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The Ethics of Faculty-Student Friendships

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In any relationship, be it friendship, sexual, business, or other, the potential for hurting the involved persons exists because of role conflicts, power imbalances, and a host of other reasons. Moreover, even in those cases where neither party feels particularly constrained or coerced, there are relationships that seem hurtful to the larger society in which they occur. The question we will examine is whether such problems exist in the case of friendships between professors and students.

Relatively little attention has been paid to this relationship in the scholarly literature, although the ethical dimensions of sexual relationships between professors and students have been written about extensively. We write in order to examine where or whether the boundary lines are or could be drawn for appropriate faculty-student relationships. Teachers ourselves, we have often wondered about the extent to which we should engage those students who strike us as potential friends. At the outset, we reject the argument that professors are or should be "friends" with all their students. To us, this merely denotes having friendly behavior toward all students, if it means anything at all. Friendly behavior is not the same as friendship. Desirable though such an attitude may be, our focus in this paper is on the possibility of relationships that go beyond cordiality. Should we be friends with individual students, with all that such a relationship may entail?

In the first part of this paper, we present three arguments against faculty-student friendships and show why these arguments are not successful. Furthermore, we contend that the failure of these arguments is due, in part, to their flawed conceptualization of friendship and so in the second part we present William Rawlins's (1992) theory of friendship, which we believe is more successful at capturing the realities of friendship in contemporary society.

Three Arguments against Faculty-Student Friendship

It is interesting to note that while few writers have specifically considered the topic of faculty-student friendships, those who have considered it tend to argue against it. Yet friendship is typically regarded as a prima facie good; Aristotle, after all, devotes two whole books to the topic in the *Nicomachean Ethics* precisely because he believes *eudaimonia* is impossible without friendships. Few would seriously object to friendship as a prima facie good. If faculty-student friendships are, at least in principle, prima facie good like all other friendships, then those who would prohibit faculty-student friendships must shoulder the burden of proof by showing that there is either (a) something inherently wrong with these relationships or that (b) other weightier moral concerns require professors and students to forego the good of friendship. In this first section we critically examine three arguments against faculty-student friendships that adopt one or both of these approaches.

The first argument is that such relationships are inevitably corrupted by favoritism and therefore are unethical. The second main argument is that even though faculty-student friendships may not necessarily be corrupted, they should be avoided because of either the *possibility* of abuse or the *appearance* of abuse. We consider these two arguments first and then explain why we believe they fail to show that professors are professionally obligated to refrain from forming friendships with their students. We then turn to a third main argument, not found in the literature but worthy of consideration nevertheless. It is the claim that the likelihood of violating the expectations that accompany such friendships is too high and hence professors should not engage in such relationships, not out of professional concerns, but rather to avoid the possibility of betrayal. This is, in effect, the inverse of the preceding two arguments—which have to do with being a good and true *professor*—in that it holds that professors who do *not* bestow favors upon their student friends are not being good and true friends. We will argue that this argument is not compelling because it hinges upon a widely held, but nonetheless inherently flawed, theory of friendship we call the "exchange model of friendship."

Favoritism Prevents Fulfillment of Professional Obligation

The first argument amounts to a claim that there should be an identical treatment of all students by the professor or it constitutes an unequal and unfair discrimination on the professor's part. Cahn (1986) argues that faculty-student friendships inevitably entail favoritism on the part of the professor toward the student friend. To be friends with someone means that we are partial to them, that we prefer to do things

with that person as opposed to another, that we grant them favors that we would not grant another, and that we forgive them mistakes that we would not necessarily forgive those with whom we have no special relationship. As Cahn (1986) writes,

> If one student is permitted to write a paper instead of taking an examination, that option should be available to everyone in the class. If one student is allowed to turn in an assignment late, then all others in similar circumstances should be offered the same opportunity. And if one student in a seminar is invited to the professor's home for dinner, then all should receive invitations. (36)

One interpretation of Cahn's argument is that the ordinary pleasures of friendship—going to dinner, watching movies, grabbing a beer—will not be extended to all the students and so most students will be denied equal treatment by the professor. Any faculty-student friendship would therefore violate the rights of the other students in the class to be treated equally.

