related to money. Celia, for instance, explains that she rarely buys presents for friends because she does not have much money, a reason given by other people as well. Nevertheless, even this is not exactly the case. There were a few for whom money was not a problem

and, even for them, gift-giving was extremely unusual. Celia might not have enough money to buy the presents *she* would like to give to her friends. But she herself stresses that, although she does not generally present her friends with gifts, she does 'exchange' a lot of food and drink with them. She is not 'stingy' at all about it, she says, and she shares with friends all the food and drink she has at home. Reciprocity is not usually a concern. She describes her attitude first as one of 'generosity' but then corrects it as one of 'sharing'. This is an important distinction because 'sharing' means the common/collective use of something by a group of people, such as in a meal shared by all those present. The notion of 'generosity', instead, places the emphasis on the free, readily disposition to give, creating a difference between giver and recipient, and does not necessarily imply the common use of the thing given.[8]

It seems, therefore, that spending money on food and drink consumption with friends is easier than on the purchase of gifts for them. One could say that the costs involved in each case are different but not when one considers the frequency with which people go out for drinks or entertain friends at home. Guests coming to a dinner are normally expected to take something to drink -- generally a bottle of wine, which costs between two to five or more pounds. For those preparing the meal, the expenses can amount to the same or more, depending on the number of people invited and the ingredients used. At a dinner party for twelve people which had as its main course the Spanish dish *paella*, the cook mentioned that he had spent seventeen pounds buying all the food. In other words, with the frequency with which people invite friends over for

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[8] Indeed, in tribal societies, Sahlins (1972) argues, generosity from those who have more can be a starting mechanism of rank and leadership.

a meal and the average expenditure involved in these events, there is enough money for the exchange of Christmas and birthday presents.

What seems to be at stake is not so much the money involved but the different uses of gifts and of dinners. In both the cases of gifts and meals, time and effort are combined with money in order to personalize the acts of buying a present and preparing dinner for a friend. *The difference between them lies in the individual use of the gift and in the commensal aspect of the meal.*[9] To return briefly to Cheal's material, gifts show one's concern and love for the other in the form of an object that materializes the memory of a relationship. It is given to friends so that 'they remember me and my affection for them', as one of Cheal's interviewees says. Meals express care and affection as well but are vested with the character of sociability. They are experienced together as friendship in action. Hence, Celia's preference in characterizing a dinner party as an act of sharing rather than as one of generosity.

If there is a stronger value placed upon sharing than upon gift exchange, one can understand why guests to a meal usually take alcoholic drinks. Hosts often provide some alcohol themselves so that what guests bring can be seen as additional. The importance of taking alcoholic drinks goes beyond the mere aspect of consumption. It becomes both a contribution for and something given in return for the meal. As a contribution, guests share with hosts -- even if on a smaller scale -- the time, 'effort' and money in preparing a meal which normally includes the presence of alcoholic drinks. The provision of drinks also reciprocates to some extent the hosts' investment of time, 'effort' and money in the entertainment of friends.

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[9] Similarly, Carsten (1989) shows how, in a Malay fishing village, money loses its potentially divisive and individuating effects by being spent on household food consumption, thus endowing money with the values of kinship morality.

Thus, what serves to reaffirm a friendship through time is not so much the gifts of objects which act as mementoes of one person or another. Rather, it is through gifts of food and drink *which are shared* by both giver and recipient in the context of sociability that the tie of friendship is continually renewed and strengthened.

Sociability at the home

Time, money and 'effort' are elements which, when introduced into the preparation of dinner parties, acquire meanings different to those they have in the sphere of work. The transformation in their significance occurs, I suggest, because they are transposed to the domain of leisure. Fundamental in leisure is the possibility of sociability, an essential element in friendship.

Up to now I have been using the concept of sociability in its general conception as liking and fondness for the company of people. This is similar to Ariès' (1962) definition of sociability as the propensity traditional communities have for reunions, visits and parties, in which there is social communication and exchange of affection. At this stage, I would like to examine a different approach to sociability by referring to Simmel's (1971b) seminal essay on this notion.

Simmel discusses sociability as an abstraction, as an ideal form of interaction in Western societies. According to him, sociability extracts from the realities of social life the pure essence of association, in which "the associative process becomes a value and a satisfaction in themselves" (1971b: 128). Sociability places great emphasis on form because there is no subsequent end, no content, no result outside the associative process itself. As a result, it is based and focused solely on the persons socializing. That is, "personal traits of amiability, cordiality and attractiveness of all kinds determine the

character of purely sociable association" (Simmel 1971b: 130). But precisely because

sociability is based on them, persons must not emphasize their individualities too much:

> riches and social position, learning and fame, exceptional capacities and
> merits of the individual have no role in sociability, or, at most, as a slight
> nuance of that immateriality with which alone reality dares penetrate into
> the artificial structure of sociability. As these objective qualities which
> gather about the personality, so also must the most purely and deeply
> personal things -- character, mood, and fate -- have thus no place in it
> (1971b: 130).

When a connection finally comes to focus on individualities, it loses the quality of

sociability and turns into an association structured by a content.

Thus, Simmel treats sociability as creating an ideal world, artificial and abstract,

one in which objective and personal features of life are renounced. He argues that such

an ideal is constructed in contrast with what he calls 'modern life', which is

"overburdened with objective content and material demands" (1971b: 133).

Simmel's discussion throws light on the notion of sociability present in the

discourse on friendship studied here. The emphasis on having a 'good time', having fun,

and having a 'laugh' appeared constantly when describing meetings with friends and even

when defining friendship itself. In this sense, the contents of a meal (the food and the

drink) become somewhat peripheral, since entertainment and sociability are the basic

goals to be sought. This view is underscored by the comments that Peter and Allison have

made about their relative indifference to guests' opinions about their cooking.

The stress on having fun and having a 'laugh' highlights the value laid on the

characteristics of amiability and cordiality mentioned by Simmel. All of the dinner parties

as well as many of the drinking sessions at pubs I went to were marked by great doses

of humour -- not necessarily in the form of jokes but in the tone with which comments

were made. And because humour is an important element of sociability among friends,

those who fail to participate in it either disturb the sociable atmosphere of the occasion or find themselves somewhat excluded from the conversation. Liz once complained to me that, at a dinner party in which we had been, an Italian man whom she knew decided to tell her about his girlfriend's illness. So after a while, she began avoiding being with him on their own, since he had become quite 'morbid'. Not only was the subject matter a 'personal' one but the tone was also serious, contrasting with the general spirit of the gathering. Humour is then a form of keeping sociable conversation above the level of the 'personal', especially among people who are not close friends and who may not, therefore, share similar ideas about what 'personal' means.[10]

Keeping a lighthearted mood is, therefore, important in situations of sociability. One way in which this is achieved, Simmel argues, is by viewing talking as an end in itself. The content becomes simply the necessary "carrier of stimulation".

> Not that it is a matter of indifference; it must be interesting, gripping,
> even significant -- only it is not the purpose of conversation that these
> qualities should square with objective results, which stand by definition
> outside the conversation (1971b: 136).

The nature of sociable conversation is such that its object matter can change lightly and quickly, staying always above individual intimacy.

It is interesting that, in my interviews, I was frequently told that remembering the content of conversations with friends was difficult. Some would even say that they would spend hours talking about 'nothing'. What can seem as a memory lapse might actually mean that it is the act of conversing which really counts. In parties, conversations are

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[10] In this respect, it is especially difficult for foreigners to join in the sense of humour shared by a group of English friends. This is a situation in which I found myself a couple of times during fieldwork, especially in large gatherings where I knew only one or two people. It was always overwhelming to watch how all their comments were so humorous, leaving me with the feeling of inadequacy in measuring up to their standards.

often characterized as being 'small talk' or 'talk about the weather', which implies, broadly speaking, topics that are not too personal or intimate. In the dinner parties I went to during fieldwork, conversation always covered a wide range of topics, from humorous recollections of childhood and adolescence to films, music and television programs.

The idea that party mood, referring both to dinner and dance parties, should be lighthearted clearly emerges when it fails to be amenable and cheerful. Sarah recounted how she once had a breakdown at a party and began crying, a reaction met with coldness and even disapproval by her friends. Instead of criticizing them for not being sympathetic, her comment was that *she* had chosen the wrong moment to ask for their support. Similarly, Allison gets 'suspicious' of people who, in parties, come to tell her their intimate problems. One should have fun at parties, she said. Parties are not the context in which one should get 'too personal'.

Likewise, one should not express too much personal interest at a person who has just been introduced at a party. One does not make friends in a party, Sarah and Victor have claimed. Rather, parties provide an opportunity for meeting new people but the relationship is developed in later occasions. Therefore, in finding a person interesting and friendly, one may ask the friend who has organized the party to arrange another meeting -- perhaps a smaller gathering or a trip to the cinema -- in order to further the acquaintanceship. Or, as Victor thinks, one can wait to 'bump into' the person in other parties and, then, set a time and occasion to meet each other.

In a general way, Simmel proposes a specific view of sociability as a model set of interactions, stressing always that it is artificial. Many of its features are found in the model of sociability shared by the people I met. But, in practice, sociable behaviour may not meet up to the ideal standard discussed by Simmel.

The character of sociability changes according to how well people know each other. In general, it is at large parties (of a dinner or dance type) that interactive behaviour approaches the pattern of sociability described by Simmel, where not every guest is known. Even so, as these parties go on into the night, the gathering breaks down into smaller groups or dyads and conversations may become more personal, especially if those conversing are relative close friends. In the same vein, small dinner parties in which guests are friends function differently. When all the people gathered are close friends, one reaches a level of sociability in which there is less or no concern over exposing the self, when 'one can be oneself' without the 'judgement' of friends. Here, humour is an option and not the expected way of behaving. I was once taken by Liz to a dinner party in which nearly everyone present knew each other well (most of them were flatmates). During the meal, we were all engaged in one common conversation. As the night went on, people began talking on a one-to-one basis and, as the only outsider present, I was left very much on my own. It struck me that, since I was a guest, people did very little to bring me into their conversation. This lack of attention was later explained to me by Martin, who knows Liz's friends. He said that, because most of these people live together and are friends, they are past 'the politeness phase'. That is, they were 'being themselves' in a party where, except for me, all the guests were friends.

There is a general notion of sociability which permeates the discourse on friendship. As I have presented in the first chapter, friends are, among other things, people who one 'enjoys to be with' and has a 'laugh'/ 'good time with'. Interacting with each other has value in itself and talking can at times be seen in the same way, not really about anything but enjoyable in itself. Humour is of great importance because it subtly gives lightness to otherwise dense and intimate issues, and makes one laugh with each

other. It can also serve to keep conversation above the personal level when friendship is not a close one and, consequently, there is not enough trust for personal disclosure.

Having a 'good time', therefore, may happen with greater or lesser personal disclosure. Not being able to 'be oneself' in some situations of sociability is not perceived to be a problem; there are other moments when one can fully reveal oneself. Besides, humour is valued and enjoyed for itself. When self exposure happens at a greater degree, the possibility of being spontaneous and behaving as one wishes to adds to the idea of having a 'good time'.

Home and the transformation of work values

Dinner parties are forms of sociability which take place at the home. They contrast with eating at restaurants and drinking at pubs because of the meaning of *home* as contrasting with *work* and with the public domain in general, a topic explored in the next chapter. It is not just because, at home, any gathering of friends is sheltered from the public eye. Parties are also special because they require that one puts aside one's time and 'effort' to make something for friends. Elements such as time and 'effort', which are valuable resources in the sphere of work, acquire different meanings once transposed into the practice of sociability. From being assets which are used with the ultimate goal of making money, even if just enough to earn one's livelihood, at home they become 'invested' into welcoming and pleasing friends as well as into having a 'good time' with them. Through meals, friendship is shown to be important exactly because it receives the 'investment' of one's time and 'effort'. For people who do not have children to take care of, time and 'effort' in the home tend to be spent according to their wishes. To 'be

bothered' and 'take the effort' to prepare a meal for friends express how much friendship is important for oneself.

When employed in the entertainment of friends, money also seems to lose the market features which it normally has in the domain of work. It is no longer impersonal because it is vested with personal time and 'effort' in order to produce a meal. It is almost not recognized as money when people say they cannot afford to buy gifts for friends but do exchange a lot of food and drink with them. Thus, from something which is usually the end result of much time and 'effort' (i.e. making money as one of the aims of work), money becomes only one of the means, and the least emphasized one, to create sociability.

