

## ROMANTIC PARTNERSHIP AS FRIENDSHIP

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This paper defends the thesis that romantic partnership is a form of friendship by arguing that such partnership is a romantic kind of close friendship. Despite its modest philosophical popularity, the thesis that romantic partnership is a form of friendship stands in need of an adequate defense, and so the paper first reconstructs and critically evaluates previous philosophical attempts to vindicate the thesis in order to motivate the need for a fresh defense of it. To substantiate the thesis, the paper then offers accounts of romantic partnership and close friendship before explaining how romantic partnership counts as a romantic form of close friendship in light of these accounts. The paper then responds to critics of the romantic-partnership-as-friendship position.

### Introduction

Are friendships and romantic partnerships completely different kinds of personal relationships? Or are committed life partners who romantically love and respect each other friends of a certain type? Not surprisingly, philosophers of love and friendship appear divided on this issue. On the one hand, opinion seems to skew in favor of romantic partnership being a form of friendship, with multiple philosophers apparently maintaining this position (e.g., Hoffman 1980; McMurty 1982: 175–176; Thomas 1990: 59; Delaney 1996: 341; Jeske 2008: 97; Jollimore 2011: xvi; Seglow 2013: 90). On the other hand, there are those who seem to disagree and believe instead that romantic partnership and friendship are completely different kinds of personal relationships. Caroline Simon (1993: 125), for instance, appears to treat these relationships as different kinds of affectionate human relationships, while James Conlon (1995) clearly thinks that romantic partnership and friendship constitute two discrete forms of human intimacy. And Richard White (2001: 66) appears to side with both Simon and Conlon in thinking that romantic partnership and friendship are completely different kinds of personal relationships by claiming that we destroy the former if we assimilate it to the latter.

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My central aim in this paper is to weigh in on this disagreement by defending the thesis that *romantic partnership is a romantic form of close friendship*. This does not strictly identify romantic partnership with a romantic form of close friendship. Instead, this thesis should be understood as maintaining that, *for any personal relationship, R, between two people, if R is a romantic partnership, then R is a romantic form of close friendship*. This thesis, then, should be understood as one that leaves open the theoretical possibility of other romantic forms of close friendship besides romantic partnership, or as one that claims that romantic partnership is merely *a* romantic form of close friendship, where it might just be one romantic form of close friendship among a plurality of such forms of such friendship. If true, this thesis would erase the sharp division between friendship and romantic partnership while preserving the valid distinction between romantic partnership and what I shall call, for lack of a better label, “just friendship,” which it accomplishes by construing the distinction here as one between a specific kind of romantic friendship and non-romantic friendship rather than different kinds of interpersonal relationships altogether.<sup>1</sup> Though defending this thesis is my central goal here, my discussion also aims to shed light on the nature of romance, romantic love, romantic partnership, and close friendship. Furthermore, it aims to highlight the similarities and differences between romantic partnership and close, just friendship, as well as those between romantic love and non-romantic love. My discussion will also reveal how romance, which is often thought to occur only outside of friendship, counts as a form of the interactions, activities, and experiences partly definitive of close friendship and thus how romance can be part of close friendship and thereby render such friendship romantic.

As should be evident, the position that I aim to defend here is not a particularly novel one. Instead, it seems to be an instance of the generally favored view among philosophers of love and friendship that romantic partnership is a form of friendship. However, if it is generally favored, then why think that there is anything worth defending here? Although the view that romantic partnership is a form of friendship may seem obvious and in need of no defense to some, the apparent disagreement voiced by those philosophers mentioned above calls for those who hold the view to offer a satisfying justification of it for both epistemic and moral reasons. Epistemically speaking, we must get in touch with some satisfactory grounds for the view to have the right to hold it. And morally speaking, we must show our peers respect and take their disagreement seriously by finding these satisfactory grounds. Unfortunately, this view is more often presumed than defended, and the few defenses of it that I have come across are rather unsatisfying. This paper, then, attempts to offer a satisfactory justification

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1. The term “just friendship” is based on people saying that they are “just friends” to indicate that they share a non-romantic friendship. It is not intended to convey that such friendship is inferior to the romantic kind.

of the view, which I will do by arguing that *romantic partnership is a romantic form of close friendship*. After I draw some important distinctions and explain a notable assumption of my argumentation, I will reconstruct previous defenses of the thesis that romantic partnership is a form of friendship and explain why they are unsatisfying in order to motivate a fresh defense of it. Then I will mount such a defense by (1) presenting accounts of romantic partnership and close friendship, (2) explaining how, given these accounts, romantic partnership counts as a romantic form of close friendship, and (3) responding to objections.

