Personal and Public Lives and Relationships in a Changing Social World
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By

Dr Sharon Wray and Dr Rosemary Rae
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INTRODUCTION

DR SHARON WRAY AND DR ROSEMARY RAE

In September 2011 we organized an international interdisciplinary conference at the University of Huddersfield entitled “Personal and Public Lives: Exploring Relationships, Roles and Responsibilities”. Our aim was to bring together researchers and practitioners to examine the interface between personal and public spheres. We wanted to develop insight into the multiple and diverse roles, relationships and responsibilities that shape people’s everyday lives. This edited collection is based on some of the national and international research findings presented at this conference. A range of theoretical perspectives are drawn upon to explore how personal, private and public spaces interrelate to produce different effects and outcomes for people. Each contribution to this collection in its own way seeks to highlight the impact of personal and public relationships on people’s lives. Thus, the overall aim of the book is to examine the enmeshed inter-connections between the private/personal and the public in order to contribute to the development of a conceptual framework with which to capture the importance of personal and public aspects of life. We begin from the premise that, as Carol Smart (2007) argues, the field of personal life is a relatively new area of sociological study that seeks to understand the complexities of contemporary personal and social relationships. We include in this an exploration of the impact of social, economic, legal, and political change on personal experiences and relationships and a desire to capture the significance of “memory, biography and certain aspects of emotional life” to help us to understand personal lives and relationships (Smart 2007,183).

The topic of personal and public lives has its foundations in earlier feminist work on the gendered separation of private and public spheres. Feminists such as Mary Wollstonecraft (1792) and Simone de Beauvoir (1949) wrote passionately about how locating women within the private sphere of the home negatively shaped their rights to full citizenship. More recently, notions of the private and public have been applied to a wide range of topics such as, the gendered division of labour (Scott and Nolan 2007), sexuality (Richardson 1998), transnational migration (Ahmed et al.
2003), and health (Ettore 2010). This suggests the private/public divide continues to influence the everyday lives of women and men nationally and internationally.

One of the main themes of this collection is migration and displacement due to the complex far-reaching effects they have on personal and public life (Ahmed et al. 2003). Despite the fact that migration and displacement of people from their country of origin is a growing phenomenon, immigration processes have become increasingly complex. Those who migrate range from those who choose to follow family or employment opportunities, to those who are fleeing conflict and seeking asylum. As Rapport and Dawson (1998, 23) note, “exile, emigration banishment, labour migrancy, tourism, urbanization and counter-urbanization are the central motifs of modern culture” and they are often enmeshed in conflict. As such, the reasons people move may be a consequence of conflict, war, persecution, and genocide. A key factor that influences the outcome of migration or displacement is gender. As such in this collection we argue that it is crucial to examine how gender relationships influence the position of women who are uprooted from their homeland (Ahmed et al. 2003). For those who are able to choose whether to stay put or leave the effects of migration on the maintenance of personal relationships with friends and family cannot be underestimated. Yet the spatial practices of transnational friendships remain under researched. As some of the contributors to this collection show the reasons for geographical movement have a lasting impact on the personal lives of those who move (see Part I in this volume).

Gender roles, relationships and responsibilities form another key theme of this book. Feminist writers have written extensively about public and private spheres. Historically, the women’s movement has insisted that the private is political and has deconstructed and revealed the ubiquitous alignment of masculinity with the political and public, and femininity with the private and personal. In the West, the development of these spheres has been traced back to the separation of work from the home that occurred during the period of industrialisation (Rowbotham 1973). Distinct gender based roles and responsibilities emerged during this time and lead to the formation of a gender division of labour that is still evident today (Scott and Nolan 2007). Feminist analyses of gender divisions have sought to examine power relations between women and men using the concept of patriarchy. In her book “Theorizing Patriarchy” (1990), Sylvia Walby distinguishes between public and private forms of patriarchy. She argues public forms of patriarchy are to be found in areas such as the labour market and education whereas private patriarchy involves the
“expropriation of women’s labour” and takes place mainly in the household (Walby 1990, 24). More recently, this approach to understanding gender divisions and relationships within society has been criticised for its failure to account for the diverse nature of women’s experiences and the different roles and responsibilities that shape their everyday lives (hooks 1991; Mohanty 1991; Young 1997). For example, bell hooks argues universal categories within feminism, such as patriarchy, have been used to reify the experiences of white middle-class women. She terms this “the appropriation of feminism by white middle-class women” (hooks 1982, 140). Other social movements such as queer politics have questioned the reliance on identity as a unit of analysis and a basis for political activity and change (Butler 1990). The main argument here is that identity can no longer be understood as stable but instead is characterised by fragmentation and instability. This is evident in the work of Judith Butler (1990, 1993) who deconstructs gender and sex and suggests they are a fantasy, a performance created through bodily signification. She also argues that identity and sex are the disciplinary outcomes of culturally constructed taboos and sanctions and that this has the effect of re-creating and maintaining heterosexuality as norm (Butler 1990). One criticism of Butler’s work is the failure to theorise experience and the way that it exceeds language (Burkitt 1998). Some of the chapters in this collection draw upon feminist theoretical frameworks to explore and theorise the complex power relationships encountered by women and men in private and public spaces (see Part II in this volume).