Thus, time and 'effort' become personal possessions which are put into the development and maintenance of friendship. Money is one such personal possession, but, because of its negative evaluation, it is often ignored as an element which is 'invested' in friendship. Despite this view, money, time and 'effort' actually produce the material foundation of sociability -- food and drink -- which in turn helps to produce the humour and conversation which are necessary aspects of friendship. But this basis is always to be seen as secondary -- not indispensable but not the focus of the gathering. Thus, material things are important only in so far as they become the means to an end which is sociability and friendship.

CHAPTER 7.

FRIENDSHIP AND WORK

The domain of work shares with that of the home a central place in the lives of the young English people I have studied. In many ways, work is characterized in relation to the home and vice-versa. For instance, time, 'effort' and money, all elements present at work, have their value changed once they are employed at the home in the preparation of meals for friends. These elements become the means of fostering sociability and friendship. At work, on the other hand, time and 'effort' become directed to other purposes (one of which is making money) and are thus detracted from the investment in ties established at the workplace. It is the formation of friendship at the workplace, as a specific setting with particular characteristics, and the problems involved in this relationship that I want to examine in the present chapter.

As sociologists (Allan 1989, Fine 1986) claim, friendships formed at work may suffer because of elements of competition and hierarchy at the workplace. But the presence of these elements was only implicitly acknowledged by the people I studied, for an egalitarian rhetoric was predominant in their discourse. Instead, they attributed the weak and transitory aspects of friendships at work to their high job mobility. Underlying the reasons for such high rate of job mobility is the strong value on personal freedom in choosing when and where to work. This is despite the present context of economic recession. The ability to exercise choice is applied as well in the maintenance of friendship ties with people from work. Ultimately, keeping in contact with colleagues is perceived to depend very much on people's willingness to 'make an effort'.

However, I would argue that the weakness of friendship at work is also related to the perceptions people have of the workplace. The workplace takes on those characteristics of the public sphere, such as impersonality, formality and rationality, which are considered to hinder personal disclosure. By the same token, the home is

associated to the private sphere, where affective and personal ties prevail. At home, one can 'be oneself'. At work, only parts of the self are considered as proper to reveal, for self-control is stressed in the process of disclosure at the workplace. Because the idea of a closer friendship requires in-depth revelations, relationships established at work are thus felt to be weaker and short-lived than those created outside the workplace.

It is important to note that the weakness and temporary character of friendships at work may be a middle class feature. Westwood (1984) and Werbner (1990) show how friendships at work are significant for the working class people they studied. Job mobility does not seem to be as high among the working class and this could be one possible explanation for their different friendship patterns at work. I would also suggest, although I cannot develop this idea in this thesis, that working class people's perceptions of the workplace may differ from that of the middle class. Perhaps, for the former the character of work does not appear to conflict with the values of friendship as much as it does for the latter.

Choice and work careers

> You're brought up to think that the world is your oyster and you just have to go and get it, and if you don't get it, it's probably because you don't want it... (Celia).

As many writers have noted, the notion of the individual as having freedom of choice is one of the pillars of late twentieth century Western society (e.g. see Featherstone 1991, Strathern 1992). It is, in Celia's view, a particularly strong value and belief of the middle class (see chapter 4). Although the world can be as tough to handle as an oyster is, any success or failure in securing it for oneself seems to stem from one's wishes and decisions. The belief in such freedom of choice is reflected in people's work

careers, marked by a high degree of mobility which is much the result of their own motivations and interests, despite the present context of crisis and recession in the British economy.

When I began doing fieldwork in April 1991, eight people out of the seventeen I interviewed were employed on a full-time basis. There were two people who were unemployed but in the course of one year found themselves a job. There were also four university students of both undergraduate and graduate levels and two artists who held a combination of part-time jobs while not working in their art trade. One person was self-employed as a market trader.

Nearly every person I met worked in what sociologists call service sector occupations, involved in retailing or provision of personal services (e.g. health, education).[1] Their jobs were: managers and coordinators in voluntary sector organizations and in small public sector firms (such as Camden Age Concern and the Environment Council), administrative secretaries in private companies (e.g. a graphics design company, marketing organization for Third World products), social workers, artists, and street market traders. The artists and musicians had part-time jobs, such as teaching English for foreign students or playing with children in nurseries, and the 'odd' assignments as, for instance, cleaning carpets and house decorating. Most of the students intended to pursue academic careers after finishing their courses.

Over half of the people work in offices, with a more or less rigid schedule beginning at nine o'clock in the morning and leaving at five or six in the afternoon, from

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[1] Industrialized societies are generally described in terms of three sectors: primary, which concerns work in agriculture and mineral extraction, manufacturing, which produces industrialized goods, and service, which circulate these goods as well as provide services (Abercrombie *et al* 1988).

Mondays to Fridays. Very often, they can stay in the office until much later, working, for example, on projects which have to be finished before an approaching deadline. The artists alternate periods of intense work, such as rehearsing for a play or touring with a band, with those of little or no activity. The students and market traders have more flexibility in arranging their daily routines but, in a sense, feel they have work to do during all days of the week.

Most of these people have to commute between their homes and their workplace, generally situated in central London. The universities attended by those who were students are also located in this part of the city. The remainder work in more than one area of London which generally does not include the city centre: the actress appears on stage in different fringe theatres, the musician plays gigs in clubs all over the city, and the market trader sells on at least two different markets.

Most people are happy with their choice of career. To work in the voluntary sector, for instance, was motivated by people's belief in doing something thought as socially good. Having a job in a firm which fostered independent trade among Third and First World countries was in accord with general ideas about economic unfairness in international commerce. Being an artist or a musician, on the other hand, did not result from one's moral values but from the belief that one was talented. On the whole, these are people who like their career, for whom work is done for pleasure and/or moral reasons.

Being happy with one's occupation does not mean being satisfied with the particular job one has at the moment. Julie, who has both an undergraduate and postgraduate degree in Sociology, worked as a manager in the Education council, but planned to go back to teaching the following year. Teaching was her previous activity and

that which truly pleased her. Liz considered herself an artist (and was so regarded by her friends) but worked as an administrative secretary at a graphics design office. She did not have a degree in Arts but recently began evening classes in sculpture. She even thought of becoming a full-time student the following year, depending on how her interests developed.

There were some people who chose to be unemployed until they found a satisfactory job for themselves. Despite the present panorama of economic recession in Britain, some people have sought means of coping with unemployment instead of applying for any possible job in order to support themselves: unemployment and housing benefits are the most common resource and some people also resort to doing 'odd jobs' such as a music gig or one house-decorating assignment. Victor lived 'on the dole' for nearly one year, during which he waited to be offered the specific job that he wanted to have. Sally was growing unhappy and bored with her job in a small public sector organization when I met her. Towards the end of fieldwork, she had decided to work part-time and eventually resigned, with no other job to take on. She had become interested in aromatherapy and wished to be qualified to work with it. Thus, she chose to leave her job and receive unemployment benefits while investing in her new career interest. Despite the reduction in income that often mounted debts, these people preferred to stay unemployed until the 'right' job came along rather than taking on a job, even if not an adequate one, in order to earn a living.

The students' career history is also one built on decisions of *when* to work or to study. Daniel began an Arts course when he was eighteen but never passed his foundation year. For four years, he worked in all sorts of ways, such as doing house decoration, selling clothes and being a gardener. At some point, he became interested in studying

again and decided to attend night school in order to get his A levels. He was later

accepted to the Geography course at Manchester University and is now in London

working towards a postgraduate degree in Urban Studies. Like him, all the other students

have at a certain stage decided to stop their studies and work for a while, before

returning to university.

Changing jobs is far from being an unusual feature in people's work career. Most

of them have actually held a number of different jobs after having finished their

university courses (only two of them did not finish their courses at university). Artists,

for whom their art career is the primary focus, regard their part-time jobs as being of

secondary importance. Thus, they resort to these part-time activities as a way of

maintaining a basic income, but there is no commitment to them. As soon as such jobs

are considered uninteresting or tiresome they are left for new jobs. Even those who were

employed full-time as managers had already worked before in other companies, and they

did not exclude the possibility of leaving their present jobs in the future. Janice explained

when she was about to begin a new job as manager of a research organization that,

nowadays, moving jobs after a couple of years was the way to build one's career.

Job mobility is not particular to the specific English people I studied. Rather, it

fits into a pattern which sociologists think is becoming more widespread within the

British service class (cf. Savage, Dickens, and Fielding 1988, Dickens 1990). 'Service

class' is designated by sociologists as referring to the part of the service sector comprised

by managers and professionals. Abercrombie *et al* (1988) describe the service class as

the 'upper' part of the middle class, having higher earnings and being more skilled than

routine white-collar workers, teachers and nurses.

Within the service class, there is a new segment characterized by relatively high job mobility. According to Savage, Dickens and Fielding (1988), this mobility pattern is typical of managers and professionals working in small firms or who are self-employed. These individuals can be geographically mobile during their early working life, which includes their passage through colleges and universities. Later they tend to settle down in large urban areas, such as London, where their type of jobs is in reasonable supply. While geographically static, they reach high position jobs through the process of rapid mobility between companies. This trend for job mobility contrasts with the behaviour of a more traditional segment of the service class, whose members are employed mainly in the public sector (e.g. state agencies) and in large companies. Within this segment, the usual trajectory towards higher positions may take an individual through different geographical areas whilst staying within the same company (hence, the sociological denomination of these employees as 'spiralists' or 'organization men').

The pattern of job mobility in what Savage *et al* call the new segment of the service class is associated with the notion of individual choice. "There is a new service class of workers who move straight into the sorts of jobs *they want* to do and sort of area where *they want* to be" (Savage et al. 1988: 468, added emphasis). This attitude towards work is, in fact, part of a wider notion in Western societies of the individual as able to exercise choice over most matters of his or her life.

Among the people I studied, the freedom to chose whether to stay in a job (like the decision to move residence or not) is further accentuated by the fact that none of them have a family to support. The fact that the government provides unemployment and housing benefits also helps to allow for relative scope in individual manoeuvre of one's work career. These government provisions are, for example, nonexistent in countries like

Brazil, where there is the additional difficulty posed by high inflation. Although Brazilian families might support their unemployed children, this is both temporary and something of a last resort option, and these people tend to give up their jobs only if they have already secured an alternative.

Of course, the present economic recession tends to curtail the freedom of individual will. Nevertheless, what prevails is the importance attributed to choice, which prioritizes personal wishes and desires, while understating social constraints and influences. Making the decision to leave a job becomes more dependent on personal considerations alone. The perception of freedom of choice is paramount to a notion of the person as agent in actively forming his or her own identity (in this case related to work).

Friendships in the workplace

Nearly everyone I talked to has friendly relations with people with whom they work. However, those who are classed as 'friends' from work tend to fall into the category of friends that go out for drinks to 'have a good time'. They tend not to be friends to whom one is close, in the sense of spending more time together (outside work). Rather, they are people with whom one has 'laughs' with, but in the presence of whom one finds difficulty in 'being oneself'. People will often socialize with colleagues by going out for drinks after work hours. Sometimes, they may join one another for a meal at a restaurant. What they tend not to do is to visit each other at their homes, for, as I have shown in the previous chapter, this form of sociability marks a closer type of friendship which is not how work relationships are described.

For people who work together, the pub is the central place for interaction outside the workplace. Drinking at pubs is an English institution and there are some 'rules' to it, such as taking turns in paying rounds of drinks (I discuss this topic in the next chapter). The subject matter for most conversations among people who work together can range from gossip about work to other topics of general interest, but never becoming too personal nor losing the humorous tone. It is also a good situation in which to get to know new people who share similar professional interests, adds Kevin.

Sociability would seem, therefore, to be the significant element in the relations among colleagues. But, as Allan adds with ethnographic insight,

> while sociability is quite central to friendship, it is neither all there is to the relationship, nor necessarily indicative of its significance (1989: 19).

This is why people with whom one works will often not be referred to as a category composed of friends. Peter says that he is *friendly* with people at work and will sometimes go to the pub and 'have a laugh' with them, but he does not think of them as friends. Here, the ideal of close friendship becomes the standard for friendship in general. For some people, the presence of elements of sociability in the relationship does not counteract the lack of personal disclosure, which thus cancells its possible classification as friendship.

Friendships with work colleagues generally are temporary, and last only whilst a person is working in a particular job. Almost everyone has lost contact with people with whom they worked in previous jobs. It was the on-going sharing of that specific work experience that maintained the relationship. As Allan says, "even if the friends routinely meet in one particular setting, this does not define the limits of their friendship nor account for its continuation" (1989: 25-26). It is Kurth who better phrases the issue:

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a friendship requires that one build a substantial relationship on other bases, so that it will persist even if the formal role relationship is dissolved (1970: 158).