## Preliminary Distinctions and Assumptions

It will be useful to begin by drawing some important distinctions. Since the term “romantic love” can be legitimately used to refer to a specific, unidirectional psychological orientation of individual subjects toward other subjects or to a certain type of personal relationship that obtains between two people that have those very orientations toward each other, I shall first distinguish between “romantic love” and “romantic partnership,” where the former strictly refers to the specific, unidirectional orientation of individual subjects toward other subjects, while the latter refers to the certain type of personal relationship that obtains between two subjects that have that specific orientation toward each other.<sup>2</sup> I will provide substantive accounts of both romantic love and romantic partnership in later sections of the paper, but for now the important point is that, in the context of this discussion, “romantic love” refers strictly to the specific, unidirectional orientation of individual subjects toward other subjects that may or may not occur within an interpersonal relationship rather than to the type of personal relationship that obtains between two people that have that very orientation toward each other, whereas the term “romantic partnership” is reserved for that type of relationship.<sup>3</sup>

Two other important distinctions are between different types of friendship. One is between what I shall call “basic friendship” and “close friendship,” where the former is the more common type that obtains between friends that are not close, while the latter is the less common kind that obtains between close friends and that I shall elaborate upon later. These types of friendship are best thought

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2. This is very similar to Smuts' (2014a: 509) distinction between “love-the-feeling” and “love-the-relationship,” either of which can be legitimately called “love.”

3. It is important not to confuse romantic partnerships with marriages or exclusive dating relationships. Marriage is a socially significant *legal* (and for some, a religious) arrangement between two or more people, but as both loveless marriages and marriages of convenience demonstrate, married people might not love each other and thus might not have a romantic partnership. Exclusive dating relationships, while usually romantic, need not—and perhaps typically will not—obtain between two people who romantically *love* each other. Though these kinds of relationships *can* involve romantic partnership, they need not, which means that they are not the same as romantic partnership.

of as lying on a continuum, where some friendships are easily categorized as one or the other, while others are not so easily placed. I shall offer no substantive account of basic friendship along with the accounts of close friendship and romantic partnership, but basic friendship will at least lack the intimacy and the deep loyalty that is characteristic of close friendship. Much more, of course, needs to be said about the nature of basic friendship and how it differs from close friendship, but such a discussion is beyond the scope of this paper. Nevertheless, my argumentation will rely on some plausible assumptions about the necessary conditions of friendship, whether basic, close, or somewhere in-between. One particularly notable assumption here, which will be important for my ensuing criticisms of previous attempts to substantiate the claim that romantic partnership is a form of friendship, is that friends must desire to spend time together or be open to spending time together when their agency runs free or autonomously. If two people never have any such desire or openness, then whatever they are, they are not friends.<sup>4</sup>

The second distinction between different types of friendship is that between “romantic friendship” and what I am calling “just friendship,” where the former refers to any romantic form of friendship, while the latter refers to any friendship, whether close or basic, that is non-romantic. Those who think that friendship cannot contain romance, or that romance automatically takes one out of friendship territory, will treat “romantic friendship” as a self-contradictory category with an empty extension. The view that will be defended here, however, is that romantic partnership is a romantic form of close friendship that counts as such friendship because it satisfies the conditions of close friendship while introducing a romantic dimension that is not present in just friendship. Put differently: romantic partnerships are romantic friendships that constitute a proper subset of close friendships that differ in kind from other close friendships and at least most basic friendships, none of which are romantic ones.