The first problem with the argument as presented by Cahn is that it erroneously equates equal or fair treatment with identical treatment; that is, the only way to treat two people equally is to treat them identically. Yet, this is clearly fallacious. As parents, for example, to treat our children equally means to give due consideration to their individual interests and needs; it does not mean to treat them exactly the same. It would be as if one gave one's eldest child a soccer ball and then felt constrained to give one's younger child a soccer ball as well even though that child hates soccer. To determine whether an action has been unfair we must look further than simply that action itself; we must look to the *reasons* for the difference in treatment. Sometimes it is inappropriate to treat students differently (e.g., allowing someone to take extra time on a paper in exchange for monetary compensation) and in other cases it is only fair to do so (e.g., allowing learning-disabled students to take exams in special quiet testing areas or finding tutors that will help with their assignments).

The second problem with Cahn's view is that it categorizes all possible interactions and activities between teacher and student as equivalent. From this Cahn concludes that all students have an equal claim to interact with the professor in exactly the same way as any other student or they have been unfairly excluded. However, this extends the scope of obligations on the part of the professor to his/her students too far. Students have a right to equal treatment only with regard to those interactions that are part of the teacher's obligations to the students as a teacher of that particular class. It is not clear how having dinner together, or having a beer, or going to see a movie, or shooting hoops, falls under the reasonable expectation of a student taking a course.

From this we can see there is a two-step phase for ascertaining the moral appropriateness of a difference in treatment of students. First, is the interaction in question something that each student would reasonably expect as part of their taking the course? If it is, then (a) the goals for the difference in treatment are to promote an equal opportunity for all by offsetting certain kinds of disadvantages and (b) the differential treatment is equally available to anyone similarly situated. This allows us to give a principled distinction between the various cases that Cahn mentions.

However, there is another way of interpreting Cahn's line of argument that would avoid some of our objections. He says that faculty-student friendships are wrong because faculty members need to be "dispassionate, able to deliberate, judge, and act without thought of personal interest or advantage" (Cahn, 1986, 35). He cites Sidney Hook's analysis of teacher-student relationships in support of his view. Hook maintains that friendship expresses itself in "indulgence, favors, and distinction that unconsciously find an invidious form" (Cahn, 1986, 35). This line of thought is more substantially developed by Markie both in his essay, "Professors, Students, and Friendships" (1990) and in his book, *A Professor's Duties* (1994). In order to expound upon this line of thought we must first outline Markie's own understanding of the nature of friendships.

Markie (1990, 136) argues that there are three necessary conditions for calling a relationship a friendship. First, friends engage in shared activities and this provides the basis for the exchange of personal knowledge about each other that others, nonfriends, will not be privy to. Second, friends have a mutual affection for each other that arises out of an enjoyment of that particular person's company and hence we can distinguish a friend from people with whom we are simply friendly. In the case of friendship, there is a particularity to the affection that is different from a general affection or liking we might have for everyone we meet or interact with. The third aspect is that friends have certain expectations and commitments that naturally arise out of this relationship and these carry with them moral weight. To violate these expectations and commitments is to violate prima facie duties of fidelity and gratitude. Any friend worth his/her salt will feel these obligations as part of the relationship and will naturally act on them. We call this view, "the exchange model of friendship." We recognize its appeal as a commonsense view of friendship. However, we feel that it fails to capture the elusive realities of lived friendships. Accordingly, we will offer in the last section of this paper a much richer theory of friendship. But for now, we argue that, even if we were to accept the exchange model of friendship, it still does not support the favoritism argument against faculty-student friendships.

After considering and dismissing a number of possible objections to faculty-student friendships, Markie advances his own arguments based on the exchange model. First, Markie argues that people have a prima facie obligation not to engage in any activities that are likely to prevent or deter them from carrying out their moral obligations. A professional, such as a teacher, has certain moral obligations that are incumbent upon him or her in virtue of assuming the role of a professional. Therefore, if there is some activity likely to cause a problem in behaving professionally then, unless there are very strong moral grounds to the contrary, a teacher should not do it (Markie, 1990, 142). He then argues that because friendship carries with it a prima facie obligation to grant favors and help one's friends, it is very likely that teachers will violate their professional obligations by engaging in faculty-student friendships.

Put another way, Markie claims that the moral obligation to refrain from engaging in a faculty-student friendship is not because such relationships are inherently immoral; there is nothing per se wrong with a professor and a student being friends. However, because the professor has professional obligations that she/he adopts in the role of professor, there is a derivative obligation not to engage in any activities that could likely interfere with those professional obligations. The greater the likelihood of an activity distracting or diminishing the professor from following through on these commitments, the stronger the moral obligation to refrain from engaging in the activity. Markie then proceeds to spell out some of the ways that the inherent expectations and commitments of friendship will drastically restrict a professor's capacity to carry out primary moral obligations to his/her students.