Perhaps one of the major distinctions between friends from work and close friends lies in the notion of 'effort', which denotes the varying degrees of 'investment' of time and attention that can go into a friendship. This distinction is clear for Janice:

> I bump into people [from past jobs] and it's quite nice, seeing people, but I wouldn't necessarily want to see any more of them.(...) When I was working at a shop last year, I got quite close to a lot of the women there and we'd go out after work. And I send them postcards occasionally and had a couple of cards from the women there and that's nice. But it's not a close friendship; it's just people that are around, that you could phone up and go for a drink.

In contrast, there are a few people (not from work) she feels very close to, with whom she likes to spend a lot of time and talk to. Janice admits her 'low boredom threshold' and intolerance and, unless she is in 'the *mood* to go out and get drunk or go dancing', she finds it difficult to spend an evening with people she is not close to. Similarly, Julie thinks that people usually lose contact with friends from work because 'they don't make the effort, they are lazy'. Thus, one makes the effort to keep constantly in touch with close friends, whereas with other friends, and this will probably include people with whom one works or has worked, contact happens almost by chance ('I bumped into...'), or with little 'effort'.

It is important to recall that 'constant contact' with friends is something that varies from daily contact to a phone call every month or so. What is relevant, therefore, in distinguishing friends made at work and close friends resides in the idea that 'effort' is put into making time to see the latter, whereas this is not done for the former. As with one's careers and many other aspects of one's life, one perceives the freedom to choose

whether to be friends with people at work or not and, later, whether to keep in contact with them or not.

Anne complains about the lack of 'effort' from the people she works with in a small firm which markets environmentally safe products. Here, she is the one who makes the 'effort' to develop a friendship but finds that it is an one-sided attempt:

> I find it really frustrating sometimes, because I go towards them [people at work] and they are all quite new to me, some of them more than others, and I go towards them and try and make conversation and get a friendship together or something, you're working with them and go for it. And you get such a minimal response sometimes, and you think 'Argh!', putting all this effort!.

Anne is half French and half English and at times thinks the difficulty comes from people's 'English reserve':

> maybe I'm a bit pushy -- what they consider pushy -- and they hold back a bit and get a bit sceptical until they get to know me and have a few jokes with them, a few situations where things loosen up... I don't know.(...) Of course, it's not everybody but it is something that does come out... kind of you have to keep your pose, you don't want people to break in too quickly and find out, you know, too much about you. Depends, if you're in a work situation, work makes it harder to get through to people, because they're weary.

Six months after this interview, Anne's feelings had changed somewhat. She was no longer complaining about 'English reserve' (after all, she is half English) but simply concluded that the people she worked with were not 'her type'. At a conference trip, when she had to spend three days with two colleagues, she noticed she was never relaxed with them, not even while they had dinner or breakfast. With one of them, a woman, Anne used to think that there was potential for friendship, but it never developed. But then, she also feels that most of her colleagues are not as interested in the job as she is, which further adds to the perceived differences.

Thus, it seems that there is some aspect of the workplace that complicates the process of approaching other people and gradually disclosing information about themselves in the way that closer friends do. The lack of personal disclosure subtracts from a tie based chiefly on sharing the experience of work and on sociability after work hours. Although sociability is an important element of friendship in general, personal disclosure receives greater value as a defining feature of this relationship. When moving jobs, ties established at work which are grounded on sociability tend to lose most of their foundation, and people stop having contact with friends made at work.

Friends from work and closer friends

High job mobility is perceived to have important implications for the way in which friendships are structured in the workplace. Being on a job temporarily was often mentioned by people as an explanation for why friendships in the workplace do not usually last very long. But, as I will discuss, perceptions of work as the domain of rationality and efficiency affect friendship at the workplace as much as people's high job mobility.

Sociologists explain the lack of a stronger basis and the consequent temporary character of friendship at work with reference to the characteristics of the workplace. Allan (1989) argues that, although the workplace can offer possibilities for the development of friendship, this will ultimately depend on its internal organization. In some cases, competitive and hierarchical features of the work environment may hinder the creation of friendship relations. He concludes:

> the majority of workplace contacts do not develop into recognized friendships as such. Many remain just workplace ties, either through choice, convention (...) or circumstance (Allan 1989: 36).

Fine (1986) presents a similar view on the problems posed by competition and hierarchical relationships for friendships in the workplace. The difficulty, he proposes, lies in the possibility of conflict between one's duties in the job and one's personal inclinations. Fine adds, however, that, if the job is structured in terms of complementary tasks, friendly relations can be encouraged.

However, neither competition nor hierarchy were perceived by the people I studied to account for the weakness of friendships at work. Regarding competitiveness, it was clearly emphasized, discourse-wise, that competition was not considered an explicit element present in their work environments. This may be due to the fact that half of the people I studied work at community services jobs or voluntary sector organizations, which are non-profit oriented. Thus, it may be that these forms of employment emphasize the complementary nature of the different tasks and the stress on team spirit, rather than on individual competitiveness. Of course, none of these reasons preclude a desire to compete if not for higher wages, for greater status and power. But again, when explicitly asked about competitiveness as a problem for friendship in the workplace, nearly all of them disregarded it, either as a strong presence or as the explanation for lacking closer friends at work.

The single exceptional statement comes from Anne, who thinks there was competition both in her previous and present jobs. One of the causes for that in the former was a confusion in the allocation of tasks, such that different people would often do the same things. But Anne does emphasize that she does not consider competition as something which prevents friendship from forming at the workplace. Indeed, from her previous job, she has maintained two female friends.

Similarly, hierarchy is not regarded as the difficulty in making friends at work. Again, because of the nature of people's jobs, hierarchy does not appear to be strongly emphasized in the work organization and consequently does not usually seem to be regarded as problem for relationships. Janice told me how the atmosphere in her workplace changed when a new director came in. The previous director was a very friendly person and well-experienced in running the organization. In contrast, the new director created much dissatisfaction among the staff by using a very authoritarian tone and being unable to take criticisms. Janice, who finds this person insecure and incompetent (being authoritarian is thus regarded as a shield), feared that the organization would collapse. Therefore, making hierarchical differences very clear would appear to affect negatively the quality of the relationships among all the staff. Janice herself has changed jobs (because of both the new tensions in the organization and greater security in her new occupation) and will now have a managing position. She is not concerned that being in a superior post may affect her work relationships, since she does not think of her task as one of displaying authority but more as one of coordinating a team.

Anne's story is also revealing. After being in her job for three months, she had her work assessed by her manager in order to decide on a raise in salary and a change in position. Having received what she thought was an unfair assessment, Anne confronted the manager about the ambivalence of his decision, since he was always praising her work. They discussed the issue for a couple of hours and he came to agree with Anne's views and gave her the raise. It is a peculiar relationship, she thinks, in that they are exactly the same age and yet he has more work experience than she has and, therefore, occupies a managing position. She felt comfortable enough to confront him, which I think denotes a certain ease where there could have been more apprehension and even fear. It

is actually interesting that she achieved something which she finds difficult to do with friends: to talk honestly about problems in their relationship. But he was not seen as a friend and she thought it was her right to discuss a decision perceived as unjust (hence, the lack of concern that she may impose her feelings on the manager).

It is curious, though, that, in most of the conversations about work I had with people during fieldwork, 'the boss' was often present as a central figure. In the case of students, tutors and supervisors replace 'the boss', as the person on whom one's fate depends. He or she is often referred to as one who does not recognize all the effort one is putting into one's work, or who is authoritarian. Or, conversely, reference to these authority figures can be positive as when they make important compliments or give raises in position and salaries. These comments reveal a conscious desire for egalitarian relationships, while implicitly acknowledging the presence of hierarchy. At the same time, in admitting the importance of raises, a desire for hierarchy is also affirmed. These are conflicting principles about work, which contradict the alleged little influence of hierarchy on work relationships.

Relating socially to people subordinate to oneself can also be understood as a problem. According to Julie, one's prestige might be diminished by mixing with people who are in an inferior position. Similarly, she finds that in her workplace there is often a cliquish behaviour. There are groups of people, occupying roughly the same positions, who consider themselves 'in' and exclude from their social activities those seen as insignificant (e.g. shy people).

Thus, although hierarchical relations are recognized to affect friendships at work, what these people stress is the fact that they are able to deal with such relationships irrespective of hierarchy. When they do speak of difficulties in relating to 'the boss', it

is always as if it were a problem of that particular individual and not because she or he holds a superior position. In this discourse prevails an egalitarian rhetoric which fits into a broader Western model of individualism.

This egalitarian mode appears as well in people's perception of how gender comes into the work environment. Like competition and hierarchy, at the level of discourse gender does not seem to affect much relationships at the workplace. Kevin finds that at work he regards men and women irrespective of their sex and has said that, in the area he works in (environment conservation agency), there are roughly as many women as men working in decisive positions. Anne, who has had problems with her manager (who is a man), never mentioned that her difficulties may have been caused by any sort of gender discrimination. I have heard other women who, like Anne, complain about their 'bosses' (who are also men) without any reference to gender as an explanation for their problems at work. Thus, gender differences are not brought into people's discourse as the reason for unequal treatment within the workplace. This is not to say that there are no salary differentials between women and men, nor that such distinctions are not acknowledged. But in terms of work relationships gender is often considered a non-issue.

Where it can be an issue is when romantic relationships develop in the workplace, a theme often discussed in the sociological literature as both problematic and yet somewhat frequent. However, throughout my conversations with this group of people, I have heard little mention of romance with colleagues from work. Liz, who works mainly among men, is one of the few who had stories of short-lived affairs to tell. I was told as well of a woman who is now engaged to a colleague from her last job, although the relationship began after she had left it.

Different age-groups are also present in the workplace, distinguishing it from school and, to some extent, university environments. Few people have friends that are ten years or more older than them, but some have said that at work they enjoy being able to relate to older colleagues. In Sally's view, they are like her parents in age and experience but their relationship to her is not one between parent and child, so she feels she can talk to these friends more freely than with her parents.

More than competitiveness, inequality in positions, gender differences or any other sociological variable, what is stated as preventing friendships at the workplace from lasting is the time factor. It is not just that jobs may be temporary and because of that one loses contact with one's colleagues. Time is crucial in establishing friendships and working with a person for one year is generally not considered enough to build up trust, one of the foundations of this relationship.

This may seem somewhat paradoxical since, even if one stays at a certain job for six months, they are likely to be with the same group of people every day of the working week for that period of time. Whereas an older friend from school might not be met more than once a week and yet be deemed much closer than any of their colleagues. If these close friends do not live in London, they might not see each other more than two or three times a year. Friends from work also share experiences together. Whether it is solving a problem or preparing a conference or complaining about 'the boss', there are many events which people at work go through together. It is also possible to be more personal with friends at work. Since the notion of 'personal' is recognized by every one I talked to as being a relative one, varying with the contexts one is in,[2] it is possible to be personal to a certain degree with people one works with.

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[2] See the discussion about the boundaries of the category 'personal' in chapter 1.

But this is not the rationale followed by this group of people. What explains why friendship at work generally is a weak tie is how each of the constitutive elements of this relationship is qualified. Thus, sharing work experience is not perceived as strong enough to bind people after they move on to other jobs. Here, I would suggest that, although their presence was not stressed, competition and hierarchy does affect the quality of experience shared at work. For both competition and hierarchy are seen as presuming roles the person has to perform, which detract from the process of complete disclosure which is an ideal of friendship. Consequently, in spite of the possibility of being personal with friends from work, the degree to which one is personal tends to be much less than if one were among close friends. From this follows that time spent with friends from work is not valued in the same way as that which is passed with closer friends.

The particularity of the workplace

There is the feeling that the work environment is different from other places one usually goes to and, consequently, the relationships formed there will be, likewise, specific to that context. According to Sally, work is fundamentally distinguished from school and university because people are there to 'earn a living'. Schools, universities and the work environment have certain rules of conduct, tasks which must be accomplished and personal performance which must be assessed by a superior. All three milieu require that energy, 'effort' and labour are put into realizing the tasks one is assigned to do. But, whereas in school and in university spending time and energy is seen as 'studying', at the workplace time and energy spent are traded for salary wages and it is this aspect which characterizes 'work'. In other words, the fact that people have jobs in order to receive

an income fundamentally characterizes work, even if they seek personal fulfilment in their choice of careers.