## Previous Defenses of the Romantic-Partnership-as-Friendship Thesis

Before I can defend my version of the romantic-partnership-as-friendship thesis, I must first examine defenses of it that others have suggested to show

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4. To appreciate this assumption, consider the apparent absurdity of affirming that you are friends with someone even though you desire to spend *none* of your free time with them and are not even open to spending any of your free time with them. Imagine what things are like from their perspective: you say that you are their friend, but you *never* want to spend free time with them and are not even open to doing so. Rather than a friend, you are someone who refuses to be friends with them.

why a fresh defense is warranted.<sup>5</sup> Let's begin with some interesting arguments that Eric Hoffman suggests (1980). The first is that we should understand romantic partnership as friendship because this way of thinking about such partnership affirms (1) the role of choice in such partnership, (2) that such partnership involves making strong, yet not unconditional, commitments based on affection, empathy, admiration, trust, and respect, and (3) that romantic partnership is the pursuit of a limited mutuality that preserves the separateness of the parties involved (1980: 109–110, 115). Unfortunately, this argument does not provide sufficient grounds for thinking that romantic partnership is a species of friendship. To see why, consider first this hypothetical case:

*Colleagueship*: Two philosophy professors are strongly and voluntarily, yet not unconditionally, committed to working together professionally on manuscripts after a history of interaction that (1) caused them to like, trust, respect, and admire each other and (2) involved empathizing with each other's professional plight. Their relationship, however, is strictly professional: they never spend any of their free time together nor are they even open to doing so because, although they respect, admire, trust, and like each other, they only see each other as excellent colleagues that should nevertheless be kept separate from their private lives.

Now suppose that we conceive of romantic partnership along the lines of *Colleagueship* rather than friendship. While this would affirm the same things as Hoffman's friendship model and preserve the separateness of the parties involved, this does not show that we should think of romantic partnership along the lines of *Colleagueship* because it is still clearly misguided to do so. Instead, this shows, at most, that we must understand romantic partnership as sharing certain characteristics with *Colleagueship*; it does not substantiate the false idea that romantic partnership is a form of *Colleagueship*. So, by parity of reasoning, Hoffman's first argument at best shows that we must understand romantic partnership as similar to friendship in certain ways—it does not show that people should abandon the idea that romantic partnerships and friendships are completely different kinds of personal relationships.

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5. An anonymous reviewer has suggested that the authors I will discuss in this section have not offered full-blown defenses of the romantic-partnership-as-friendship thesis. Instead, they have offered only "gestural observations" to elucidate these types of relationships. If so, then I know of no previous defenses of this thesis, and so it stands in clear need of justification. However, as indicated above, I will treat these authors as at least suggesting full-blown defenses of the romantic-partnership-as-friendship thesis in order to show why this thesis, despite its apparent popularity among philosophers, has not yet been adequately justified and is thus in need of the fresh defense that I shall provide later on.

A second argument that Hoffman suggests, at least as I understand it, is that we should construe romantic partnership as a species of friendship because such partnership satisfies his account of friendship, which maintains that two people are friends just in case they (1) care for each other for the sake of the other as a unique individual, (2) express this care in shared activity, and (3) mutually acknowledge that the other conditions obtain (1980: 112). But even though the argumentative strategy here is good, the account of friendship on which it is based seems inadequate. Condition (3) does not seem necessary for friendship, but even if it were, these conditions do not seem jointly sufficient. Consider this counterexample:

*Morally Respectable Business Partners:* Two business partners with relatively virtuous moral characters are strongly committed to working together in morally acceptable ways for their own material self-interest on morally acceptable business ventures. Although they care about people in general, they non-instrumentally care about each other as unique individuals since they know each other very well and think very highly of each other, which they express while working together, such as by showing daily concern about each other's well-being and being careful not to overly stress the other out with an unreasonable amount of the workload. They also mutually acknowledge that they care about each other and express it by showing consistent gratitude toward the other. Nevertheless, they have no desire to spend any of their free time together nor are they even open to doing so because, although they care about each other non-instrumentally and even enjoy each other's company at work, they only see each other as virtuous, morally respectable business partners that should be kept separate from their private lives.