> They are then likely to give those students who are their friends extra opportunities in instruction, advising, and evaluation, even though being a friend is not a characteristic relevant to the distribution of these opportunities. They are likely to violate their moral obligation to give all students equal consideration. (Markie, 1990, 142)

Markie contends that this tendency will be a natural result of the relationship because of the special commitments to each other that do not exist in the professor's relationship with any of the other students. On Markie's view, professors who have a student friend will be more likely to let him/her take a make-up exam, hand in assignments late, will be likely to grade more sympathetically, use their professional contacts to aid their friend, or give extra advice with regard to a course of study and career. Moreover, casual friend-to-friend conversations are more likely to involve discussion of the course material, which amounts to extra instruction that is not available to the other students. This will be unfair because such aid does not meet

the first condition for acceptable differences in treatment presented earlier. The differences are not being allowed to offset any kinds of disadvantages, but rather figure as a benefit of being part of a special relationship. It may even be the case that the professor is being unfair to the student friend since the necessary objectivity that any student requires in the evaluation of his/her work will be absent; the professor is unlikely to be able to see the student's work clearly. In any case, the lack of equal treatment is a violation of the professor's professional obligations, although it is perfectly comprehensible in the context of a friendship.

Markie points out that these are unlikely to be conscious decisions or choices, nor does he believe that in every case the student would explicitly ask for these favors. (It could, in fact, be argued that a student who actually requested such favors would be an unworthy friend.) Rather, he is warning that there is very likely to be a falling away (albeit an unconscious one) from rigorous commitment to one's professional obligations due to the special treatment we feel we owe our friends.

As before, we recognize the commonsense appeal of Markie's arguments. However, while we agree with Markie that teachers are obliged to treat all students fairly, we disagree with his overall argument. An initial problem we have with this analysis is that Markie, like Cahn, takes a series of disparate activities and places them all on the same level. For example, we do not believe that discussions about the course subject matter conducted with a student friend is relevantly similar to giving a student friend extra time to complete an assignment. While we agree that the latter, depending upon the circumstances, may be wrong, we do not see the former as being an unfair distribution of advantages. Dedicated professors typically provide a number of forums for additional discussion and exploration of the topic (e.g., office hours, computer-monitored list servers, meeting before and after class). If other students choose not to come to office hours and talk about the material, why should the student friend be prevented from doing so simply because the discussion may take place in a more informal time and place? It is true that if professors do not make a reasonable effort to provide alternative arrangements to students who, for legitimate reasons, cannot make use of these extra resources then they are creating a disadvantage for such students. However, this disadvantage is from the professor's lack of commitment to teaching, not from the nature of faculty-student friendship. To say that each student will receive only a certain amount of instruction/discussion and no more, feeds into the pernicious notion that education is not about learning but about accumulating high grades which can then be traded in for a career. It is antithetical to the spirit of teaching to cut off opportunities to stimulate a student's

interest in a subject or to avoid encouraging them in a deeper exploration of those ideas and questions that drive us in our work.

But if we restrict ourselves to those areas that we and Markie agree would be unfair advantages, we still find that his argument is inadequate. The natural response to Markie's charge that professors will grant unfair exceptions is to say that professors simply should not grant these exceptions unless there is some legitimate reason for doing so. A good professor will make sure he/she is cognizant of the dangers of such favoritism and act accordingly. Under such circumstances, a professor and student could be friends without the ethical dilemmas that Markie envisions. However, Markie dismisses this as unlikely given the natural obligations and commitments that flow from the exchange model of friendship. He argues that we do not make similar assumptions in other professions, and rightly so.

> This objection asks us to believe that in relating to students who are their friends, professors can display a willingness and ability to control their inclinations that we don't attribute to other professionals. . . . We require even the most respected jurists to excuse themselves from hearing cases that involve the interests of a friend, and we do so because we doubt their ability, if not their willingness, to control the strong inclination to favor a friend. We require letters in support of promotion and tenure to be solicited from professors who are not friends of the candidate; we treat letters from the candidate's friends, even from friends who claim to be giving an objective evaluation, as likely to be biased. (Markie, 1990, 144)

Since Markie does not believe that there is an *intrinsic* problem with professors and students being friends, this propensity-to-engage-in-favoritism argument is the crux of Markie's view. Therefore, his position is as weak or strong as this is.