Our personal lives are embedded in diverse social contexts and sexuality is one feature of this shifting social landscape. The social sciences have made a highly influential contribution to the study of sexualities, which is now a thriving area of study (e.g. Plummer 1975, 1995, Foucault 1978, Weeks 1989, 2007, Butler 1990, Jackson 1999, Heaphy and Donovan 2001, Weeks, Heaphy and Donovan 2001, Jackson and Scott 2010, Flanagan 2011). It is also a topic that highlights the connections between people’s personal life and public structures, such as the law and education. For those who identify as lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender (LBGT) securing legal rights and social recognition is an on-going priority. The recent campaigns to seek legal recognition for same-sex partnerships are one example of this (see Thomas, Chapter 8). A topic that has received little attention is that of childhood sexuality, despite child sex abuse becoming an important concern for those working in counselling and psychology (Lamb et al. 2008). One argument is that further research is required that examines children’s perceptions of
sexuality as opposed to the application of adult perspectives to children’s behaviour (Robinson 2005; see also Flanagan, Chapter 9).

The social and political appropriation of bodies is also evident in the area of health (Grosz 1994, Battersby 1998, Wray 2007, Ettore 2010) where our bodies are increasingly managed and controlled through medical and biomedical interventions (Ettore 2010). Reproductive technologies such as egg donation are one example of this process (see Golding, Chapter 10 and Fletcher, Chapter 11). Women have been donating eggs since the early 1990s (Haimes, Taylor, and Turkmendag 2012). One argument is that this has provided women with more opportunity to become mothers whether they have a partner or not (Bock 2000). However, others have raised concerns about the potential exploitation of women who donate eggs (Haimes and Taylor 2011; Haimes et al. 2012). In this collection we explore the experience of women who have consented to share their eggs and single women who have used reproductive technologies to fulfil their dreams to become mothers. The methodological issues relating to undertaking research on pregnancy, birth and early motherhood are examined with particular reference to the blurring of personal and public identities and relationships within the research setting (see Letherby and Stenhouse, Chapter 12). The tensions between public expectations of the National Health Service (NHS) and how NHS managers manage their personal values and identities alongside their work roles and responsibilities, are another concern of this collection (see Ilett, Chapter 13).

The structure of the book

The book is divided into four parts that cut across different areas of personal and public life. The first part, “Migration and Displacement” considers the effects of forced and chosen migration on personal relationships and emotional and physical well-being. Overall, this part brings together a body of research that explores personal and public relationships and issues arising from migration, displacement and asylum seeking. Each of the chapters provides new empirical and theoretical insights into the personal lives of those who migrate.

In Chapter 1, Harriet Westcott explores the friendship experiences of skilled migrants to Australia as they return “home” to visit old friends. A key aim is to extend Goffman’s (1971) concepts of “little pieties”. It starts off with an overview of contemporary literature and theories relating to friendship and migration before going on to consider how migrants maintain their friendships with those they have left behind. It then looks at
how the research participants perform three key social rituals: little pieties; periods of high access; and the attenuation rule of pleasure in order to explore experiences of returning home to visit old friends. It ends with a brief discussion of the personal and structural factors influencing the preservation of friendship over vast physical distances.

In Chapter 2, Kate Smith looks at injustices in the detention system for women seeking asylum in the UK.

Drawing on empirical research, it aims to explore how asylum policy and practice may fail to protect women. The first part of the chapter offers an overview of current literature on public detention policy and practices in the UK. It moves on to explore the methodological background to the study, emphasising feminist research approaches and practices. This section also provides an outline of the research participants backgrounds, such as age, country of origin and length of stay in the UK. This leads on to a discussion of the detrimental impact of detention on the women’s psychological and physical health. The chapter finishes by arguing for an end to the detention of women asylum-seekers in the UK.

In Chapter 3, Eric Ochen examines the abduction of young women in Northern Uganda. A central aim is to demonstrate how gendered socio-cultural expectations shape the re-settlement and re-integration of the young women back into Acholi society. The chapter starts with an outline of the methodological background to the study. It then goes on to explore the literature on women in contemporary armed conflict. In the next section, the focus is on the stories of young women returning to their communities after being held by rebels. Their experiences of social rejection and attempts at reintegration are discussed in the final sections of the chapter.

The second part of the book “Gender Roles and Responsibilities” explores the impact of gender roles, relationships and responsibilities on the public and private lives of women and men in the USA, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and the Czech Republic. In 1988 Miriam Johnson wrote a book, which explored the process of how gender differences became translated into social inequalities. She stated: “My task is to describe some connections that run so deep they go unnoticed in our everyday lives” (Johnson 1988, ix). Later, Giele and Holse (2004) employed differentiation theory to develop a template for analysing these changes and identified ‘adaptive upgrading’ as one of four processes with which to recognise the best use of time, talent, space, information and material resources as an indicator of social change in relation to gender.

In Chapter 4 Roger Patulny and Iona Ramia consider the importance of subjective well-being when carrying out time-based activities with women.
and men. They inform us that little is known about how people feel about the activities they engage in. We assume, for example that labour, whether paid or unpaid, is not enjoyable for most people. Using data from the US 2006 Princeton Affect and Time Survey (PATS) and in particular “affect diaries” they examine the enjoyment and other emotional qualities associated with time-based activities from a gender perspective. Their study describes a complex but still gender-differentiated situation in the workplace and at home which reflects a continued gender imbalance, despite changes to the gender division of labour, in the public and private domain.