Although these business partners non-instrumentally care about each other as particular individuals, express this when working together, and mutually acknowledge these things, they are not friends because they have no desire to spend their free time together and are not even open to spending their free time together. The time that they spend together is "all business" within morally acceptable limits, and that is not friendship.<sup>6</sup> These business partners, then, satisfy Hoffman's account of friendship even though they are not friends, and so the satisfaction of this account is not enough to establish a friendship. Consequently, even if romantic partners likewise satisfy Hoffman's account of friendship, this is not enough to show that they are friends.

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6. This seems similar to an example from McKeever (2022), who plausibly maintains that her and her doctor are not friends if they do not spend any time together outside of the clinical setting. She is essentially claiming, as I do here, that two people are not friends if they are "all business" when they spend time together.

Hoffman's first argument, however, suggests a different way of understanding his second argument.<sup>7</sup> Perhaps we should understand it as similarly arguing that we should construe romantic partnership as a form of friendship because this affirms the mutual caring between the partners, the mutual expression of this caring, and the mutual acknowledgement of this caring. But even though romantic partnership surely involves such things, this argument fares no better than the first one. For suppose that we construe romantic partnership as a species of the morally respectable business partnership sketched above. While this would correctly affirm the mutual caring between romantic partners, the mutual expression of this caring, and the mutual acknowledgement of this caring, it would still be misguided to construe romantic partnership as a morally respectable business partnership—these are obviously two entirely different kinds of partnership! Even if understanding romantic partnership along these new lines would affirm some truths about such partnership, then, this would not be enough to establish that we should construe romantic partnership in this fashion. Accordingly, even though conceiving of romantic partnership as friendship captures some truths about the former, this does not provide sufficient grounds for this way of understanding romantic partnership.

Next let's look at an intriguing argument that John McMurty (1982: 176) suggests, which runs as follows: Romantic partnership is a form of friendship because (1) friendship is a life-sharing between persons that is realized in activities or enterprises pursued by choice, and (2) romantic partnership is an instance of such life-sharing. Unfortunately, while the argumentative strategy here is good, the argument fails to deliver the desired conclusion. The problem is the conception of friendship affirmed in the first premise, which seems dubious and, at best, insufficient given the ambiguity of the "life-sharing" that it equates with friendship. How should we understand this life-sharing? Romantic partnership is clearly a kind of life-sharing, but it seems false that friends per se share their lives in this same way. Perhaps some close, non-romantic friends, such as the main characters from the television show *Will and Grace*, share their lives in this way, but we do not have to share our lives with our friends in this same way in order to be friends. Of course, we might be able to understand this life-sharing in a way that clearly defines friendship, but even so, we would still need to spell this out in a way that properly excludes forms of life-sharing that fall outside of friendship, such as the "life-sharing" between the morally respectable business partners or the two philosophy professors discussed earlier. Overall, then, this argument needs to further specify the kind of life-sharing described in the first premise so that it clearly captures friendship and properly excludes non-friendships such as *Colleagueship* and *Morally Respectable Business Partners*. Otherwise,

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7. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pointing out this possibility.

the argument either rests on a false premise or invalidly infers the desired conclusion from the fact that romantic partnership satisfies an account of friendship that, it turns out, non-friendships can satisfy.

A final defense of the romantic-partnership-as-friendship thesis is suggested by Lawrence Thomas, who appears to offer three pieces of evidence for it. One we can call “similarity of origin”: romantic partnership and friendship both result from a complex mix of choice and fortune (1987: 217–218; 1990: 52). On the one hand, we do not straightforwardly choose to become friends or romantic partners with other people as we do when we choose to become Facebook friends with people. Instead, to some extent they both “just happen to us.” On the other hand, we do choose to put ourselves and remain in situations or to interact with others in ways that may lead to friendship or romantic partnership. We basically choose to initiate and sustain the interactions or activities that can lead to these relationships, but whether the psychological realities of either actually result from these interactions or activities is a matter of luck.

Also, the participants in both relationships choose to continually engage in the interactions and activities that partly constitute these relationships. These interactions and activities do not just happen to us, and they cannot be coerced, as otherwise they are not constituents of the relationships in question. Whether the psychological realities of either are sustained by these interactions and activities is a function of both choice and luck: we may be able to foster these realities by choosing certain things instead of others, but there will always be an element of luck when it comes to whether these realities are so sustained.