The perception of work as a means of getting an income becomes problematic because of these people's stated negative evaluation of money. Most people I met were not working in profit-oriented companies and were not concerned with 'making money' through their jobs either. Saving money was always directed to immediate purposes, and not as a way of building up a long-term financial reserve. To have savings was a preoccupation for the two people who had bought their flats and who had to pay mortgages for them. They thus needed to have a financial reserve in case they lost or left their jobs. There were some students who got temporary jobs in order to earn money and to finance a long stay abroad. Otherwise, people often spent more than they had and I often heard mentions of their being indebted to their banks. Susan professed the belief that the more one spends money, the more it comes back to her, in some way or the other. Likewise, the willingness some people have to live on unemployment benefit until they find a satisfactory job reveals that having little money is less important than working for pleasure.

The workplace is also characterized by specific standards of behaviour. Sally remarked that chatting with colleagues during work hours may be complicated 'if the boss is watching'. At work, one should be working and not socializing with colleagues. The imagery of work is then one of a domain where relationships are formal, impersonal, efficient and rational. Taylor (1975) attributes such imagery not just to work but to the whole of society. It is what he calls an 'industrial, technological and rationalized civilization', organized according to efficiency and higher production. In this civilization there prevails a conception of the person as having a self-defining identity and being

independent. Rationality is a strong mark of this social order and of this conception of the person (Brubaker 1984). This is Weber's (1976) main thesis, in which capitalism and its economic rationalism thrived because of people's disposition, much influenced by the Protestant ethic, to adopt a formal rational conduct.

If in the workplace one has to be formal, impersonal, rational and efficient, it means that the emotive, 'real' self has to be controlled and hidden in relationships with people at work. As discussed in chapter 1, such a control of the 'true' self appears as showing oneself to be 'confident' and 'polite'. Controlling the self can also be considered to be an act of 'pretence'. Whether taken as part of displaying politeness, confidence or pretence, in the workplace only one side of the self is regarded as proper to be revealed: the rational one. Because friendship is based on the ideal of reciprocal disclosure of one's 'true', emotive self, the stress placed on being rational and controlled in the workplace literally acts against the possibilities of becoming friends with colleagues.

Aside from being a formal, impersonal and efficiency oriented environment, the workplace is regarded as generally being a heterogeneous milieu, composed of people of different ages and often of distinct interests. Anne complained that not all her colleagues were as equally involved with the social causes of the job as she was. The lack of common interests among colleagues may point to differences in class backgrounds they may have, which further complicates the establishment of friendship ties. Such diversity of people is taken to be a broader characteristic of the public sphere (Sennett 1976).

The imagery of work as heterogeneous, formal, rational, efficient and dominated by market values is structured in contrast with that of the home. Thus, aside from their physical separation, each has its own distinct organization of time. While the public/work sphere has more or less rigid schedules and appointments which have to be met

punctually, the home is (theoretically at least) the domain where one decides when to do things (e.g. washing up the dishes can be done right after eating or left lying in the sink for days). Whereas efficiency is paramount at the workplace, at home one can be 'messy', untidy and disorganized if one wants to. At work, one has to appear in control, be polite and present only one side of the self; relationships are chiefly based on rational behaviour. By contrast, even if one shares the home with others, one has some degree of privacy in which control can be relaxed and one can be oneself. Whilst work is associated with weak and short-lived friendships, the home is the place where friendship is strengthened through sociability and commensality. It is not a coincidence, then, that friends from work are seldom invited home for a meal.

The contrast between work and home is often associated with the distinction between the public and the private. Taylor (1975) describes the public in Western thought as based on efficiency and high productivity and the private as the domain of individual fulfilment and individual liberty. From a philosophical standpoint, therefore, "modern society, we might say, is Romantic in its private and imaginative life and utilitarian or instrumentalist in its public, effective life" (1975: 541). Sennett (1976) claims that, because of the greater value placed on individual fulfilment, the public has lost its value whereas the private becomes the source of all significant experience. Self-revelation is thus treasured, Sennett argues, to the extent that any behaviour in public, generally not of a self-disclosing nature, becomes formal, dry and 'phony'. The home as the domain of privacy becomes cherished as the seat of the 'true', emotive self while the workplace as part of the public sphere becomes equated with formal obligations and one-sided (and potentially 'phony') presentations of the self.

To be sure, tracing equivalences between the boundaries of public and private domains with those of work and home is something which varies within Western societies. For instance, DaMatta (1984) describes Brazilian society as one in which public and private become translated into notions of street (*rua*) and home (*casa*). According to him, in Brazil there is a general tendency to transform the street world -- marked by impersonality -- into a home world -- one where personal identities and relationships guide social behaviour. For example, to solve any bureaucratic problem, Brazilians tend to seek the connections they have (of a family or friendship nature) in order to settle the matter quicker than if they follow normal institutional procedures. Other examples could be brought in, but my intention is mainly to highlight the particular separation between home and work effected by the English people I am studying.

The perception of the workplace as endowed with characteristics of the market and of the public sphere exists in conflict with the idea of work as personally fulfilling. This also reflects a conflict between two notions of the person. On one hand, there is the person who is an active agent in shaping his or her career and through whose will seems to overcome social and economic difficulties. This is the person who may choose to remain unemployed and not work unless it is for pleasure. On the other hand, the person has in some contexts, such when at work, to perform a specific role which is seen as masking some parts of the self. In this situation, it is as if there were no choice about how to behave; the person has to act in socially expected ways.

But there is little conflict about the difficulties of developing long-term close friendships at work. The relationships established at work tend to be perceived as a consequence of people working together, rather than being formed purely on grounds of liking and having similar interests. Interests are often divergent and, although colleagues

spend many hours together, they disclose very little about their emotive selves. Moreover, competition and hierarchy are present, no matter how mild, in the workplace, clashing with the egalitarian discourse fundamental to friendship.

It is no wonder then that to keep friendships made at work 'a lot of effort' is required, perhaps as much as is needed in maintaining close friendships. One has to counteract a host of factors that hinder the establishment of friendship. This is why some people say that it is easier to develop the relationship once friends are no longer working in the same job. The 'pressures' from work are gone and the friendship is sustained on its own account. On the whole, though, keeping such friendships are considered to demand an 'effort' which most people are not willing to undertake. For them, there is the idea of having the choice of not making any 'effort' and of losing contact with friends from work.

Epilogue: the researcher as a friend

It is relevant and interesting to examine at this stage a question which intrigued me throughout my fieldwork: would I become friends with the people I was studying? I was told by various English people, whom I was not interviewing for this research, that the development of friendship would take some time. That is, by the end of one year of fieldwork, I might feel that I had established friendship ties with, at least, some of the people I was regularly meeting.

My fieldwork consisted basically of conversations at the pub or at people's homes, often during a meal. The phase of formal interviewing was restricted to the first four months, after which our encounters became occasions for sociability. Conversation topics

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ranged from personal relationships to cinema, television programs and cooking. At this stage, I participated in the socializing as much as they did. Thus, I thought, there were elements of both sociability and personal disclosure in our relationships, which, with the effects of time, might be transformed into friendship.

Furthermore, despite being Brazilian, I was of a similar class background to that of most people I met: middle class, with university education. Indeed, this similarity was once pointed out to me by Martin, who made no reference to the fact that I was Brazilian and he was English. Besides this, communicating in English was not a problem for me and I was also of the same age-group as most people. Therefore, in my view, I had many social characteristics in common with the people I was studying.

It was with surprise (and some disappointment) then that, roughly a year after I had begun fieldwork, I realized that I was still very much regarded as a researcher and not as a friend. On one occasion, I was having dinner with Sally when, amongst other things, she said that I was not exactly a friend. I was interested in listening to what people had to tell me, Sally remarked, but I was not judging them as a friend would do. Thus, I was a friendly researcher. On another occasion, I met Liz at a pub before going to a party. We had not seen each other for two months and she asked me how my work was going on. She then baffled me by asking if I still took notes after each conversation I had with people (the previous time we had met was over dinner at my place, during which we both talked about various things but mainly about love relationships). I felt then that all my efforts to underplay my role as a researcher (e.g. taking notes after meetings, talking about myself as well) had been in vain. Throughout the fieldwork, I had other hints (e.g. contact was only sought by me) that, no matter how much people liked me, I was chiefly seen as a researcher studying friendship for her PhD thesis.

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The issue in these relationships was, I suggest, people's perception that I was relating to them first and foremost because of my work. The sociability elements in the relationship were of secondary importance or seen as a consequence of a bond which was established for the purpose of my study. The fact that my topic was friendship only served to increase the difficulty in changing the character of our relationships. Any interest shown by me in becoming their friend might have been explained by my research pursuits and not by a willingness to enter the relationship for its own sake.

When I ended fieldwork, I decided to tell most people that I was no longer collecting data. Equally, I stopped telephoning people to set meetings. Curiously, some people have begun to ring me to arrange meals at their place or outings at the cinema. These are some hints that our relationships may be turning into friendships...

CHAPTER 8.

SOCIABILITY AT THE PUB

Travelling back home on the underground late at night was always an amazing trip for me because of the radical transformation in public behaviour. During the day, one sees circumspect men and women in suits, carrying their briefcases and seriously engaged in reading their newspapers or books. Conversation is carried out in low volume and every one seems to be very conscious of all the others nearby, despite their avoidance of direct eye contact. At night, after the pubs have closed, one sees the opposite: people laughing and speaking loudly and even talking to fellow travellers.

This transformation begins after work, when many people go to the pub for a drink. It is especially striking in those areas of London where business offices are concentrated and whose pubs become quite full in the early evening. Some call this period of time in the pub "Happy Hours", which implies that the hours before at work were anything but happy... Not everyone stays on until closing time. Not everyone drinks every day either. But to stop in the pub after work hours is common enough to be taken as a habit that many English people have.

This was certainly true of the women and men I met. Whether with people from work or with friends, drinking at the pub was not just a common and frequent activity but one regarded as important for friendship. In this chapter, I examine the dynamics of going to the pub in relation to friendship. The pub is not just a place for the consumption of alcohol, albeit the importance of drinking for these and other English people. It is also a context in which friendship is developed and maintained through the reciprocal relations of buying rounds of drink. Ultimately, the pub stands in contradistinction with other parts of the public domain -- especially with the sphere of work -- because it is considered to favour, above anything else, two fundamental dimensions of friendship: 'having a good time' and 'being oneself' with friends.

The likes and needs for alcohol

Throughout my fieldwork, most of the meetings and interviews that I had included the consumption of alcohol. Whether at home or at the pub, drinking was always welcomed after a day's work and as an accompaniment to our conversations. For instance, whenever I met Janice after her work hours, she would always propose going to a pub because she really 'needed' a drink. After getting her drink, she would slump on the chair and sigh relieved that now she could rest. Drinking meant that work was over and she could begin to relax and 'unwind'.

Although the consumption of alcohol in Western societies is strongly associated with the time of play, major sociological and anthropological studies on drinking have tended to focus on its excesses, consequently treating it as a problem (cf. Davies and Walsh 1983, Everett *et al* 1976, Heath 1986). Somewhat departing from this tendency, Douglas (1987) has organized a volume of essays in which drinking is analysed as a social act, which for instance can take the form of a ritual or function as a marker of boundaries of inclusion or exclusion. But, in her introduction to the collection, she still displays the concern with the problems generated by drinking alcohol (e.g. alcoholism), even if they are to be seen as socially constructed and not biologically founded.

A more innovative compilation is that edited by Gefou-Madianou (1992), centred on alcohol commensality and gender identities. Chiefly based on studies of Mediterranean societies, the articles show how men and women generally have separate domains for the consumption of alcohol, which reinforce patterns of affirming gender identities. Thus, men normally drink in public places such as coffeehouses, bars or taverns, while women keep themselves to domestic circles. This pattern may be upset when women enter male-dominated areas by going to coffeehouses, or when they even open their own public place

for the consumption of alcohol. Such behaviour may, for example, be interpreted as an act of rebellion against established ideas about female gender (Papagaroufali 1992).

In England and particularly among the young men and women I studied, gender differences do not affect drinking practices to the extent found in Mediterranean societies. Willis (1991) does point to gender differences when describing how much alcohol is consumed among young, mainly working class people in Britain. He sees excessive drinking as a way of affirming masculinity, while women maintain their gender propriety through a certain moderation lest they display sexual permissiveness (in my data, this concern appears in a rather different light as I discuss below).