We find it unpersuasive for a number of reasons. First, there is a significant disanalogy between the example of a judge presiding over a case which involves a friend and faculty-student friendship. The judge is part of an adversarial system in which one side will win and the other will lose; it is a zero sum game. Professors, unless they specifically design their class in such a way, are not functioning in this manner; such an approach would mistakenly view teaching as a process which is designed to determine who are the winners and who are the losers. The focus in teaching is on helping the student to achieve his/her potential. A more apt comparison with other professions would be to consider whether it is appropriate to be friends with one's physician or lawyer or minister, which are also relationships in which the professional is dedicated to helping the patient/client/parishioner achieve his/her potential or goals. Given that most people find such friendships entirely acceptable as long as the professional continues to honor his/her professional obligations, this would hold equally for teaching. Unless Markie is arguing for a more

radical thesis than he appears to be, most physicians, lawyers, and ministers would find it insulting to be told that they are unable to control their affections for their friends to the extent that they would violate their professional obligations for them.

Furthermore, while it is true that letters from outside the institution are weighed more heavily than letters from within the institution regarding the skills and abilities of professors, this arises from a desire to incorporate a noninstitutional perspective, not because of the assumption that the outside letters are written by nonfriends. Indeed, it would be hard to see how one could determine which outside letters (or inside ones, for that matter) are written by friends and which ones are not. There is no formal mechanism for determining this information and it is difficult to envision how one would even go about constructing such a system.

Finally, there are problems with how Markie claims that professors help students. There are criteria that have to be met to achieve success in a class and the brute fact of whether the student has met these criteria or not provides a check on any affection for the student. Unless the course is badly designed, the student and the professor are both clear about the nature of the assignments, what counts as good work and what constitutes sloppy work, and so on. Markie envisions a friendship in which the professor has no sense of self-worth or standards that are not sacrificed on the altar of friendship. Most professors are aware that their reputation is an important part of their livelihood and if they write recommendations that are demonstrably false or misleading they will suffer for this down the line.

To conclude this section, we believe that it *is* plausible to view professors as being able to be self-aware enough to continue being professional while maintaining a friendship.

The Perception of Favoritism Is Destructive to the Teaching Process

The second argument against faculty-student friendships is related to the first but differs in allowing for the possibility that friendships might not regularly slide into acts of favoritism. Even though there is no special treatment accorded the student friend there may very well be a perception on the part of the other students that favoritism exists. Because of such perceptions, the professor would lose credibility with the rest of the class and his/her evaluations of their work would be suspect. Students object, and rightly so, to teachers who play favorites in their classes. Most students have had the unfortunate experience of being in a class when the teacher clearly enjoyed the comments or answers from a small clique of students and responded more enthusiastically to their views. Such interactions promote in the other students a feeling of cynicism and frustration as

they come to view the educational process as simply one more system to "game." Such attitudes foster cheating, dropping the subject, sycophantism, and a variety of behaviors we teachers wish to discourage whenever possible. Therefore, even in those cases when the professor is not granting special privileges to the student, faculty-student friendships are counterproductive to good teaching.

While everything that Markie claims about the dangers of perceived favoritism is true it actually has limited relevance for the question of faculty-student friendships. It is certainly the case that the appearance of favoritism can have a debilitating impact on the other students and hence professors should closely monitor their behavior to avoid giving such an impression. However, professors have had to grapple with the dangers of allowing their public behavior to affect student's attitudes since the beginning of the profession. Professors may avoid faculty-student friendships, they may even assiduously avoid contact with students outside of classes, but this does not mean that there will not be some students who are enjoyable to have in class and others students who are annoying. It is a common experience for professors to "take a liking" to a student even if they do not become friends; they would hardly be human if this were otherwise. What matters is how a professor publicly acts on these attitudes and this will always be an area of concern for the conscientious teacher.

The Danger of Betrayal Should Prohibit Faculty-Student Friendships

It is only natural for the writers who have addressed these questions to focus on the professional responsibilities of the professor as the most critical ethical aspect of the problem. After all, those writing are teachers, as we are, and morally responsible teachers are self-critical. However, this may inadvertently cause us to overlook other ethical dimensions of the relationship. Suppose that Markie is wrong and that most professors are capable of treating their student friends as fairly as all the rest of their students, and furthermore, suppose that none of the other students perceive any favoritism. This would eliminate the morally problematic aspects of such relationships only if the sole obligations at stake were those that accrue to the professor in his/her role as a teacher. However, there is another way in which obligations may conflict, arising from the fact that the teacher who befriends a student is taking on two different roles with two different sets of obligations. To say that a professor's ability to remain impartial resolves the problem is to simply say that the professor will ignore or denigrate one set of those obligations, namely those that arise when one takes on the role of friend. For the purposes of stating this argument, we will continue to employ the commonly held exchange model of friendship supplied by Markie.