Chapter 5, by Thilakshi Kodagoda draws on a qualitative study from Sri Lanka which is concerned with how the public lives of women in managerial positions impacts on their private lives and how they manage the resulting stresses in the personal domain. Sri Lanka is particularly relevant in this regard because, as we are told, it is ranked highly in the 2011 World Economic Forum on gender equality despite having few family-friendly work policies. Despite this, there is little empirical research on this issue and as the author points out, only qualitative studies can uncover the detail of how this work/family balance is managed from a gendered perspective. This is an area where much is assumed. When women enter the work force, it is assumed that both work and family suffer and idealised conceptualisations of “good mothering” sit uneasily with working outside the home. This is exacerbated when shift work or long hours are required and in particular with management positions, which traditionally have less flexible working hours. Kodagoda’s study shows that both men and women in Sri Lanka suffer stress resulting from working whilst trying to raise a family. However, women suffer unique stresses such as discrimination, stereotyping, social isolation and more frequent career breaks.

Chapter 6 begins with a description of how being HIV positive affects the position of married women within the domestic sphere in Pakistan and in particular how their status in the household is dramatically and drastically affected once they are diagnosed. Using a Foucauldian analytical approach, Zujaja explains how the infected woman is “policed” and how her presence becomes unwelcome in her own home. This study enables us to understand the suffering caused by this physical and social isolation but we also gain valuable insight into the problems of researching the diverse nature of women’s personal experiences.

Chapter 7 focuses on the issue of gender well-being in relation to the economic, social and political change brought about by the “velvet” revolution in the Czech Republic. Kuška et al. draw on data from a
longitudinal study they carried out in 2000, asking students what they felt they had gained and what they felt they had lost following the overthrow of Soviet political and economic domination. This study found that despite opportunities for increased democracy gender inequalities – such as differences between women and men in participation in domestic work within the private sphere – were still evident after the velvet revolution. This they argue can be partly related to the low status of domestic work compared to that of financial reward and material gain. They describe a society that is fearful of authority and public corruption and therefore unlikely to connect with the more equalising aspects implicit in western ideas regarding democracy.

The third part of the book examines how discourse on sexuality influences two significant contemporary issues: civil partnership and same-sex marriage, and the meaning of sexuality in children’s lives. The chapters in this section contribute to and extend this body of theoretical and empirical work.

In Chapter 8, Mike Thomas explores same-sex couples’ experiences of civil partnership and marriage and the contradictions embedded within these. He draws on qualitative data to consider the impact of marriage or civil partnership on Canadian, American, and British lesbian and gay couples. The first part of the chapter provides a background to the debate between those who argue public recognition is important because it extends legal and civil rights to same-sex couples and those who contend marriage is a heterosexual patriarchal institution that threatens the diversity that characterises non-heterosexual lifestyles and relationships. It then goes on to consider the research participants’ experiences of same-sex marriage and civil partnership. The chapter ends by arguing marriage and civil partnership cannot be relied upon to deliver social acceptance and remove stigma and discrimination.

In Chapter 9, Paul Flanagan questions and deconstructs the meaning of sexuality in the lives of children in New Zealand. A key argument is that the response of adults to children’s sexuality can have a negative impact on children’s identities and their relationships with others. The first section provides a reflexive account of the author’s biographical background and how this has influenced his interest in the topic area. The next section explores how current theories on sexuality are applied to children and the problems arising from this. A key argument here is that children’s own discourses on sexuality are often missing from current research and that this has positioned children as passive and/or deviant. Stories from counselling practice and media articles are deconstructed in the next section. Here the aim is to highlight the problems arising from adult
understandings and interpretations of children’s behaviour and discourses. The chapter ends by arguing for a child-centred approach to understanding the discourses of sexuality in children’s lives.

The fourth and final part of this book focuses on three inter-connected issues relating to personal and public experiences of the health-care system in the UK: donor conception, pregnancy and childbirth, and the role of Manager in the National Health Service (NHS) in Scotland.

In Chapter 10, Berenice Golding presents findings from a study that explored the controversial topic of egg sharing. She describes how the choice of a “voice-centred” relational method for data collection and the subsequent feminist perspective in regard to data analysis enabled her to describe and analyse the relational complexity of her participants’ lives. These emotional and social aspects of the transaction were crucial to understanding the potentially “new” families that might result from donor egg-sharing.

In Chapter 11, the theme of donor conception is continued when Dr Cheryl Fletcher describes the new families being created by single heterosexual women who choose to use donor conception. “Single” in this case did not necessarily mean women who were not in a relationship but who, if they were in one, felt that it was not stable enough for parenthood. Therefore her definition of single in the study was where the woman had no plan to co-parent. The data in this study was collected as narratives since they could show how people connect their experiences with the outside world. The twenty-four women in this study chose to conceive in this way at a time when it was perceived as a deviant act and discussed how they could construct their particular family type and in particular a positive narrative for the children they conceived. The study shows how strongly the health system influenced their experiences.

In Chapter 12, Gayle Letherby and Elizabeth Stenhouse move on from the issue of conception to the actual experience of pregnancy and childbirth. Their main focus is on the experiences of pregnant women who suffer from diabetes in the UK. This chapter describes in some detail the reflexive and analytical aspects of studying a subject close to the lives of those carrying out the research—in this case the researchers had worked within the field of midwifery and had experiences both of pregnancy, motherhood and childlessness. This story is about the experiences of these women as they progress in their pregnancy and not about the researchers but is a richer account because of their relationship to the issues that are raised.