Among the people I studied, gender differences are attributed to explain not so much the amount of alcohol consumed but the distinct ways in which women and men converse with their same-sex friends while drinking. In a sense, these types of conversation tend to be regarded as the exact reverse of each other: men talk about women, with a greater emphasis on the sexual details of their relationships or affairs, whereas women talk about men, with a clear focus on emotional matters. But, though this view mirrors common sense ideas about gender, it was also considered to be simplistic in a way. For it is also possible that close male friends go to a pub to discuss their emotions and feelings regarding relationships.

As frequent as drinking with people of one's sex, men and women also drink together after work hours or at the weekend, at the pub or at home, as part of sociability patterns between friends. In fact, more than gender differences, what seems to mark the character of drinking practices among friends is its contrast with attitudes and behaviour maintained at work. In moderation or not, drinking belongs to the time and place where one can begin to relax, as I have shown with reference to Janice.

The idea that alcohol effects the passage from work to play has been analysed by Gusfield (1987) with reference to American society. In 'modern industrialized' society, he explains, time is divided into periods of different quality and functions. The week is opposed to the weekend because time is organized into contrasting periods of work and of play. Likewise, work has become geographically separated from home. Thus, the notion of leisure as a clearly demarcated part of time emerges as historically specific, as particular to 'modern industrialized' society.

Leisure and work are, therefore, contrasting domains: they are different contexts of time as well as of space and of behaviour. Here Gusfield presents an extended concept of leisure which goes beyond its definition as 'time free from work' (cf. Oxford Dictionary).[1] "Leisure is not-work; work is not-leisure" (Gusfield 1987: 74). Each domain is defined in antithesis to one another. Leisure, Gusfield explains, is characterized by notions of release, spontaneity, disorder, relaxation, freedom and equality, whereas work is described by discipline, order, hierarchy, supervision and utilitarian forms of thought.

Because alcohol is believed to be a disinhibitor, Gusfield argues, it sets a mood of relaxation which contrasts to work, thus appropriately marking the passage from work to leisure. Gefou-Madianou adds that alcohol enables people to transcend the confines of the everyday world and "breaks down internal constraints, allowing through the flow of alcohol, the flow of sentiment" (1992: 12). In other words, alcohol is regarded as facilitating a greater exposure of the self, something which belongs to the period of leisure.

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[1] Willis (1990) criticizes the use of term 'leisure' because it can be applied to cover unemployment by calling it 'free time', among other things. But, lacking better alternatives, Willis makes use of the term with a meaning akin to 'play'.

The idea that alcohol affects how the self is exposed to others, especially contrasting with behaviour at work, is common among the people I met. More so, drinking alcohol is enjoyed precisely because of this quality. Patrick, who is Irish but was brought up in England since he was nine years old, discusses what alcohol does to his feelings of reserve with his English friend Syd:

> *Patrick*: If my mood is good, then I behave in a way that's more akin to the social behaviour of people in Ireland than with the classic British, English reserve. So if I have a few pints or I'm dancing, I'll absolutely won't give a damn about anything. I'm sure it happens to a lot of people's reserve, English people's reserve will go...
> *Syd*: Well, that's a very British thing to do, isn't it?
> *Patrick*: Yeah, that's the time to let loose.

According to Patrick, alcohol would act especially on 'the classic English reserve'. It accelerates the process of self-disclosure; it is the time to 'let loose' one's self-control to the extent that one may not even 'give a damn' about the consequences of not being reserved. The often used expression 'to unwind' only reaffirms this idea: one can unroll/uncoil the self, particularly after a day of discipline and tensions which 'works one up'.

In affecting the self's reserve, alcohol is perceived to alter, among other things, how one expresses one's sexuality, an idea voiced only by the women interviewed. Becoming more flirtatious and even ending the night in bed with someone -- often a stranger -- were responses frequently attributed to drinking. But these behaviours were generally said to be part of their past behaviour, particularly characteristic of late adolescence and early adulthood.[2] As Allison recounts, when she was younger, having sex with people "was like going out and getting drunk".

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[2] See chapter 2.

Despite the excesses which are seen to pertain to late adolescence, being forward about one's sexual desires concerns to a great extent exposing the self and is generally avoided until the chances of being rejected are ruled out. Being thus direct when flirting is not usually part of the conduct of a sober adult and to behave in this way often requires drinking and even getting drunk. One does not get here the social condemnation found in Mediterranean societies (Cowan 1990, Gefou-Madianou 1992, Papagaroufali 1992). But to be perceived as excessively displaying sexual availability is considered negative, and many women prefer not to risk being thus judged (cf. Willis 1990). Although alcohol helps to relax self-control, one should still maintain a degree of control so as not to make oneself vulnerable by becoming too exposed.

Being forward about one's sexual desire and appearing 'cheap' can be as subtle a distinction as that which separates moderate from excessive drinking. Notions of what moderation and excess mean vary not only socially but also individually. I often heard people saying they had got 'drunk' at a party or at a pub. Initially I thought that the English people I knew got 'drunk' much more frequently than the Brazilian people I knew. Later, it occurred to me that perhaps their threshold of drunkenness is different and lower than that of my Brazilian friends. That is, granting that the English state of sobriety involves an acknowledged element of personal reserve (cf. Patrick above), any alteration of this reserve caused by alcohol may be felt as becoming 'tipsy' or, even further, as getting 'drunk'.

Thus, the consumption of alcohol is perceived to induce or accelerate the process of personal disclosure among people who consider themselves to be normally in a state of reserve. Reserve means being 'in control' of oneself, which in turn implies controlling what one exposes of the self, to whom and in which situations. This attitude is further

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accentuated in the domain of work -- dominant in people's lives throughout the week, since it is regarded as placing an even greater premium on discipline and rationality as necessary for the accomplishment of one's assignments. Drinking is enjoyed precisely because it helps to modify an attitude which, although part of the expected behaviour of an adult, is also seen as a burden.

Moreover, when drinking, one is justified in relaxing one's self-control. In this case, it is the effect of alcohol, rather than one's difficulty in controlling oneself, which explains change in behaviour. In Gusfield's words, "alcohol provides a 'cover' to the exposure of the self to public judgements" (1987: 79), but always within certain limits. I have discussed the concern women have in not being taken as 'easy' when displaying sexual desire. Disapproval also falls on those who are perceived to become rude when drinking. If alcohol 'loosens the tongue', it should not do away with basic politeness. Even though Patrick may not 'give a damn' after having a few pints, he dislikes impolite people who are rude and disrespectful to others.

Within the limits of 'appropriateness', drinking is a preferred activity among the people I studied. Alcohol is taken to produce a greater openness of the self for people who are normally concerned about when and with whom they can 'be themselves'. Drinking not only effects the passage between work and leisure, as Gusfield claims, but is also constitutive of play itself. And in the domain of leisure, friendship has a fundamental role.

Friendship and drinking

Drinking at home and at the pub are two of the most common activities friends do together. Because alcohol fosters a relaxation of self-control, drinking promotes a

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greater exposure of the self, something which is seen as part of friendship. Whether encouraging the discussion of intimate matters or creating a humorous and relaxed mood, the consumption of alcohol generates sociability among friends.

A common sense idea is that alcohol 'loosens the tongue'. The perception of a close link between talking and drinking is such that, for example, Susan questions whether some people can converse without alcohol. Her partner has a group of friends that he meets at the pub and with whom he drinks and talks to. She wonders if these men were to meet outside the pub, what would they talk about. Anne also criticizes the structure of pubs where people first go to the counter to get something to drink before talking to each other properly, thus emphasizing the drink as much as the encounter between friends. She prefers what she calls the 'Continental' way of socializing in bars and cafés, where people meet and talk to each other before ordering what they want.

Both Susan and Anne raise an interesting issue: some people appear to be able to have conversations with their friends only under the influence of alcohol. This is, no doubt, a rather extreme case, but it does highlight a fundamental aspect about friendship. Friendship involves some degree of personal disclosure so that ultimately close friends are people with whom one can 'be oneself'. For some people alcohol is necessary to make oneself at ease, escaping reserve and the work frame of mind, and more capable of being forward about oneself. For others, alcohol is not a case of necessity but of something which facilitates the exposure of self between friends.

Thus, drinking socially becomes an essential element in the process of developing a friendship through its effect on how the self is revealed. Inviting someone to 'go out for a drink' is important because it often signals the beginning of a friendship, in Kevin's view. He contrasts the stage of a relationship where people exchange not much more than

greetings, to the next one in which they go out for a drink in order to get to know each other better. Anne has also described her relationship with a woman from her work in these terms. After more than eight months on her job and a strictly impersonal relationship with this woman, the formality in the relationship started to change as Anne's colleague began discussing family matters with her as well as asking her to go out for a drink.

Drinking with colleagues after work hours happens very frequently. The consumption of alcohol engenders a mood of greater spontaneity and humour different from that shared at work, even if the subject of conversation often revolves on work. Some may not consider that this form of sociability establishes friendship with people from work but only friendly relations. Nevertheless, there is a strong value accorded to drinking with work mates which is revealed in complaints such as the one made by Anne, whose colleagues never went out to drink together. Even if the elements necessary for a closer friendship (e.g. personal disclosure, time and trust) are not present, the sociability fostered by drinking together is important in itself as well as because of the changes in the impersonal character of relationships at work. The sociability created through drinking can generate equality and informality, overcoming the hierarchical and formal features of work.

In long standing close friendships, episodes of drinking together become reference points in the relationship, part of memories shared by friends. Liz misses the time when Catherine was her flatmate and they would chat for hours, drinking all the bottles of wine in the house. Similarly, I have heard Liz reminiscing with friends about past parties in which they all got drunk, laughing about what each of them did in that state. For Allison, drinking together helps to define who her closest friends are. Having known each other

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since university, her close friends are people with whom she 'could get drunk with and piss on' and who would still be supportive and talk to her the next day. Here there is the idea that friends are those who suspend judgement when little self-control is shown because of one's being drunk. Furthermore, such episodes are important markers in friendships since they are instances when the self is revealed to a greater extent, and when one finds support from friends, instead of criticism and rejection.

Drinking with friends is shown to be particularly important through examples of people who do not socialize in this way. An old flatmate of Liz was considered to be 'different' because she never went out for a drink with people from work nor joined in the meals Liz prepared for friends at home. Catherine, who often accompanied Liz in drinking ventures, changed her consumption patterns towards the end of 1991. She began 'mellowing out', in Liz's terms, as she became engaged and moved in with her fiancé. She also started working at a new, very 'yuppie' job which often required long office hours and work to be done at home. Not only did she have less time to see friends but she also stopped drinking alcohol because she wanted to 'be on her best' for work.

These examples reveal the absence of values which are considered to be significant in a friendship relation. If one is always present at, but never joins in (i.e. drinking and eating), sociability situations, one appears to be neglectful of friendship relations. The process of personal disclosure that can happen under the influence of alcohol may be somewhat inhibited if it is not perceived to be mutual.

Likewise, being predominantly concerned with work is also considered to affect negatively how much time and attention one is willing to put into friendship. Becoming involved in a serious love relationship further adds to changes in one's friendship

patterns.[3] Catherine's new phase was a 'mellow' one because, in not consuming alcoholic drinks, she was also forsaking a major instance of sociability with friends. A person that 'mellows out' is seen as one who becomes quiet and enjoys staying at home, contrasting with people who like to go out drinking and partying with friends.

Drinking with friends is, therefore, important for many reasons. As alcohol is believed to disinhibit people, it breaks down the reserve people are perceived to have -- a reserve which is further accentuated at work -- and enables one to enter into the leisure mode (Gusfield 1987). This, in turn, sets the mood for the creation and development of friendship relations, since these are regarded to be based on having fun together and being able to reveal one's self to the other. As a consequence, going out for a drink acquires a special significance in the initial stages of friendship, when revealing oneself tends to be gradual and cautious. And, because drinking has such an impact on personal disclosure, episodes of getting drunk together come to form part of the memories of a friendship. The pub as an establishment that is basically devoted to the selling and consumption of alcoholic drinks consequently becomes a central venue for sociability among friends.

The pub in English culture

> The measure of friendship is going down to the pub and having a good conversation (Victor).

For Victor, to have a good conversation only is not enough to show that friendship is being developed. It is also important that it should happen at the pub. This is understandable because of the consumption of alcohol at the pub, which affects the

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[3] See chapter 3.

process of personal disclosure between friends. But the pub is also significant for the relations of reciprocity established between friends who drink together.

The importance of the pub in English culture is so widely recognized that, at first, I took its recurrent presence in my fieldnotes very matter-of-factly. Pubs appeared to be merely settings where many interactions between friends happened. It was only much later that I realized that no other spatial setting figured in my notes half as much as the pub does. In fact, the frequency with which references were made to pubs is overwhelming. Most of the episodes recounted by the people studied which involved friends (e.g. arguments, misunderstandings, reconciliation) contained an allusion to pubs.