Another piece of evidence is that, just as a person’s romantic partner can be jealous of other potential romantic partners, a person’s romantic partner and his or her friends can be jealous of each other, and his or her friends can be jealous of each other or of potential romantic partners (Thomas 1990: 63). Finally, ending a friendship can feel like ending a romantic partnership—they both can feel like “break ups.”

Though provocative and very insightful, this suggested defense is not compelling. First of all, similarity of origin in terms of a complex mix of luck and choice might be found in different kinds of interpersonal relationships. Perhaps the philosophy colleagueship and the morally acceptable business partnership from earlier, which are neither romantic partnerships nor friendships, nevertheless have their origin in a complex mix of both choice and luck. Furthermore, it is at least possible for the romantic partners of these colleagues or these business partners to become jealous of the other colleague or business partner given the amount of time spent together and similar interests. It also seems possible for the colleagues or business partners to feel like they have “broken up” if they were to part ways after several years of working closely together in a unique way.

Jealousy or “break-up” emotions, then, might also be found in completely different kinds of interpersonal relationships.

Given the apparent inadequacy of these suggested defenses of the romantic-partnership-as-friendship thesis, we need a fresh one, which I shall now provide by (1) offering accounts of romantic partnership and close friendship and (2) explaining how romantic partnership satisfies the conditions of close friendship and thereby counts as such friendship.

## The Nature of Romantic Partnership, Part 1: Romance

Let's begin with romantic partnership, which we can initially characterize as *a personal relationship of mutual romantic love and serious, long-term commitment that has a romantic dimension to it*. Each part here, however, requires some elaboration. Let's start with the romantic dimension. While this typically includes a sexual component, since there are asexual individuals who still seek or enjoy romantic partnerships, the romantic dimension need not involve sex, and even when it does it will include more than sex.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, even if sex is part of the romance, sex itself is not inherently romantic. Instead, sex comes in romantic and non-romantic forms, and so any sex that constitutes part of the romance must be romantic. Therefore, since romance can come in sex-free and more-than-just-sex varieties, either way it will involve non-sexual, romantic acts or activities. And when it comes in the latter, more-than-just-sex variety, it will consist of those non-sexual acts or activities along with romantic sex. But when is sex romantic instead of non-romantic? And how are we to understand these non-sexual acts or activities that are romantic? Generally speaking, how are we to understand these romantic things?

Although these questions call for more extensive treatment than what I can give them here, we can come up with a plausible, provisional conception of the romantic by briefly probing some paradigmatic examples of romance. Let's start with that of someone, S, giving another person, P, a rose. Though a paradigmatic instance of romance, it would *not* be romantic if certain things about the act were true. Suppose, for instance, that S had some ulterior motive for giving the rose, such as to merely inspire P to have sex with them or to give S some money. Alternatively, suppose that S gave it to P coldly, such as with a stern look on their

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8. These asexual individuals, then, are different from aromantic ones that have no interest in romance or romantic relationships. Aromantic individuals may seek something that resembles a romantic partnership—they may want to find someone with which to share their non-romantic life in the same way that many people want to find a romantic partner. But since these individuals are not seeking a romantic relationship, the relationship that they are seeking here would still count as a non-romantic, close friendship.

face, or roughly, such as by throwing it to P, or in a hurry, such as by running up to P and quickly directing them over and over again to take it. Surely any of these would render the gesture non-romantic. To be genuinely romantic, *S must intend to make P happy and for the gesture to indicate P's special status as S's romantic interest, and S must carry it out in a warm, gentle, non-rushed way.* Furthermore, it would not be romantic if S is just looking for a beneficiary and just so happens to settle on giving the rose to P. To be romantic, *S must intend to give it to P specifically.* However, even if S has the required intentions here and carries out the gesture in the right way, this gesture might be creepy, rather than romantic, if P finds it unwelcome, and so it *must also be welcomed by the beneficiary to be romantic.*