In Chapter 13, Rosie Ilett draws on a recent study that set out to explore how NHS managers in Scotland manage their personal values and
identities alongside their work roles and responsibilities. She took a mixed methods approach that included an on-line anonymous survey, and semi-structured qualitative interviews. Her theoretical approach draws on social identity theory to illustrate how individuals create their identities through comparing themselves with others. This has obvious implications for issues around inclusivity and the delivery of equality-sensitive health care.

Together the chapters in this collection bring to the fore national and international research examining the impact of personal and public space on people’s relationships, roles and responsibilities. In bringing this work together we aim to emphasise the importance of understanding the inter-connections between these spheres on people’s personal everyday lives. Importantly, although the collection is organised around the central theme of personal and public lives and relationships, the strength of the collection lies in the original and distinctive contribution each chapter makes to this topic area.
PART I

MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT
CHAPTER ONE

MIGRANTS’ VISITS TO OLD FRIENDS:
AN ANALYSIS OF FRIENDSHIP MAINTENANCE
WORK USING SOCIAL RITUAL

HARRIET WESTCOTT

Introduction

This chapter explores an aspect of the friendship experiences of skilled migrants to Australia. It is a break in friendships, facilitated or necessitated by migration, that allows migrants the opportunity to compare “before” and “after” friends, meaning, the “old” friends they knew before they migrated and the “new” friends made after migration to Australia. The chapter focuses in particular on skilled migrants returning – usually to wherever home is – to visit “old” friends after a period of time spent living in Australia. It is the meaning that migrants attribute to their old friendships prior to and during visits home and their enactment of these friendships at this time, which is of interest to this research. Given that mobility and migration are common features of our contemporary society the findings in this chapter illuminate an understanding of the enactment of friendship following a period of absence, a situation that is faced by increasing numbers of people (Hugo 2006). Importantly, links will be drawn between the experience of migration at the individual level, and the ways that this corresponds to the enactment of old friendships through the use of maintenance rituals.

Using findings from twenty interviews with skilled migrants to Australia, the chapter draws on Erving Goffman’s work (1971) to examine the rituals of supportive interchange that occur between people to cement a social relationship. It explores the rituals enacted by migrants prior to and during meeting up with old friends after a period of separation from them. Specifically the chapter will extend Goffman’s concepts of: “little pieties”, the giving of small gifts to support friendship; “periods of high access”,
being available to socialise with friends in response to projected geographic inaccessibility; and the “attenuation rule of the performance of pleasure”, a display of initial delight following the reunion with an acquaintance that quickly diminishes. The ways that migrants and their old friends contribute to these rituals, and the ways that structural factors such as time, money, geographic distance and family commitments challenge their enactment at the micro-level will be explored. The chapter begins with some background to the literature about friendship and migration and situates my theoretical approach to this research. Next, the methodology section outlines the recruitment of research participants and how data was gathered. This is followed by discussion of the findings focusing on the rituals enacted by migrants during their visits home to old friends.

Ritual, friendship and migration

In this section an overview of the theoretical framework for this research, and a brief introduction to the literature on friendship and migration is outlined. Goffman has a micro-theory approach to understanding the self and social interaction that provides a lens through which to explore the experiences of skilled migrants and their friends outside Australia (Roberts 2006, 62). Goffman’s (1966, 1969, 1971) work on the interaction order is concerned with what happens when two or more individuals are co-present and considers aspects such as ritual, drama or performance and game. Whilst Goffman (1971) makes limited reference to friends, and none to skilled migrants, his analysis of the focused aspect of interaction, when two or more people are actively involved in a conversation that holds their attention, does provide a transferable framework through which face-to-face friendship enactment and maintenance in everyday life can be understood (Goffman 1966). This model has been used by Butera (2008) to analyse gender performance in friendship. The research on which this chapter is based expands on Goffman’s interaction rituals that take place in micro-social interchanges specifically in the context of friendship.

Building on Durkheim’s (2001) work on religious rituals Goffman uses a rich array of metaphors to describe the ritual, social life and the moral self (Manning 1992, Trevino 2003, Roberts 2006). In “Relations in Public” Goffman (1971) writes about the micro-interactions of groups and individuals who are co-present in relation to the verbal and non-verbal rules, and the rituals that govern social behaviour. Here Goffman (1971, 62) defines a ritual as:
A perfunctory, conventionalised act through which an individual portrays his respect and regard for some object of ultimate value to that object of ultimate value or to its stand in.

These rituals occur between one or more people and are specifically targeted at acknowledging, through spoken words and congruent actions, the changes that have occurred in the status of the other. Goffman (1971, 66, 69) refers to these rituals as “supportive interchanges” and more specifically “maintenance rites” that “affirm and support the social relationship between doer and recipient.” These rituals perform an important function to ratify social harmony at the micro-level. Drawing on Hochschild’s (2003) concept of emotion work it can be argued that in the context of friendship these rituals can be viewed as a type of friendship maintenance. That is, these rituals constitute work because they must be actively engaged with in order to cement friendship intimacy over time, and in order to continue to generate solidarity despite geographic distance and a lack of co-presence.