Curiously enough, the pub figures very little as the central subject of sociological or anthropological studies. It tends to be usually taken as a setting for sociability and drinking. Vasey (1990) has produced a general overview of the pub in terms of its history, evolution of physical design and the types of drinkers found there. Adler's (1991) historical analysis of drinking in England presents a more interesting discussion of the relationships developed at the pub.

According to Adler, before the 1830s, communal drinking at the tavern provided the symbolic means for the generation and confirmation of social relations among artisans. "Through the giving and exchange of drinks social ties of obligation and reciprocity were established" (1991: 382) to such an extent that not to drink could be compared to ostracism. Drink rituals also enabled the organization of redistribution ceremonies as well as the display of paternalistic bonds through the drinks supplied by employers to their employees. Therefore, the tavern had a central role in the life of the community, functioning as a public meeting house and as a centre for trade news and economic transactions (1991: 391).

The temperance movement in the early nineteenth century, together with the increasing specialization and differentiation of economic and social functions, began to alter this picture of the drinking place as a central public institution. With new values placed on thrift, sobriety and self-control, not only were drinking practices modified but, as Adler proposes, a changing conception of man's relationship to the world also arose:

> In this process man's own conception of his self was taking on increasingly thinglike qualities. From being the hallowed vessel of God, the body was becoming a machine whose integrity was defined by the smooth functioning of its parts rather than by the moral or jural bond linking self to other (1991: 387).

Thus, a 'new man' was created: an individual with labour power to sell and a consumer with 'needs'.

The twentieth century brought further changes to the patterns of drinking. The working classes, with whom pub drinking was basically associated, began to move from town centres to suburbs for housing. A geographical separation between work and home was therefore established. Adding to this the growing ideological importance of the family, the pub to which men went after work "was no longer the trade pub near work but the 'local'" (Adler 1991: 392). Now wives occasionally accompanied their husbands, but kept to different areas of the pub. In general, the pub became a recreational centre, competing with other and new forms of entertainment (e.g. cinemas, dance halls). From member of the local community, the drinker was transformed into a consumer with needs as a result of a process which displaced the locus of identity "from the *relations* that the object of exchange serves to articulate, to the *object itself*" (Adler 1991: 398, original emphasis).

If the pub is no longer a centre for trade meetings and economic negotiations, it is still important for the creation and maintenance of social relationships, more so than

Adler admits. Many people have an image of the local pub as a place for making new friends. Allison, for instance, likes her local pub for the mixture of ethnic groups it offers. Greeks, Irish, Polish, these are some of the people she meets and interacts with at this pub.

But Allison is an isolated example among those studied here of a person who feels somewhat part of a community through the local pub. And even then, the relationships she builds there are not considered to be of a friendship sort; they are only acquaintances. In general, though, I have heard that pubs in London do not foster the establishment of new friendships as pubs in smaller towns are thought to do. Not only is the turnover of customers much higher in most London pubs but there is also the feeling that people are not as open to interaction with strangers. Instead, for these particular men and women, pubs become more a place to go with friends than one in which to make new friends.

Despite the difficulty of meeting people in London pubs, the relevance of these drinking places for friendship goes beyond their role as a setting for sociability. There is no doubt that, as a place for the consumption of alcohol, pubs are important because of the mood of relaxation and greater exposure of self they help to create among friends, as I have shown in the previous section. Pubs are also significant because they provide an opportunity for the reciprocal exchange of drinks between friends. Paraphrasing Adler, the relations established through the object of exchange are as significant as the object itself, as I discuss next.

Reciprocity at the pub

When going to the pub with a group of English people, there is a very specific way to behave: each person should buy a round of drinks for the group. I stress the

cultural specificity since, with my Brazilian friends in London, we would always pay for our own drinks whenever we went to pubs. With this in mind, my initial reaction when I first went to a pub with English people was to regard their behaviour as a display of hospitality and generosity, since they were paying drinks for everyone. It was only later that I realized I would also be expected to buy rounds for them at some point and that any imbalances should on the long term be evened out.

At first, one could think that the system of buying rounds of drinks is linked to the physical design of the pub. The important aspect of this layout is the presence of a central counter where customers order and pay for drinks, which contrasts with the waiting service of bars and cafés (Vasey 1990). Thus, while the latter consists basically of small tables and chairs, the pub offers few places to sit, with some stools around the counter and tables and chairs sparsely distributed in the surrounding area.

The fact that pubs are designed around a central counter certainly affects how drinks are purchased. Rather than sitting down at a table, waiting to be served and paying when leaving, as would happen in bars and cafés, the order of events is reversed: first, one walks straight to the counter, orders and pays for the drinks and only then finds a place to sit down (if not standing up). Furthermore, every time one finishes one's drink and wants to get another, one has to go back to the counter, which enables people to take turns in getting rounds of drinks. Buying rounds at cafés and restaurants, where there is a waiting service, cannot happen since the bill only comes before people are ready to leave. In this case, bills can either be shared equally or according to each person's consumption (having one person paying for all the others is not common).

But in pubs there is still the possibility of each person going up to the counter to pay for his or her own drink. This is an option which is neglected in favour of the

opportunity to buy rounds for a group of people. The significance of this drinking practice is that it raises the important issue of reciprocity among people who go to pubs together. It is expected that each person will eventually buy drinks for the group, even if on different occasions.

Now, fundamental as it is for friendship, concern with reciprocity in material exchange was a topic rarely mentioned by people. As discussed in chapter 6, what prevails between friends is a notion akin to that of 'generalized reciprocity' (Sahlins 1972), which diffuses the need for the recipient to provide immediate and balanced returns to the donor. Rather, in this case, what matters is the feeling that, when the donor is in need, the recipient will try to give him or her goods or assistance in return. The concern with this form of reciprocity is at best implicit, while any overt reckoning of debts becomes imbued with the character of market transactions, a rationale which is alien to the discourse on friendship. The importance of reciprocating goods, such as buying drinks for friends at the pub, is only revealed in cases when it is threatened because of too little money or when reciprocity is actually found to be lacking.

I refer once more to Celia and her views on reciprocity. Although she often finds herself without much money, she exchanges whenever possible food and drink with her friends. She states that she is not 'stingy' at all about it, that is, whatever she has, she will share with friends. Reciprocity is not usually a concern, she says. This attitude applies to drinking at the pub as well, but here Celia admits that she can have problems when she does not have much money and does not want to drink rounds. With close friends it is not as difficult because she can tell them she is 'broke' and they will pay for her drinks, something she will do for them if the situation is reversed. There is the idea that, with close friends, there is mutual understanding so that they would be able to

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distinguish between Celia being 'stingy' (i.e. wanting to keep money to herself) and not having enough money to buy rounds of drinks. The concern is that friends who are not as close may be unable to make such a distinction, misunderstanding her lack of money for an unwillingness to reciprocate.

The friendship between Anne, Peter and Sally went through a difficult phase over the issue of reciprocity in buying rounds of drinks. They had been friends since their meeting at university in York. After graduating, all three moved to London to work in administrative and management positions in organizations concerned with social and environmental causes. The narrative below is based on Sally's account only, since Peter and Anne only referred to the problem without explaining to me what it was about (these difficulties had surfaced shortly after I met them).

Since the beginning of 1991, Peter and Anne began to feel that Sally, who was then working at a small but successful firm, was behaving differently towards them. According to Sally, they felt that she had become rather arrogant and bossy, extending her behaviour from work to the way she related to them. One of the specific complaints Peter made referred to Sally's pub behaviour: she was not buying drinks for him nor for Anne. Sally, on the other hand, said that she was not reciprocating drinks because of her lack of attention as to whom was buying rounds for whom. She was quick to emphasize that she is not 'stingy' at all, and that she would happily buy Peter and Anne 'all the drinks in the world'. On the whole, Sally agreed with Peter and Anne on her 'being wrong' and felt that it was very painful not to have noticed how wrong she had been for such a long time (it took more or less six months before Peter and Anne discussed their feelings with Sally, who by then had begun to feel that they were drawing away from her).

Both Celia and Sally display a concern about being regarded by friends as being 'stingy', or as wanting to spend money only on themselves. They see themselves as willing to share with friends whatever they have -- money, food and drink. They imply that they do not like to hold back any material goods from their friends. Celia added that she lends (and borrows from) her friends clothes and money, something which I have heard from other people as well. Not that lending money to friends is an easy matter; very often, it can become a problem when the sum borrowed is not paid back. In asking to have a loan repaid, one may jeopardize the friendship by making explicit an overconcern with one's money. At the same time, the person who borrows should have consideration for the friend who lends, and return the sum as soon as possible. In not doing it, he or she can be seen as lacking in consideration for friends, thus putting the friendship at risk. In general, any value placed upon money is deliberately underplayed in relation to the value attributed to friendship. The value shown here is that material things should not be a barrier between friends but rather something which enhances sociability.

Like Celia, Sally did not want to be seen as a stingy person. In her problem with Peter and Anne, she attributed her lack of reciprocity in buying rounds to other reasons -- not paying attention to whose turn it was, for instance -- but not because of wanting to keep money to herself. On the contrary, she says, she would happily spend it on her friends. Here again, there is a deliberate undermining of the value of money to oneself and a conscious stress on the value of friendship. In other words, in relation to friendship, money is important in so far as it can be spent on buying food and drinks for friends or in lending it to friends.

It is because of the wish to show that one wants to spend money on friends that friends do not go to a pub and buy their drinks separately. By paying rounds of drinks for people, one disregards how much each one consumes or whether in the end the costs are evened out. A person who always drinks half pints of beer always spends more on friends who drink whole pints. But this should be 'beside the point', although sometimes this attitude is not unproblematic, as Celia claims. The predominant logic is that of 'generalized reciprocity', for any overt concern for balanced exchange becomes impersonal and reveals a greater value placed on money, rather than on friendship.

Upholding this logic is especially important in a society in which one spends most of the day operating in terms of market values, hierarchical structures and a premium placed on self-control. Thus, all values and forms of conduct associated with the world of work should be left outside when one enters the pub, the domain of leisure. Gusfield emphasizes precisely this idea:

> what the rationalistic, modern impulse has demanded is that the hedonistic, the playful, the irresponsible, the non-serious not be permitted to enter the domain of the 'serious' areas of making a living and earning a livelihood (1987: 75).

I would add that the reverse is also true, that is, that in the domain of leisure attitudes and behaviour associated to work should not be allowed to intrude.

But in practice such a polarity is not so clear-cut. I have mentioned the common habit of going to the pub with colleagues from work. Gusfield adds the case of service sector jobs which may serve wine in some meetings, generally at the end of the day, which engenders a certain atmosphere of social occasion. I would refer as well to drinks after seminars or even business lunches, which are often accompanied by alcohol. Kevin and Anne have stressed that these drink occasions, after work or seminars, provide a valuable opportunity for exchanging ideas and making contacts for work. Thus, these

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cases seem to include elements of play -- chiefly through alcohol and often the setting as well (if one leaves the office for the pub), but they are nevertheless still strongly associated with work. One talks mostly about work and pursues interests related to work.

The degree to which aspects of work interfere with leisure also depends on whether job hierarchies are maintained at the pub. I have observed in some situations that superiors are frequently the first to buy rounds. I have also been told by Kevin and Martin, who occupy managerial positions in their jobs, that they were buying me drinks because I was a student. It is true that if these meetings at the pub are prolonged others in inferior positions also have a chance to reciprocate in buying rounds. But the element of hierarchy may still be present and, in my episodes with Kevin and Martin, openly affirmed.

At the same time, there is also the feeling that hierarchies are displaced in the pub. Peter finds that going for a drink with people from his job helps to put aside differences of hierarchy, even if only while at the pub. Gusfield explains this idea through the fact that alcohol is believed to set the mood for relaxation and for a greater exposure of the self. "Precisely because it possesses a meaning of contrast to organized work, it is a dissolver of hierarchy" (1987: 79). The emphasis on egalitarianism is also extended to differences of gender. Men may be the ones to buy the first round but not necessarily so. In my experience of going to pubs with English people, women paid for rounds of drinks as frequently as men did.

Thus, not only is there an emphasis on egalitarian relations, but money also ceases to be a central value. Buying rounds of drinks epitomizes the change of focus from a concern with exact calculations of a balanced type of reciprocity to an ethos which takes

exchange as connected to moral attributes, to fostering and maintaining social relations (Gusfield 1987, Gefou-Madianou 1992).