This argument turns on the view that to become someone's friend is not an inconsequential act and that to be a good and true friend is to recognize that it carries with it a special set of obligations. It is usually considered a violation of friendship to remain impartial. Friends are the people in your life who *are* partial; you can count on them to take your side, to help you out, to be the people you can turn to in a difficult situation. Friends are the people in your life who use their talents and skills to make your life a little easier and for whom you would do the same. Friends tell you secrets, they don't withhold information that is important to your success in life, and they don't hide behind rules and regulations to protect themselves. There are plenty of people who will not distinguish between you and everyone else they come in contact with, and it is precisely this feature that allows you to tell who your true friends are versus those people with whom you are merely friendly.

If this is so, then a professor who does not engage in at least some level of favoritism is not being a true friend. The professor who hides behind "professional obligations" to deny a friend the opportunity to take a test or turn in a paper late is not taking his/her friendship seriously. It is no problem to say we are friends with someone, but if the friendship gets tested by a real call for aid, and the friend turns us down for other obligations it tells us where we stand. This can be especially damaging if we were counting on our friend to help us out in a tight spot (a not unreasonable expectation of a friend) and it is exactly at that moment that they turn us away. In such a circumstance we would probably feel betrayed because our trust in our friend had been violated; it would be fine if the professor behaved in this "professional" manner as long as he/she did not at the same time claim to be our friend.

Notice that this objection to teacher-student friendships does not deny the importance of professional obligations, but it does say that teachers must choose which set of obligations they will fulfill. If this were the case, then the professor will always have one set of obligations that he/she is violating in the relationship. Moreover, it may be that it is a best-case scenario when the professor violates only one set of obligations; it may be that by trying to be both friend and teacher, the professor manages to violate his/her professional obligations by helping the student *and* betraying the student by not giving enough help/aid.

As we said in the beginning of this section, it is not surprising that this argument is not a part of the limited literature on the subject. Because of this, we concede that we do not know how the faculty-student friendship opponents would respond to it. However, we believe that Cahn, Markie, and even maybe Aristotle, would be sympathetic to its basic approach, although they would disagree with

the conclusion. They would agree that the problem is how the tension between the two sets of obligations is to be resolved (i.e., favoritism for the student friend vs. professional obligations) because it fits in with their understanding of the nature of friendship and professional obligations. However, this argument fails because of its assumptions about the nature of friendship. In delineating these problems we will be able to draw some more general conclusions with regard to the nature of friendship and contemporary society.

Recall that for Markie friendship has three necessary components: friends engage in shared activities, have a mutual affection for each other, and have certain expectations and commitments that naturally arise out of this relationship and which carry moral weight. To violate these expectations and commitments is to violate prima facie duties of fidelity and gratitude. However, it is not clear how this relationship between duty and friendship is established, nor does Markie explicate the scope or nature of what constitutes an appropriate commitment or expectation, and herein lies a serious problem. To establish the betrayal argument, it must be the case that there are specific obligations that are derivable from the friendship relationship, per se, just as we might say that the specific duty not to prescribe futile treatment arises out of the physician-patient relationship. Although it is not clear, Markie seems to suggest that keeping promises and being properly grateful for favors granted are two kinds of prima facie obligations that arise naturally from friendships (Markie, 1990, 136).

Yet, we can quickly see that this will not work. It cannot be that promise keeping in general is a derivative moral category of friendship. It is true that if one promises a friend to help start his car and then one fails to follow through, one has violated one's obligation to keep promises. However, this would also hold if one promised someone who was not a friend. As Dan Pascal puts it in his article on friendship and obligation, "Those of what are called duties to friends which really are duties, are obligations that we would owe to anyone in the circumstances" (Pascal, 1980, 4). This means it is hard to see how the moral obligation to keep a promise is one derived from the nature of friendship. We might think that in ignoring friends we have done something worse, but this is not necessarily the case. If the stranger is an elderly person in a dangerous section of town at night and our friend is a self-sufficient type in relaxed circumstances, then the violation of the promise to the stranger is a greater moral wrong.