Goffman suggests that individuals have various motives for maintaining their impressions of self when co-present, and in a way collude with others to “save face” (Goffman 1969, 9). Whilst this collusion may be taken as a means by which rituals are mutually supportive or collaborative, it could also be understood as strategic behaviour (Roberts 2006, 72). Goffman’s idea of the strategic self relates to functional modes of friendship where a quid pro quo system (a favour for a favour) is assumed to operate. For example, Aristotle’s (2002, 232-260) “utility” and “pleasure” friends are motivated by what can be gained by friendship, as opposed to the benevolence of friendship, for friendship’s sake. Similarly Little (1993) proposed the friendship modes of “social” and “familiar” which emphasise this utility function above benevolence. My research explores some of the personal motivations that migrants presented for engaging in this ritual friendship work in relation to the permanency of their migration.

Any discussion of friendship requires an understanding of the complexity and ambiguity of the term friend, which is historically and culturally situated and subject to approximate and normative use (Lewis 1978, Giddens 1991, Derrida 1997, Pahl 2000, Spencer and Pahl 2006). Friendship means different things to different people, and there is no one correct or absolute definition. A friend may equally be a chosen relationship, or a given relationship such as a family member who is viewed as being a friend (Spencer and Pahl 2006, Weeks et al. 2001). Further, technological innovation, particularly Facebook’s use of the word “friend” to denote a contact, has led to a debate about the differences, if
any between on and offline friends, and the quality and nature of these relationships (Zoppos 2011).

There is a substantial literature that demonstrates the importance of friends being in the same physical place and of having frequent contact in order to enact and maintain friendship face-to-face (Montaigne 1991, Little 1993, Derrida 1997, Pahl 2000, Aristotle 2002). For example, Aristotle (2002, 236) thought that good friendship was impeded by separation as:

> If they are asleep, or in different parts of the world, they cannot express their mutual affection in deeds, though retaining the disposition to do so. For separation in space does not kill friendship outright, it only makes its active exercise impossible.

Aristotle implies that friends must be together in “space”. Millennia later Little (1993) agrees that true friends need a physical space in which to spend time and be friends in. Similarly Derrida (1997, 240) asserts that friends need to be in the same place and see each other often: “The friend is the near one and friendship grows with presence, with allocution in the same place.” Likewise, Pahl (2000, 121) highlights the importance of nurturing friendship networks, proposing that friendships are about shared values and times together and argues that geographic proximity offers a different style of intimacy than that of a friend “separated by the Atlantic Ocean”. When migrants come to Australia, they are separated from their old friends by physical distance and can no longer spend time together in active face-to-face friendships. Based on the argument about the importance of face-to-face friendship in the literature, I assert that maintaining the closeness of active friendship with people outside Australia would be a challenge to skilled migrants, as geographic separation means that they are unable to physically spend time together. The key opportunity to enact friendship face-to-face is the visit home, and this is an area which requires further investigation in order to ascertain the impacts of geographic distance and separation on long-term friendship enactment.

Whilst the active nature of friendship enactment is impeded by geographic mobility, which plays a role in modifying this social relation and its maintenance due to a lack of face-to-face access, there is an established social norm that friendship is continuing, even with lack of contact (Pahl and Pevalin 2005, Spencer and Pahl 2006). Indeed, this is complicated by the fact that unlike other social ties that may be formally ended, for instance a husband and wife getting a divorce, the end of a friendship is rarely formally articulated, meaning friends tend to “fade”
away (Matthews 1986, Little 1993, Pahl 2000). Without malice or another reason to cast the friend aside, there is a prevailing sentiment that friendship is ongoing, meaning that it is acceptable for individuals to draw on this friendship at a later stage. For example, Matthews (1986, 66-69) shows that older people drew on “dormant” friends in old age depending on their social situations. Pahl (2000) describes these old friends who may have been important once, for instance at university, and are then called upon at a later stage in life, as “fossil friends”. He observes that they can be reactivated as life circumstances change and the friendship would carry on “just where it left off” (Pahl 2000, 72). The concept of the fossil friend suggests the social norm that friendship continues in some form, even with absence and lack of contact.

However, without currency and enactment, this is principally an idea of a friend that is held in the individual’s imagination (Adams 2004). Changes in status across the life course such as marriage, having children or moving to a new location may result in the reactivation of an old friendship based on a previous bond from time spent together, and a newfound commonality. Indeed, this demonstrates that friendship is not a static relation, but one that constantly evolves, as individuals in a personal community expand and contract according to different contexts, mutual needs, and commonalities.

Migrants can maintain their friendship to different extents using the small rituals that Goffman identifies as “little pieties”, such as sending a Christmas card as an infrequent exchange of friendship (Goffman 1971, 62; see also Matthews 1986). These token friendship maintenance rituals require little active effort yet do contribute to the continuation of the friendship.

Nowadays these tokens can include the use of technologies for example, text messaging and internet applications as highlighted in the literature (e.g. Vertovec 2004, Clarke 2005, Panagakos and Horst 2006). The importance of these technologies in this context lies in their role as a contemporary form of the little piety. For some migrants, computer mediated interactions become substitutes to the more traditional ways of staying in touch, such as letter writing and postcards. With the exception of Clarke (2005) whose work hints at an aspect of friendship work by highlighting the paradox of emotional costs and benefits for migrants communicating with old friends in another country, few accounts focus on the role that these technologies can play in the enactment of social rituals. Instead, the literature generally proposes the benefits for migrants using these technologies of staying in contact in real time despite geographic distance.
Little (1993) suggests that when friends do reunite and resume friendship after a long period of dormancy and little effort to make contact they often feel a sense of pride. In an autobiographical account of her return to Krakow following migration as an adolescent to Vancouver in the late 1950s, Hoffman (1990, 224) demonstrates Little’s sentiment with regard to a meeting with old friends:

And so we began talking with the double sense that we need to start from the very beginning, and that everything can be said, without the usual preliminaries.

