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Buddies that Matter: Gender and Friendship

Edited by
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Spring Issue:

abstracts (October 1),

completed papers (January 1)

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abstracts (January 1),

completed papers (April 1)

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abstracts (April 1),

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Early Career Researchers Special Issue:

abstracts (May 1),

completed papers (August 1)

Winter Issue:

abstracts (July 1),

completed papers (October 1)

About

Gender forum is an online, peer reviewed academic journal dedicated to the discussion of gender issues. As an electronic journal, *gender forum* offers a free-of-charge platform for the discussion of gender-related topics in the fields of literary and cultural production, media and the arts as well as politics, the natural sciences, medicine, the law, religion and philosophy. Inaugurated by Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier in 2002, the quarterly issues of the journal have focused on a multitude of questions from different theoretical perspectives of feminist criticism, queer theory, and masculinity studies. *gender forum* also includes reviews and occasionally interviews, fictional pieces and poetry with a gender studies angle.

Opinions expressed in articles published in *gender forum* are those of individual authors and not necessarily endorsed by the editors of *gender forum*.

Submissions

Target articles should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition) and should be between 5,000 and 8,000 words in length. Please make sure to number your paragraphs and include a bio-blurb and an abstract of roughly 300 words. Files should be sent as email attachments in Word format. Please send your manuscripts to gender-forum@uni-koeln.de.

We always welcome reviews on recent releases in Gender Studies! Submitted reviews should conform to current MLA Style (8th edition), have numbered paragraphs, and should be between 750 and 1,000 words in length. Please note that the reviewed releases ought to be no older than 24 months. In most cases, we are able to secure a review copy for contributors.

Article Publishing

The journal aims to provide rapid publication of research through a continuous publication model. All submissions are subject to peer review. Articles should not be under review by any other journal when submitted to *Gender forum*.

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Detailed Table Of Contents

Editorial	1
Leonie Wanitzek: Eros in the Classroom: Mentor figures, friendship and desire in <i>The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie</i> and <i>The History Boys</i>	3
Redfern John Barrett: “My Stand”: Queer Identities in the Poetry of Anna Seward and Thomas Gray	24
Friederike Danebrock: Revisit but not Revise: Friendship and the Romantic Imperative	39
List of Contributors	56

Editorial

1 In an interview published under the title “Friendship as a Way Of Life” Michel Foucault asks:

This notion of mode of life seems important to me. Will it require the introduction of a diversification different from the ones due to social class, differences in profession and culture, a diversification that would also be a form of relationship and would be a “way of life”? A way of life can be shared among individuals of different age, status, and social activity. It can yield intense relations not resembling those that are institutionalised. It seems to me that a way of life can yield a culture and an ethics. (Ethics. Subjectivity and Truth 1994: 127-8)

This issue of gender forum is dedicated to the question of how friendships may encourage or discourage, obscure or validate established concepts of gendered power relations and self concepts. Are friendships spaces in which issues of gender and sexuality figure less or more, do they offer alternative, non-institutionalised ways of life or figure as relations shunning the “real thing”? The exclusion of physical desire traditionally appears to be one of the defining principles of friendship as a bond that rests on mutual trust and understanding undisturbed by sexual and opposing interests. Especially at a time of “postmodern, fragmented selves”, selves in perpetual crisis, where romance and the assumed shortlivedness of physical attraction becomes viewed more sceptically, cynically even, friendship allegedly grants a space of reassuring stability. What the articles assembled in *Buddies that Matter* foreground, however, are precisely the slippery boundaries which (do not) separate friendships from sexual relationships, intellectual/emotional from physical interaction and matches of equals from power struggles. Rather than being conceptualised as a retreat from “doomed romances”, from the war of the sexes and sexualities within an oversexed western culture as a whole the articles render friendships as fragile relations, subverting and stabilising institutions, undermining and validating the self.

2 Leonie Wanitzek’s contribution focuses on the fragile concept of friendship originating in mentor - pupil relations in two literary examples. The characters of Hector and Miss Brodie as two particularly complex examples of inspiring yet ambiguous mentor figures in British fiction are analysed in regard of their various relationships with colleagues and students. Following a long literary tradition, the different teacher-student relationships in *The History Boys* and *The Prime of Miss Jean Brodie* encompass aspects of platonic friendship and erotic desire as well as complementary and oppositional positionings. The unequal setup of power distributions within these friendships figures as both an educating and fostering as well as an exploitative and hindering constellation for “both” parties.

3 Drawing attention to two seemingly extraordinary conceptualisations of friendship Redfern Jon Barret article "'My Stand': Queer Identities in the Poetry of Anna Seward and Thomas Gray" undermines traditional expectations and demarcations of interpersonal relationships and romance. Barret argues that if we talk of love in our culture, we usually mean sex. It is one of the fundamental norms of our society that love is intrinsically bound to sexuality. In contrast to this prevailing concept however, Anna Seward and Thomas Gray wrote poetry about love that is nonsexual: it is even anti-sexual. They wrote about romantic friendship. The article elaborates on the importance of romantic friendship for the lives of both poets who strongly believed in same-sex friendship and opposed opposite-sex marriage, a queer desire for which each was willing to sacrifice their well-being and reputation.

4 "Revisit but not Revise: Friendship and the Romantic Imperative" is the third and concluding contribution to this issue on gender and friendship and turns its view precisely to the heteronormative assumption within our culture namely that due to their generally presupposed sexual attraction "men and women can't be friends" (When Harry met Sally). Friederike Danebrock takes issue with two popular, cinematic examples dealing with this cultural token, arguing that Hollywood's romantic comedies such as the iconic When Harry met Sally... and - as a close relative - Friends with Benefits, in terms of theme and plot, are not only revealing with regard to concepts of friendship. The romantic imperative both films construct and represent is certainly a gendered imperative, as well: The crucial issue of both narratives is the avoidance of romance in a specific constellation, namely cross-sex friendships between two heterosexual individuals – attempts which, the films suggest, are doomed to failure. In this sense the narratives are driven by (the question of) a "romantic imperative", that is by debating and depicting the unavoidability of falling in love.