The same point holds for the claim that there is the danger of being insufficiently grateful for the favors and kindnesses that often accompany a friendship. As we have seen throughout this debate, all activities friends might engage in are not equivalent and similarly all favors are not interchangeable. If one helps one's friend move into his/her house and then asks for similar assistance down the line, then

unless the friend is incapacitated it would be ungrateful not to lend a hand. However, this does not justify the further claim that in helping a friend move into the house this friend now owes whatever one thinks is equivalent. *What* exactly is owed to be appropriately grateful is a matter of negotiation, and it especially does not follow that the friend is ungrateful if he/she asked to do something that is potentially damaging.

There aren't any duties per se that flow from friendship. Implicit in such "exchange" accounts of friendship is a fourth condition, namely that among the natural expectations and commitments that accompany the friendship relation is that whenever possible friends should bring about the other's good by dispensing whatever favors are within his or her power. We feel that the "exchange" view runs the danger of turning friendship into a relationship with each party focused on the maximizing of advantages wherever possible.

The betrayal objection to faculty-student friendship (as well as the earlier objections) arises only if one assumes the exchange model of friendship. Yet, the exchange model inadequately accounts for the contextual complexity of friendships. What is needed is a more nuanced account of friendship that shows how expectations and commitments do arise among friends, as well as the factors that regularly create difficulties for friends. Furthermore, while we believe that we have demonstrated that there are serious flaws with the arguments presented by the faculty-student friendship opponents, as long as one views the exchange model as the best understanding of friendship, there will still be a tendency to endorse the position against faculty-student friendship, if not necessarily the particular arguments given by Cahn and Markie. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to present a better understanding of the concept of friendship and we believe the work of communications theorist William Rawlins provides this kind of framework.

Rawlins's Dialectics of Friendship

In his work *Friendship Matters,* William Rawlins (1992) proposes a theoretical framework for understanding the nature of friendship that consists of several interconnected "dialectics." It should be noted right away that Rawlins's use of the word "dialectic" is not intended to evoke meanings that philosophers might at first read into it. Rather, by "dialectics" he simply means tensions, forces that pull in opposite directions and that operate in varying degrees in all friendships. Two of these dialectics or tensions he labels "contextual dialectics": "They describe cultural conceptions that frame and permeate interaction within specific friendships yet are conceivably subject to revision as a result of significant changes in everyday practices" (Rawlins, 1992, 9). That is to say that some tensions are between the friendship pair

and the outside world. Four other dialectics deal with the interactions between friends; they are within the context of the friendship pair. Properly speaking, none of the following six dialectics can be separated fully from each other, save in the artificial climate of analysis. In real life, they intersect and affect each other. Rawlins's view of friendship is one of a multidimensional phenomenon whose boundaries are not circumscribed by a set of inherently given rules and obligations, but is constantly undergoing renegotiation.

The dialectic of the public and the private describes the tensions that arise due to the dual nature of friendship. It is a public relationship to the extent that it is recognized by others as a friendship. Yet as a public relationship, friendship lacks the more readily recognized and culturally agreed-upon constraints of kinship relationships, marriages, and business ties. In conflict with this public aspect, friendships have a private aspect as well. Each friendship is privately negotiated by the two friends. "Appropriate behavior is determined within the friendship and is upheld principally by each individual's affection for and/or loyalty and commitment to the other. Personal responsibility and trust are the lynchpins of this private order, which may be as evanescent as human caprice or as enduring as human dedication allows" (Rawlins, 1992, 9–10).

The relevance of this to the study of faculty-student friendship is obvious, especially with regard to the perception and betrayal arguments. To say that there is an unresolvable and ever-changing tension between the public and the private dimensions of all friendships is to say, in effect, "Hands off! As an outside observer you cannot have the final word in judging this friendship." If all friendships dwell somewhere along the lines of these opposing vectors, then faculty-student friendships are no exception. Professors must constantly take into account public perceptions, even as student friends must take into account the perceptions of their several publics (an accusation of "class pet"): as all friendships must do. With respect to the betrayal argument, there is, within Rawlins's framework, an implied injunction to restrain judgments when based solely on observable, external criteria. The friends themselves must often negotiate their own sense of the extent or existence of betrayal.