Hoffman (1990) shows that a previous bond and shared history of childhood friendship enabled the interaction a degree of intimacy despite the length of time, seventeen years, that had elapsed since their last meeting. Yet it would be a mistake to read this single account as universal to the experience of all migrants, and this ability to continue friendship where it left off is an ideal that is not always available to the returning migrant.

There is little research in the literature on the importance of migrants maintaining friendships with friends who live outside the host country and of the significance of making visits to see friends. An exception is offered by Baldassar (2001) whose anthropological account of migrants to Australia visiting their home town of San Fior in Italy examines their attachment to place and the obligation to return, and highlights the importance of the home visit as a part of the process of migration. Although Baldassar refers to visits back to family and townspeople, rather than friends per se, the themes that emerge are a useful starting point, which gives some context to the application of friendship maintenance rituals that I explore. Baldassar (2001) notes that the frequency of the return visit is of importance in two ways. Firstly, migrants that return every few years are deemed by those in the home country to be economically successful in Australia because they can afford to visit. However, Baldassar (2001, 209) also notes a tension between the migrant and the townspeople, which occurs due to a cultural perception of Italy as superior to Australia, and which requires the migrant to “manage” the impression of their success, which must be obvious, but not ostentatious.

This impression management echoes Goffman’s (1971) suggestions of the knowing or strategic individual that has been previously mentioned. The need for the migrant to present an appropriate level of success is a performance in which the townspeople also tacitly collude by sharing these social norms. Other literature on adult transnational migrants returning to their home culture suggests a different kind of cultural tension
that is experienced by migrants which is the feeling of being both familiar, yet simultaneously a stranger. For example, Pollock and Van Reken (2002) propose that the migrant who has spent time living away from the home culture has gained an expanded worldview which contrasts and conflicts with what are perceived as the parochial views of locals. So whilst the migrant shares the home country as a place of birth, the period of time away from friends can lead to a sense of separation from them when returning. Secondly, the frequency of the visit also impacts upon the reception received by the migrant. In congruence with Durkheim’s (2001) notion of the “collective effervescence” of ritual to cement a social bond of solidarity, and Goffman’s ritual performance of pleasure to ratify relationships, Baldassar (2001) suggests that the first visit is performed as a celebration. However, as the frequency of visits increases over time this celebration becomes progressively muted, a demonstration of Goffman’s attenuation rule of the performance of pleasure.

Methodology

This research explored the friendship experiences of skilled migrants to Australia. Drawing on the visa criteria for skilled migration this sample of skilled migrants was defined as those with a degree gained outside Australia and professional work experience in a field related to their degree (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2009). Participants were recruited from volunteers to advertisements sent to migrant organisations, media outlets and businesses and government offices in New South Wales, Australia. Anyone of working age, professionally employed at the time of the interview, and from any ethnicity or country of origin was included. Participants were born in: America; Bahrain; Bulgaria; France; Canada (x3); England (x3); Hong Kong/China (x3); Indonesia; Ireland; New Zealand; Norway; Slovakia; Sri Lanka; and Zambia and their ages ranged from ranged from 27 to 60 years. Nine participants were male, and eleven were female.

Following Spencer and Pahl (2006) and Butera (2008) a map was used to gather data about migrants’ friends. The map was designed to enable a distinction between old and new friends made pre- or post-migration to Australia, and to show the geographic location of friends as in or outside Australia in order to explore experiences of enacting face-to-face friendship, and time spent with friends in the same physical space as opposed to friendship over distance using communications technologies. For this reason, I divided the map into quadrants, which were: friends met pre-migration to Australia now living outside Australia; friends met pre-
migration to Australia now living in Australia; friends met in Australia still living in Australia; and, friends met in Australia now living outside Australia. The map and accompanying list of friends served as an icebreaker for semi-structured interviews which explored in greater depth the data provided on the map. Whilst in general the map was highly effective as a tool to gather data about friendship, as I have previously shown, sometimes issues such as time constraints or deciding which friends to include on the map arose (Westcott 2010). In accordance with university ethics protocols all participants gave consent to take part in the research and to have their interviews recorded. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using open coding.

Given the complexities and ambiguities of the meaning of the word friend, participants in my research were asked to include anyone who they considered to be a friend in their responses and many included family members, colleagues and partners as well as chosen friends during their interviews. In this research, the dormant nature of the old friendship is accounted for by migration, and the visit home refers to the reactivation of the friendship. The friends of migrants who live outside Australia are effectively dormant because whilst there is shared history and they may yet be drawn on should the need arise, these friendships are not active in the sense understood by Aristotle and Pahl as I have outlined above. My research demonstrates the importance of old friends to a migrant in contrast to the usual emphasis in the literature which in general tends to focus on the importance of family networks in the home country, or more broadly on the migrant’s ties to culture, place and identity in the home country (Malkki 1992, Glick Schiller et al. 1995, Ewing 2004, Voigt-Graf 2004).