In this light, I return to the problematic relations between Sally, Peter and Anne. Sally was not only apparently neglecting a significant exchange for friendship but doing so because she was behaving as if she were still at work. She was neglectful of her friends, overlooking the basic egalitarianism of friendship. She had also been treating her friends as subordinate work mates. This was in part reflected by her lack of reciprocity in buying rounds, which normally affirms both egalitarian relations and an active lack of interest in money. In not buying her friends a drink, Sally was not paying them the attention and consideration friends ought to receive.

Giving each other a drink becomes, therefore, a form of giving each other attention, of showing interest in the person. Again, this is supposed to contrast with what is seen to happen at work, when any interest in persons as friends should be secondary to concerns with productivity and efficiency. Drinking at the pub explicitly denies attitudes related to work in favour of the value attributed to sociability and friendship.

The public sphere reconsidered

Much has been said about the opposition between the public and private domains. The former is generally characterized by impersonality, discipline, self-control and market values, while the latter is the seat of personal relations, relaxation, and the freedom to behave as one wishes. In the literature, it is often the case that home becomes equated with the private whereas everything outside it falls into the public sphere. But such a view simplifies much of the complexity inherent in the public arena.

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It is more fruitful to consider the contrast between work and leisure, both of which can belong to the public domain. Although the term 'leisure' does not appear in the discourse of the English men and women I studied, the contrast between work and not-work figures clearly in their ideas. Some of the characteristics attributed to the dichotomy between the public and the private can be transferred to that between leisure and work: fun, relaxation, sociability and spontaneity versus self-control, impersonality, discipline, value placed on money.

In practice, this opposition may be more complex. Work can often be done for pleasure or moral reasons that leave monetary goals in a secondary place (especially in the case of voluntary work). And socializing with people from work may still be marked by differences in job hierarchy. Therefore, the distinction between work and not-work (or leisure) is best thought of as the extreme points in a continuum.

The pub stands as a context which belongs to the public sphere but which can bring together, in varying degrees, elements of both leisure and work. In general, though, it is the leisure mode which prevails in the pub. Alcohol is usually consumed with the intent to leave behind attitudes and behaviour associated with work. A premium is placed on generalized reciprocity (not only of drinks but, I would suggest, of personal disclosure as well), so that market values and transactions are deliberately devalued.

The pub is, therefore, a favoured place in which to meet people. It not only sells drinks but provides an atmosphere which stresses leisure above anything else. Leaving work attitudes behind, entering the pub turns into the time for investing in friendship. Indeed, the sociability found at the pub is friendship in practice: having a 'laugh' with each other and even 'being oneself' with each other.

CONCLUSION

The notion of friendship examined in this thesis places strong emphasis on personal disclosure. Trust is needed for the creation of intimacy and for the exposure of self. Personal disclosure, trust and intimacy are particularly valued by the English people I studied because the ethos which is prevalent most of the time in people's lives is that of work and of the public sphere. Work behaviour is anything but self disclosing. Therefore, when with friends, one can play up values and attitudes which are opposed to the general work frame of mind.

There is, thus, a specific view of the public sphere -- rational, impersonal, self-controlling, transient -- to which friendship is opposed. In many ways, when sociologists write about contemporary Western society, they seem to generalize these features of the public domain to all instances of life. In so doing, I think they tend to overlook the dynamics of personal relationships in the private sphere.

This appears to be the case in the discussion about modernity and postmodernity. The debate about modernity and postmodernity is not a settled one. Some sociologists say that we are living in a period of high modernity (Giddens 1990). Modernity entails, among other things, heightened reflexivity. The individual has a multitude of different roles to conciliate and from which to build an identity. But others argue that we no longer live in modernity but in *post*modernity. The postmodern individual is no longer anxious about presenting a coherent identity, but simply *chooses* which identity he or she wants to present (Kellner 1992).

This is an on-going and much complex debate. At the moment, I want to avoid deciding whether we live in modernity or postmodernity, and I will leave the issue until the end of this conclusion. I will side with Strathern (1992), who wisely adopts a third, and undisputable, term when she speaks of the late twentieth century. However, I do

wish to discuss in light of my research about English friendship features which sociologists generally attribute to modern and postmodern societies.

While sociologists may use different terms to describe contemporary society, they more or less agree about its general characteristics. Lash (1993) describes late twentieth century society as increasingly complex and less controllable than in the past.[1] Lash and Friedman (1992) comment that we live in state of flux, of constant movement and change. Fragmentation is stated to be a further characteristic of such a (postmodern) age. Kellner claims that "one of the features of contemporary culture is precisely the fragmentation, transitoriness, and multiplicity of images, which refuse to crystallize into a stable image culture" (1992: 171). Globalization is yet another aspect, one which exposes the 'disembedding' of society. Giddens (1990) refers to the process of 'disembedding' as that situation where social relations are 'lifted out' from local contexts of interaction, becoming restructured across indefinite spans of time and space. One instance of 'disembedding' is money as a means of exchange which "can be "passed around" without regard to the specific characteristics of individuals or groups that handle [it] in any particular juncture" (Giddens 1990: 22). Thus, within such a fragmented, continuously changing world, contradiction and contingency become the predicament of the contemporary person.

Together with, and perhaps as a result of, a life of contingencies and contradictions, contemporary Western society is marked by reflexivity. Lash (1993) argues that reflexivity is a form of monitoring contingency, of "making calculable the

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[1] When discussing post/modernity, sociologists often use terms such as 'complexity' and 'fragmentation' for rhetorical purposes, without explaining the meanings they attribute to such notions. Thus, if my discussion of this sociological debate can at times seem vague, this is due to the sociological material itself.

incalculable". Another form of 'controlling' contingency is through the establishment of trust (Giddens 1990). Trust in persons and in systems is not only basic to modern institutions but also to the mitigation of ontological insecurity, of existential angst. People trust that specific institutions will provide certain services and that specific people will behave in certain ways. Because of his elaboration of the notions of trust, personal disclosure and individual choice with reference to interpersonal relationships, I will dwell upon some of Giddens' (1990, 1991) recent ideas.

Giddens takes friendship to be a mode of 'reembedding' (i.e. pinning social relations down to local conditions of time and space) because of the element of trust it entails. Trust involves confidence in the reliability of persons or systems against the risks of an unexpected outcome. Trust, then, entails assuming an acceptable margin of risks. He argues that people establish a trust relationship through their commitment to loyalty and authenticity. For Giddens, part and parcel of authenticity is the process of mutual self-disclosure. Self-disclosure, in turn, requires reflexivity and, thus, a continuous process of self-inquiry. "To be true to oneself means finding oneself" (1991: 79), Giddens states. In his liberalist framework, he understands that the self is a reflexive project, which consists of "sustaining a coherent yet continuously revised, biographical narratives" (1991: 05) within the context of multiple life-style choices. Thus, trust is bound up with reflexivity which, through the commitment people make in their personal relationships, minimizes the risks of everyday contemporary life. As Giddens summarizes it:

> Trust and risk, opportunity and danger -- these polar, paradoxical features
> of modernity permeate all aspects of day-to-day life, once more reflecting
> an extraordinary interpolation of the local and the global" (1990: 148).

However, I think Giddens misunderstands the relation between trust and personal disclosure. For him, trust relationships need self-disclosure. For the English people I studied, it is the other way around: self-disclosure requires trust. Furthermore, Giddens does not seem to question why self-disclosure has become significant in late twentieth society. I suggest that the importance attributed to personal disclosure is associated to the perception of the public sphere as that time and space where the person cannot present the 'true' self. In line with Sennett (1976), I think that it is because public behaviour can at times be perceived as false or pretentious that personal revelations, which occur in the private sphere and with personal relationships, become so highly valued.

Giddens also brings together two elements which are generally attributed to be separate features of modernity and postmodernity: reflexivity and choice. The first is a modern characteristic which pertains to an identity constructed in relation to a multiplicity of roles (Lash and Friedman 1992). Reflexivity becomes pervasive because "in modernity, the problem of identity consisted in how we constitute, perceive, interpret, and present our self to ourselves and to others" (Kellner 1992: 143). In postmodernity, in turn, individuals are more aware of identity choice, and they consciously experiment with their identities. Some theorists even argue that, because of the extreme fragmentation and flux of postmodern existence, the notion of identity itself becomes an illusion.

The ideas of increasing choice and of reflexivity in late twentieth century society are taken to an extreme by Strathern (1992). However, her analysis is grounded on English middle class ideas of the person, of society and of nature, thus departing from the general approaches presented by sociologists. Middle class people, she claims, like to analyse their own conventions and to make implicit practices explicit. In so doing, they

produce the sense that there seems to be less to be taken for granted; there is "less nature in the world" (Strathern 1992: 44).

If there is less 'nature', the notion of 'society' seems to disappear as well. The hyper-individualism of the late twentieth century takes law and order to be an issue of personal motivation (1992: 152). The individual person becomes his or her own source of morality, so that moral decisions evince a notion of the individual as choice-maker, "knowing what to do". She suggests that "society vanishes from the exercise of its socialising faculty" (1992: 158) and the possibility of government intervention can thus be reduced. Likewise, there no longer exists a class dialogue, with representations of different viewpoints based on class. Social division now appears to be an issue of having financial flexibility or not, which in turn is reflected in the choices that resources can afford (1992: 141). We now have the 'plasti-class', Strathern says, flexible as plastic.

These ideas were particularly strong in the Thatcher period. But Strathern implies that such notions and the liberalism upon which they are based are more widely present in late twentieth century English society. In this sense, she does not differ from sociologists who stress that identity has become a question of choosing life-styles and that such choice is no longer connected to class, neighbourhood or any other social division. For them, choice in consumer culture is taken to reflect individuality only.

The preeminence of choice may be part of a widespread Western discourse on the individual but I think that Strathern, Giddens and other sociologists who discuss post/modernity take such ideas for facts. Even if people believe in freedom of choice, they also recognize that there are limits to such freedom. This is the source of many conflictive views for the English people I worked with. For instance, class background is perceived to shape much of people's ways of thinking and behaving, so that the extent

to which they can in fact change values and behaviour appears to be limited, a restriction they themselves admit. Many consumer choices such as diet, household decoration objects and cleaning products, are thought to reflect class background. Thus, there is a significant *social* reference point in the choices people make. This view is much in line with that of Featherstone (1991) and Bourdieu (1984), for whom choice evinces taste, which is a marker of class.

The whole issue of choice is especially interesting when analysed in the context of friendship. Nearly every social scientist who has written about friendship in contemporary Western societies remarks that friendship is a relationship based on choice. One enters in the relationship *voluntarily*. Indeed, this is the case among the people I studied, for no one felt obliged to become friends with another person. But choice was rarely emphasized as an element of friendship. And, amongst the diversity of people living in London, friends were chosen from a very limited number of people: those of similar age, ethnic and class background.

At this stage, I want to discuss people's ideas about living in London before making my final comments about friendship. Cosmopolitan settings seem to be particularly exemplary of the postmodern ethos (Featherstone 1991) as centres for consumption and play, saturated with constantly changing signs and images. It is, thus, useful to discuss people's experience of living in London toward the end of reconsidering fragmentation, flux, choice and the contemporary person.

'Postmodern' friendships?

When I discussed my research with a group of English anthropologists, they were keen to stress that much of the specificity of the people I interviewed had to do with the

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fact that they lived in London. There is a London ethos, one of them said, marked by consumerism, so that many aspects of life in the metropolis are seen as acts of consumption. Thus, for example, the fact that there is a high job mobility among these young people could almost be said to result from a consumer attitude of selecting a job that satisfies one's needs and desires and changing it when it ceases to do so. In other words, whilst consumerism is widespread in Western societies, it would be especially concentrated or more emphasized, they suggested, in a large metropolis like London.

Indeed, the idea that London is a consumerist environment is echoed in the reasons people give to live in the capital. Catherine summarizes why most people of her age and class background want to be in London: because of all the things that happen here. Most people have come to London either to pursue university education or to work after having finished their degrees. Even if they are not actively engaged in London events, the feeling that there are many options of activities, both in terms of work and leisure, is important in itself. Or, as Kevin has said, it is the idea that "there is a lot going on" which is attractive about London.

Thus, the choice of living in London for most of these young people in the network combines career considerations with the idea that "London is the place to be". Again, even if most of them arrive home tired from work and tend not to go out, it is the idea that there are many options open to them in London which matters.