The dialectic of the ideal and the real "formulates the interplay between the abstract ideals and the expectations often associated with friendship and the nettlesome realities or unexpected rewards of actual communication between friends" (Rawlins, 1992, 11). The ideals of friendship are familiar: it is a voluntary, personal relationship, pervaded by a spirit of equality (though here Rawlins does not mean the strict balancing of accounts described by Markie or Aristotle), and characterized by mutual involvement and affective ties. Contrasting with these cultural ideals, however, is the real nature of the friendship as

constantly negotiated and managed by the friends themselves. That is, an actual viable friendship might not live up to cultural ideals yet still be perfectly satisfying to both partners. Proponents of the "exchange model" of friendship have ready-made answers as to the ideal nature of friendships. In this view friends will sacrifice almost anything for the other friend: professional standards, common sense, esteem of fellow students, and so on. But Rawlins regards this as one of many cultural ideals that may or may not play out in the diverse demands of a real-life friendship. How then can we say that the professor friend will compromise her/his professional ethics when we cannot take it as a given that unwanted sacrifice or the partisan bestowing of favors will occur. Each pair of friends negotiates and constantly renegotiates the extent to which cultural assumptions about friendship shall be incorporated into *this* friendship.

Clearly, in the sometimes troubling and seemingly imbalanced friendships between professors and students the pair will find that these "contextual dialectics" are of crucial importance. But if both parties are satisfied that these two dialectics are being successfully negotiated, how shall we say that the friendship bond is morally reprehensible?

In contrast to the two contextual dialectics, which have to do with how the relationship is viewed within the larger cultural context of which it is a part, the four interactional dialectics concern the day-to-day conduct of the relationship. *The dialectic of the freedom to be independent and the freedom to be dependent* concerns the choices the two friends make regarding the extent to which each will be independent from or dependent on the other. Obviously, there can be friendship relationships where an imbalance of power can potentially imperil the conduct of that relationship and how that relationship interacts with the society in which it occurs. Still, we must be modest about the moral judgments we make when based on only our observations of how the two friends interact. Cahn, Markie, and others *assume* that the student friend in faculty-student friendship pairs will invariably be dependent and overly reliant. But Rawlins shows us that we should make no such assumptions.

The dialectic of affection and instrumentality has to do with our motives. Do we regard the friendship as a means to an end, as an end in itself, or somewhere in between? This dialectic is critical for the question of faculty-student friendship, especially in conjunction with the contextual dialectic of the public and the private. Outside observers of a friendship between professors and students are likely to form the judgment that one friend may be using another. Yet, neither friend in a faculty-student friendship may *feel* used, in spite of outward appearance. Again, it is dangerous to make judgments from a purely external perspective since we are not typically privy to the negotiations that have taken place between the friends.

The third interactive dialectic, that of *judgment and acceptance,* deals with the extent to which each friend evaluates and critiques the other. Some friends let us have it with both barrels and goad us to become something other than what we are; some simply affirm us and appreciate us for what we already are. Either pole on the spectrum is in harmony with being a good teacher. It is one of the wonderful paradoxes of teaching that we can appreciate and honor students for what they are, and yet try to fling them out beyond themselves. A given professor can judge a student friend's classwork impartially and yet still be partisan and affirming on matters within the friendship.

Lastly, argues Rawlins, all friends must choreograph an intricate and never-ending ballet: Shall I confide in my friend and show my willingness to trust and be trusted? or shall I not reveal too much about myself and thus stay protected? This tension Rawlins labels *the dialectic of expressiveness and protectiveness*. The main thing to remember here with respect to faculty-student friendship is that this *is* a tension, a dialectic. Professor friends are not constitutionally obligated to confide in, tell secrets to, or give privileged class information to the student friend. There is always the *potential* for this, but the actuality cannot be assumed.

Taken together, these six dialectics capture the complexity of friendships better than the exchange model. Each friendship is different from every other friendship. No two have exactly the same settings on these six "sliding scales." Moreover, each friendship constantly varies within itself over the course of the relationship. For example, a friendship that begins with instrumentality being the most important factor may over time change so that affection comes more to the fore. What differentiates this view from the exchange model is the emphasis on the fluid, dynamic nature of friendship, the idea that the expectations and commitments each party has about the other arises from the specifics of that relationship and not friendships in general, and that *all* friendships, not just faculty-student friendships, must negotiate the tensions between the public and private realms.