**The Rituals of Return**

This section discusses three key social rituals: little pieties; periods of high access; and the attenuation rule of pleasure, in relation to the participant’s experiences. It will examine these rituals in order to explore the participant’s experiences of returning home to visit old friends. The giving of small gifts or little pieties is a component of friendship work. It involves the sharing of a token to support the maintenance of a relationship. In general the interviews demonstrated that the migrants made minimal effort to maintain their “old” friendships, except by the sharing of little pieties. For Norman (English, 34 years) and Ricky (English, 30 years), contact with old friends in England was limited to infrequent emails a few times a year, and the occasional phone call at
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Christmas or birthdays. Benjamin (English, 52 years) limited his contact to “Christmas cards, that’s it.” Eugene (French, 33 years) used email, but infrequently: “I would say four messages a year, max”. Max (English, 38 years) noted that he emailed his old friends in “spates” whereby there would be a flurry of contact sometimes, then nothing for three or four months. Max however stayed in weekly phone contact with his brother, who he considered to be a friend. Jennifer (English, 31 years) used Facebook to send personal messages to her friends in England, and mentioned that these tended to be longer than the “inane comments” that she sent to her friends in Australia. Aside from Facebook, however, she did not generally stay in touch: “I’m a bit crap actually, my friend Claudine, I have probably phoned her twice in four years”. These examples show that migrants used technologies such as Facebook and email to perform little pieties at a distance in addition to the traditional means of communication evidenced by sending cards.

Whilst the majority of the participants used technologies, to some extent, to stay in contact with old friends they understood that these technologies were an enabling tool for contact and did not substitute co-present friendship. Although technologies provided an ease and immediacy of communication in comparison to letters and postcards, and without the costs previously associated with international telephone charges, contemporary technologies pose limitations to furthering the friendship because these technologies offer a different mode of friendship than face-to-face contact in the same physical space and time. Further, an issue for migrants using these technologies to maintain contact with friends was the impact of incongruent time zones on their communications outside Australia. This was perceived as an impediment because even though interaction was instantaneous, the migrant and the friend were simultaneously situated at different times of the day, which jarred their friendship experience. Given the differences from face-to-face interaction, it is hence important to examine migrants visiting old friends to explore how these friendships play out in the micro-social order of everyday life.

Participants did not consider that this minimal contact was a problem, nor was it an indication of the lack of value that they attributed to their friendship, or that it would effect its quality when they visited. Jennifer stated:

I can’t explain it, but it’s fine … if I moved back there tomorrow, like it [would] just pick up where it left off really.
Despite her limited friendship maintenance work, Jennifer expressed projected “pride” (Little 1993) in her ability to resume the friendship during her most recent visit back:

I stayed at her [Claudine’s] house when we went back to England and it was like we had never been apart.

Likewise, Benjamin admitted he was “not very good at keeping in touch” but still imagined close ties to friends in England based on a shared history since childhood over a period of “nearly fifty years” in comparison to twelve years shared history with his Australian friends. For Benjamin, the length of time that he had known his old friends was an important indicator of the value that he attributed to their friendships.

These examples suggest little pieties were performed by some of the participants and that these fit the model of small ritual interchanges that support interaction identified by Goffman (1971). Technologies enabled the performance of little pieties at a distance. The ease of these technologies also contributes to the tokenistic nature of this friendship maintenance ritual, as arguably it is easier to send a birthday text message in comparison to selecting and writing a card, buying a stamp and posting it which takes more time and has a greater financial cost. The research participants seemed to consider that the performance of these little pieties was sufficient to maintain friendship even in spite of their comments, which demonstrated their understanding of the low level of effort that they required. However, this was not always the case. Margaret (Québécoise, 33 years) was an exception to the other interviewees as she demonstrated a deliberate strategy to terminate old friendships. She related that she had phoned friends outside Australia weekly for the first two years, exceeding the little piety of the other participants and demonstrating a higher level of friendship work. However, subsequently her behaviour conformed to the token contact for birthdays and Christmas similar to the other participants:

I kind of cut a bit, the contacts … because it was an extra effort that I didn’t want to make. Which sounds awful. But I wanted to concentrate on the friends I have here.

Margaret’s admission that staying in contact “was an extra effort” demonstrates the active nature of friendship maintenance as work which a migrant can choose to engage in, or not, in order to maintain past relationships. Margaret’s initial high contact with friends outside Australia may be related to difficulties making friends here as she noted during the interview that it had taken her a few years to make new friends and also to
her desire to test out permanent migration. Her later reduction in contact with old friends outside Australia was deliberate, and simultaneously reflected her greater successes in making new friends and the decision to remain permanently in Australia. Margaret’s approach offers some evidence of the utilitarian nature of friendship, and also demonstrates a strategic self because she had a strategy in place to suit her own ends, rather than pursuing friendship for friendship’s sake (Roberts 2006). Some insights are gained into Margaret’s motives which are based on the security of her new friendships in comparison to the old, and her feelings around permanent migration. Margaret’s loyalties and preferences shift from her old to new friends. I argue that maintaining contact which exceeds the tokenistic friendship work of the little piety, does involve a mental shift from the present to the past, and in Margaret’s case this effort was too great to warrant her attention.