But people are also quick to state what they dislike about the city. Some people remark on the high levels of air pollution. Others remark on the lack of safety in the city. I was once asked by Anne how I felt about the IRA bombing campaigns. Although she did not change her movements in the city, she knew of others who did avoid the West End, one of the IRA's frequent targets, during Christmas time (generally a period of

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intensive bombing campaigns). I have also heard from Sally and Liz stories of sexual assault, but they did not feel these were constant or dangerous enough to alter their habits.

Perhaps one of the greatest problems in London is its size and the long distances people have to travel in order to meet each other. Most of these people have at some point lived in smaller towns, where distances are much smaller (Kevin tells how, before coming to London, he used to think of 5 miles as a long distance, whereas he now sees it as short). Because everything is "so spread out", as Catherine says, there is often the issue of where to meet friends who live on the other side of the city. Janice, for example, finds it easier to meet friends in the central area of London (e.g. the West End) than to see them where they live. As a consequence of most friends living distant from one another (taking at least thirty minutes on public transportation to reach each other's home), meetings are generally planned in advance rather than being spontaneous.

Another relevant aspect of urban life which has been stressed by some is the difficulty of making friends in London. I have encountered many English men and women who have lived in London that complain about this problem and the resulting feeling of isolation. Peter and Anne, who came to London three years ago after having finished their university courses, find that it is hard to meet people who may become friends in London. At work, one gets to know many people but, for them, these relationships do not develop necessarily into friendship. The means whereby they have met friends in London has been through other friends. They wonder if it would not have been easier had they studied in London. In York, where they went to university, there were certain pubs within the student community where they could always meet other people. In London, there are a couple of pubs they go to more frequently but they have

never met anybody there of significance for them. Victor, who has spent most of his life in London, considers the city to be a very 'fragmented' environment, one that produces feelings of isolation. He thinks that distances are great and there is little communal life in that one does not establish relationships with people one has met in pubs, for instance. In short, they all wish there was more community life in London.

Such feelings about urban existence have been discussed by sociologists since the time of Georg Simmel. In his essay 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1971a [1903]), Simmel examines mental attitudes that result from life in a milieu which is characterized by the continuous change of stimuli and advanced economic division of labour. In the metropolis, Simmel argues that, by way of protection "against the profound disruption with which the fluctuations and discontinuities of the external milieu threaten [the individual]" (1971a: 326), there develops the predominance of intellectual over emotional reactions and an attitude of reserve and indifference which often give rise to a blasé outlook. To this Simmel contrasts life in the small town, where emotional relationships prevail and one knows nearly every person one meets, which also means that there is close supervision by the community over the conduct of the individual.

To a city dweller, such supervision can feel constraining and the metropolis is thus perceived in a positive light, as providing a greater degree of personal freedom. As Simmel observes,

> the mutual reserve and indifference, and the intellectual conditions of life in large social units are never more sharply appreciated in their significance for the independence of the individual than in the dense crowds of the metropolis because the bodily closeness and lack of space make intellectual distance really perceivable for the first time (1971a: 334).

At the same time, the individual can experience the reverse of such freedom in that "under certain circumstances, one never feels as lonely and as deserted as in this metropolitan crush of persons" (1971a:334).[2]

On the one hand, with regard to the people I studied, London is marked in a positive way by providing a diversity of options for consumption. And indeed, this is a major reason for attracting most of them to London. But, on the other hand, it is also an environment perceived to foster attitudes of greater impersonality, less spontaneity and more reserve than in smaller places. Thus, the attitudes prevalent in London seem to be those of the public sphere. The establishing of personal relationships, especially friendship, is regarded as being more difficult in London than in smaller towns. Therefore, the creation of personal disclosure and intimacy -- in other words, of the private -- becomes particularly emphasized and valued.

If fragmentation, impersonality and reserve are seen as urban traits which some people dislike, no one from the network studied pronounced any desire to leave London while I was doing fieldwork. People have managed to create for themselves significant friendship linkages. Although it may be hard to make new friends in this city, even those who came to London only three years ago already had friends that they knew from before -- either from their period in university or from their home towns. These were often close friends, and they have provided fundamental support in one's process of settling down in London and ever since. The interesting factor about these friends, as I have discussed before in chapter 1, is their similarity in background: they often come from the same

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² Even today, the features analysed by Simmel (e.g. heterogeneity, anonymity) are commonly discussed by sociologists and anthropologists who are working with urban environments (cf. Basham 1978, Dickens 1990, Hannerz 1980, Velho 1981).

town and their parents' socio-economic situation is similar, which means a similar upbringing as well.

Thus, for people newly arrived in London, the initial nucleus of contacts in town is composed of people of the same background. Many of the new friends people have made in London were introduced by these older close friends, instead of having been established at the workplace or through other activities. Therefore, the network expands but maintains a relative homogeneity of social background. Thus, although these people are moving into a metropolitan environment, with all its diversity of inhabitants, their ties of friendship are still distinguished by the similarity of background, more than anything else. In such a manner, they create their own communities in which familiarity and intimacy prevail.

In a sense, the sharing of backgrounds appears almost as a measure of success in securing continuity and familiarity within a chaotic world of impersonal and fleeting relationships, of transience and change, of identities which are said by sociologists to be constructed through consumption patterns. Although upbringing influences to a great degree patterns of consumption, it is not this aspect of class background which is emphasized. Rather, it is the similar ways of thinking and behaving, shared by people with a common class background, which are stressed. Being thus similar means that people will, for instance, observe similar notions of politeness and of personal disclosure. The development of friendships can therefore be synchronized, which minimizes the possibilities of one friend imposing his or her feelings on the other.

Having similar notions of how the self should be disclosed entails having a similar idea of what is personal and what is not. If the workplace is seen as an impersonal and formal environment, this affects how one will relate to work. For the middle class people

I studied, work stands in opposition to informality and to the possibility of 'being oneself', qualities which are considered as necessary in the relationship between friends. The value placed on humour and sociability also conflict with the serious and disciplined mode which should prevail at work. Establishing friendship at work therefore becomes difficult for the development of friendship. Friendship and work embody contrasting values.

In the process of creating such community of friends with similar ways of being, any value associated with the market place is deliberately underplayed in comparison to friendship. The money spent buying food and drinks for one another seems to disappear as an element present in these exchanges. At home, the untidiness of rooms also appears to draw attention away from material display. What matters is the sociability and personal disclosure that happens between friends, creating informality and intimacy.

In this sense, friendship seems to have become a form of Giddens' (1990) 'reembedding mode'. In a time when divorce rates are high and families and marriages frequently break down, friendship has become a standard for both the relationship between family members and for that between partners. Friends share with partners a relationship built on trust and personal disclosure. Friends share with some family members a relationship based on sociability, disclosure and support. Through its emphasis on trust, on being oneself and being supportive, friendship seems to stand against the market ethos, against money-oriented, transient and impersonal associations, which is often the image that is being conveyed of London. As an antithesis to the values prevalent in the public sphere, friendship has become the model for most non-public relationships.

In a metropolis, which is often characterized by the diversity of choice options it offers, what is being stressed through long-standing close friendships is familiarity,

intimacy and permanence. The postmodern emphasis on choice and change becomes problematic, for there are limits to the free exercise of choice. The English people I studied are better described as modernists. The modern person can choose whether to present a controlled and polite self or not, but such choice has to reckon with socially defined values. Thus, at work, one *should* present a controlled self, while with friends, one *should* be able to reveal the 'true' self. If the recognition of the social limits of choice may conflict with the value placed on the individual, it does however stress the value given to that which is collective. Friendship becomes a means for the creation of 'mini' communities within a cosmopolitan setting populated by individuals.

APPENDIX

FIELDWORK AND METHODS

My interest in studying the discourse on friendship among English people living in London stems from previous research that I carried out in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This earlier work focused on sociability practices among a group of middle class teenagers. Although sociability necessarily involves how friends relate to each other, I was more interested in analysing the dynamics of individual and group identity in an urban environment, rather than examining teenagers' notions of friendship. Thus, when the present study was first conceived, it was my aim to depart from my previous approach based on network dynamics and identity in order to centre on the analysis of discourse.

In order to focus on the discourse on friendship, I structured fieldwork such that there were three methods of data collection. One way of collecting verbal data consisted of interviewing people so as to elicit formal and normative statements and, thereby, reveal dominant folk models on friendship. These interviews were loosely structured around a set of broad topics, allowing sufficient flexibility for specific questions that could arise in the course of each particular interview. Many of these interviews were tape-recorded and they generally lasted around ninety minutes. They often took place in people's homes and also in pubs and cafés. An important feature of these interviews was that they were carried out in the first months of fieldwork.

After this initial period, meetings became informal conversations. Formal interviews were maintained with only two people, with whom rapport did not develop. With the remaining fifteen people, there were some people whom I met once a week at least and others whom I would see once every six weeks. These conversations always elicited spontaneous comments in that I did not introduce pre-selected issues. Unlike the

formal interviewing, I would also talk as much as they did. These conversations lasted much longer than the interviews -- between two to four hours -- and took place in various contexts: one-to-one meetings at home or at pubs and restaurants, dinner parties for five people or so, etc. This was my second method of collecting data. The verbal data gathered in this way provided not just background information (e.g. political opinions, leisure interests), but also spontaneous comments which either supported or contradicted the interview material.

Together with the verbal data, I also gathered non-verbal material through observation. I was able to observe the contexts in which I met the people studied (e.g. their homes, their friends' homes, the pubs and restaurants they chose to go to) as well as how they related to some of their friends. Although my focus was upon the discursive material, this non-verbal information provided an important form of checking some of the verbal data, either confirming or contradicting the views stated in interviews and conversations.

In discussing how data were collected, it is necessary to consider the bearing my presence had on the research material I gathered. As a researcher, the questions I raised, particularly in the interviews, prompted normative statements of the sort 'friends are people with whom I can be myself', which generally were not made in informal conversations. But it is important to remark that the elaborateness of these statements reveal that many of the views presented had been previously formulated. The fact that many people were interested in 'being interviewed' shows that friendship had been the subject of many of their reflections before I had met them. There were also some people who told me, after our first meetings, that my questions stimulated further reflection on their relationship with friends. Thus, although formal interviews raised particular types

of data, they prompted a reflexive exercise which already existed amongst most of the people studied.

Aside from being an anthropologist, I was also a woman of similar age to the people I was studying (I was 26 years old at the time of fieldwork). The fact that I was a woman has certainly influenced the different ways in which women and men spoke to me about their personal relationships. As I discuss in chapter 2, women developed the subjects of friendship, love relationships and gender to a greater extent than men. This was so both because women see themselves as talking about these subjects more than men do, and also because they were talking to a woman. Some men felt that they were discussing with me feelings they rarely spoke about, and I think that this was due to both my being a woman -- generally perceived as more interested in emotional subjects -- and a researcher -- seen as interested in listening to others.

The fact that I was of the same age as most people studied placed me in a relatively similar phase of life as they were in. I did not have any children and I was also in the beginning of my work career. The fact that I was not older may have hindered my chances of meeting people of different generations and, thus, of discussing how distinct phases of life affect people's perceptions of friendship. At the same time, the lack of difference in age avoided problems that may have arisen if I was older than the people studied (e.g. not feeling at ease to discuss love affairs).

Perhaps the feature that may have affected the data more significantly was the fact that I was Brazilian. As a Brazilian, I looked at things in a different way. For example, my understanding of English people's sense of humour may have been different, since I did not share their English background. And yet I was surprised with the importance attributed to humour in friendship, for among the Brazilians I know this is not a

significant value. Because I was Brazilian, people may also have behaved differently with me. For instance, many people greeted me with kisses on our second meetings, instead of later, which may have been due to their perception of my (Brazilian) openness to bodily contact.

Having discussed how data were collected and affected by my personal characteristics, I would like to make one final comment on my analysis of the discourse on friendship. My approach has been to derive from the verbal data a series of notions and associations informing the discourse studied. The idea that personal disclosure is effected differently in the public/private continuum was one of such associations. But this is a relationship particularly felt by people in full time jobs, working in offices, for whom the workplace becomes characterized by features of the public sphere in opposition to the home as the realm of privacy. For those who are students or artists, the experience of the public/private continuum will probably differ, for work is mostly structured according to individual will -- in that it does not follow the rules of superior others -- and it is often carried out at home. It is also possible that personal disclosure at the workplace may change with age. The need to assert autonomy of action in relation to work may be specific to a phase of life in which people have just recently broken away from their families and affirmed their adulthood.

Thus, the public and the private may best be thought of as relative terms. Although 'public' tends to be associated with formality and impersonality whereas 'private' is linked to informality and emotiveness, they are associated with different contexts by different people according to their work situation and age.

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