In adopting Rawlins's conception of friendship, we can see other weaknesses in the arguments against faculty-student friendship. For example, in the exchange model of friendships, because the issue is primarily about who is better placed to bestow the requisite benefits, professors are seen as purely benefactors and students as purely recipients of benefits. In so doing, it downplays or ignores the student's side in the matter. However, this assumes a highly paternalistic view of the moral acuity of students; they are considered, as a class of individuals, to not be able to understand what is at stake. It assumes that there cannot be friends who, instinctively aware of the dialectics described by Rawlins, *both* negotiate the course of the friendship in ways that avoid morally sensitive issues. There is nothing in what

the faculty-student friendship opponents have written that would support such a widespread classification, nor does it seem possible that there could be. This would only be plausible if they were challenging the claim that professors *should* be friends with each student, a view which we have already rejected. The faculty-student friendship opponents discount the possibility, for example, of the student friend who (lest there be any question of favoritism) *purposely* goes beyond all expectations in crafting an essay.

Furthermore, we believe there are disturbing implications for the view against faculty-student friendship about the nature of friendship in our society. We heartily agree with the motives of the faculty-student friendship opponents who are concerned with the imbalances of power in our society and believe that those with more power are obligated to be cognizant of the dangers to those who are vulnerable. The implied solution offered by the faculty-student friendship opponents is to restrict ourselves to relationships where power imbalances are either minimal or don't exist at all. However, if we were to adopt this view consistently, it would severely restrict the possible range of friendships to only those who occupy roughly our own power level. Just for a moment consider how this solution would play itself out within academia. Provosts and deans, deans and professors, tenured professors and untenured professors, professors and teaching assistants, secretaries and professors, administration and faculty are all at different levels of power relationships. To be consistent with the approach against faculty-student friendship, each should keep to their own kind and be wary of establishing friendships outside of their own narrowly circumscribed circle. Although done with the best of intentions, the end result is a revival of the class system; each of us must be cautious not to associate with those who are above or below our station and if we move out of that sphere we must sever our ties with those we leave behind. One of the tragedies of life is that this actually does describe the condition of many institutions, though it need not be so. We contend, with Rawlins, that it is better to take the power disparity as a given and ask ourselves how best to conduct morally acceptable relationships across these lines of power.

Obviously this requires us to be cognizant of the various components in a relationship that structure the power disparities. There are some friendships that, due to particular aspects of that relationship, seem to invite closer scrutiny from outside observers and at the same time require far more effort on the part of the two friends to manage their ongoing friendship. The age or gender of the friends may be a factor in many important ways.

For example, there may be significant age differences between the professor and the student which in and of themselves are not

problematic, but the older friend may have experiences that allow them to know in advance where potential ethical problems lie. It is therefore incumbent upon the more experienced friend to guide the relationship through these problem areas.

The situation may be even thornier when we have two different sexes trying to cultivate a friendship. This will require on the part of the participants a greater sensitivity to their motivations for entering into the relationship in the first place. We believe there is a difference between the permissibility for cross-gender faculty-student friendships on the one hand and faculty-student sexual relationships on the other. We contend that the former need not entail the latter, but providing the argument for such a claim is beyond the scope of the present study. While it is important not to minimize these factors, we think that none of them constitute sufficient grounds for ruling out faculty-student friendships.

For those who are skeptical of the possibility of such relationships, we hold up the characters in the film *Educating Rita* as a believable example of how an older male professor can have a nonsexual friendship with a younger female student where each has affection for the other and no power is abused.

Conclusion

We claim, in summary, that faculty-student friendships are neither desirable nor undesirable per se. But if they arise, we maintain that they can be conducted ethically, both with regard to the enactment of professional standards and with regard to the demands and expectations of friendship. The former are not inharmonious with friendship; the latter are not codifiable. Specifically, we have argued that faculty-student friendships do not violate real or implied professional standards. We have argued that the appearance or threat of impropriety can be navigated to the satisfaction of both partners in the faculty-student friendship and to the larger public in which the relationship takes place. Furthermore, we have argued that any particular faculty-student friendship is not a violation of the nature of friendship, so long as friendship is understood as more than simply a medium of exchange. Within the more realistic model of friendship posited by Rawlins, betrayal of some external principle of friendship is not a given; each friendship pair must negotiate the boundaries of the relationship and what will constitute an act of betrayal. While this negotiation may be difficult in the academy, there are few places in the world today that are not fraught with similar perils. Power imbalances, role conflicts, appearances of impropriety—these are not barriers to true friendships because the trueness of a given friendship is not governed from without.

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