When skilled migrants visit old friends, a performance of friendship ensues that sees the enacting of a different ritual, what Goffman (1971) calls a “period of high access.” Findings from interviews demonstrated that all migrants experienced a period of increased access to their old friends. In some ways, this performance is part of the obligation to the friend as an act of benevolence. Prior to visits this manifested by greater contact by telephone, email and other means. Yet the opportunities presented by migrants to their old friends for access varied, as did their friends’ responses to the migrant’s visit. In the weeks prior to his visit, Benjamin signalled his accessibility by phone. In this example, both Benjamin and his old friends collaborated in this ritual of supportive interchange of high access:

I guess it is a bit of a false situation, when a migrant goes back home because you are only there for a short period of time, you are running around trying to see as many people as possible, err, … your time is very limited, … I want to cram as much in as possible, and I suppose, I almost force things to happen, and I will see a LOT of people in a short time. Whereas I suppose if I lived there permanently I wouldn’t be seeing people on such a regular basis. … I don’t know how much of an effort I would make if I lived there.

Benjamin’s aim of “cramming” as many friends a possible into a limited period of time is one strategy used by migrants to ensure that friendship connections can be maintained. However, as Benjamin suggests, in some ways this is a “false” or “forced” situation, and results in a different type of friendship to that which occurs when co-located because access is highly concentrated. The work that Benjamin undertook
to visit old friends was enabled by their availability and their reciprocal desire to see him, and was also affected by the fact that most of his old friends still live in his home town where he made his visits. Benjamin related that his friends in England were open to “spur of the moment” socialising during his visits to England, a mode of friendship that he commented was largely absent from his friendships in Australia. However, it is also likely that Benjamin’s friends tacitly understood that his time was limited, thus they were more willing to collude in spontaneity. Further, it can be seen that Benjamin’s friends were engaging in their own friendship work, in order that this ritual of high access could occur successfully. Benjamin’s feeling of the visit being “false” suggests a strategic self, who maximises performance for gain and this approach offers some evidence of the utilitarian nature of friendship for personal motives (Manning 2000, Aristotle 2002, Roberts 2006). Benjamin would eventually like to return to the town in England where his friends still live: “our intention when we moved here [Australia] was never to stay very long”, hence maintaining old friendships is particularly important as it contributes to a sense of the friendship continuing, even with the distance of migration. Given his intention to return, the frequent reactivation of Benjamin’s fossil friends occurred during visits. Despite twelve years in Australia, Benjamin’s friendship work during visits may later help to ensure that his friends are ready to resume more active friendship when he re-migrates.

Not all migrants were so fortunate as to be able to visit their old friends in one place. The dispersal of old friends from a central location such as the home or the university town was a common theme. Migrants and their friends managed this in different ways. Firstly, both migrant and old friend made an effort towards the maintenance of the friendship by actively engaging in the period of high access. Ricky’s most recent visit to England had been for four weeks over the Christmas period and in general he spent limited time with friends as the majority of this visit was with his parents. He was able to briefly see an old friend from the same village. However, most of Ricky’s significant friends from his days living in London had dispersed which necessitated more active work in travelling to visit them in order to enact maintenance rituals:

Mike, [I] knew him in London, but he then married and moved down to Hastings, which is just south of London … I didn’t even have time to go down to Hastings to see him so we managed to meet up halfway, which was at Gatwick Airport. So I flew in to Gatwick Airport from Ireland and he and his wife got the train up to the airport and we went to the pub in the airport, for a drink … and he went home, and I travelled up to London, for a day and a half. That was a very, very, very rushed journey.
In travelling to see Ricky, Mike makes himself available to Ricky and demonstrates his commitment to this relationship by undertaking the friendship work of travelling a distance by train to a location that would enable them to meet in spite of Ricky’s limited time. However, maintenance rituals with old friends who had moved were not always so straightforward. Sometimes migrants needed to make decisions about which friends they could or could not see, based on their available time and circumstances. Max’s old friends from Reading had also dispersed since he had migrated to Australia. Max experienced the added difficulty of travelling to England with a toddler and his partner, which he thought made catching up with old friends inconvenient:

Bill, didn’t see him last time I was over, I tried, because his parents were in Somerset but we worked out that [if] we were going to meet half-way and it was 5 hours or 4 hour drive for each of us just to have lunch and it was just with kids, it was just like … if one of us had had a motorbike and would just bomb down or something but it was just not particularly easy this time. Melinda, she flew in from Glasgow but yeah. It was just a night really.

Whilst Melinda engaged with the access ritual, limited time and family commitments precluded Max from visiting Bill. This demonstrates that a period of high access depends on factors other than a simple desire to catch up. In addition structural factors affecting the old friend needs to be considered in order to assess their ability to adequately perform the ritual. Max’s example shows that Melinda engaged in friendship work in order to see him, and in doing so she complies with his expectation that his old friendship is continuing. However, without being explicitly stated, it can be assumed that Melinda’s financial situation and life circumstances enable her to catch a plane from Glasgow to London. In other cases, an inability to engage with the period of high access by both the migrant and the old friend during the visit was inhibited by time, money, geographic distance and family commitments.

Goffman proposes an attenuation rule whereby long separated friends will be initially expansive in their pleasure at seeing each other, but that this performance will quickly diminish in intensity, to a little “cheek flick” (1971, 84). To varying degrees, the attenuation rule is demonstrated during the visits by skilled migrants to old friends. Norman relates his experience of returning home, after two and a half years away:

Yeah, it was good. I only went back for five nights … and it was brilliant on like the Friday the Saturday and the Sunday, but … Monday and the Tuesday … everyone went back to work … when you first arrive you kind