Another paradigmatic instance of romance is the romantic meal. This conjures up the image of two people sitting at a small table in a fancy restaurant, perhaps near a fire or with lit candles on the table, where they are facing each other and warmly interacting. Alternatively, we could picture two people having a picnic together, where they are sitting on a blanket very close to each other warmly interacting as they share the food that they brought to share. Either way we have a shared activity that is thought to be romantic, but what would it take to kill the romance? Like we saw with the act of giving someone a rose, if one of the parties turned out to have an ulterior motive for participating in the activity other than that of sharing and enjoying the activity specifically with the other party as a romantic interest, or if one of the parties was in a hurry to get through the meal, then the meal would not be romantic. Alternatively, if the warm, intimate interacting was replaced with silent tension, outright conflict, or the parties entertaining themselves, then the meal would not be romantic. Same deal if other participants are allowed into the activity as unwelcome guests or as welcome ones that are not among the romantic interests of both of the original parties.

A final paradigm of romance that will be useful to probe here is the romantic getaway. Here we can picture two people who have planned a short, romantic weekend together at a specific destination where they will share romantic meals, have consensual sex, and generally spend their time together engaging in intimate activities, where at least some of them will be romantic.<sup>9</sup> Since we already have some understanding of what it takes for non-sexual acts and shared activities to be romantic, we can apply that to the relevant non-sexual acts and activities that would partly constitute the romantic getaway, which would leave the sexual component as the remaining one to probe. When is sex romantic? It of course must be consensual, since non-consensual sex will not be

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9. An anonymous reviewer has rightfully pointed out that romantic getaways need not involve exclusively romantic activities. Although such getaways will likely involve romantic meals, sex, and so on, they can just as easily involve non-romantic meals, such as quick breakfasts, or non-romantic sex, such as that involving role-play.

romantic, but that is far from sufficient. Sex between a prostitute and a paying customer is consensual, but this is a non-romantic business transaction between a customer and a service-provider. So, while romantic sex must be consensual, it takes more than mutual consent for sex to be romantic. What else does it take?

It seems that another requirement of romantic sex is that it is undertaken specifically with the other person(s). For suppose that S from earlier is just looking for someone, but not anyone in particular, with which to have consensual sex and ultimately settles for P because they are good enough to satisfy S's desire. S and P have consensual sex, but it does not seem romantic since S would have settled for someone else besides P but just so happens to settle for P. To be romantic, then, sex must be both *consensual and undertaken specifically with the other person(s)*. However, in light of consensual sex undertaken specifically with another for reproductive or other purposes along with consensual "quickies" undertaken specifically with another that are intended to bring one or more parties to orgasm as quickly as possible, neither of which are romantic, it seems clear that romantic sex, like a romantic meal, must also be *undertaken in a non-hurried manner as well as for the purpose of sharing and enjoying it specifically with the other person(s)*. Finally, much like the romantic gesture of giving a rose or a romantic meal, where the act or shared activity must be warm and welcome, the particular form that the sex takes must be *wanted and particularly stimulating*—or "hot"—to be romantic. Unlike the act of giving another a rose, however, which must be done warmly and gently rather than coldly or roughly to be romantic, sex need not be gentle to be romantic. Rough sex, it seems, could be romantic so long as this is what the parties want and find particularly stimulating. However, rough sex is not automatically romantic, and it certainly would not be if it is unwanted and not stimulating.

Although slightly different in the details, these paradigms of romance jointly suggest the following, generic conception of it: romance consists in non-sexual acts along with non-sexual and sexual shared activities that are all (1) intimate and non-hurried, (2) wanted and welcome, (3) warm to hot, and (4) intended to be shared and enjoyed with specific others as romantic interests, where this last feature serves to indicate the special status of the other parties as romantic interests. The romantic dimension of a romantic partnership, then, will consist of either non-sexual acts and activities that fall along these lines, or else it will consist of such acts and activities as well as sexual activities that likewise fall along these lines.<sup>10</sup>

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10. I am not absurdly claiming here that romantic partnership consists of *only* romantic activities, or even that such partnership only contains romantic sex. Both claims are clearly false. Instead, I am only claiming that romantic partnership, by definition, will involve a romantic dimension that consists of these romantic activities, which leaves plenty of room for non-romantic activities, both sexual and non-sexual. In fact, what I have said here is consistent with these non-romantic activities making up the bulk of the partnership, which seems extremely likely.

## The Nature of Romantic Partnership, Part 2: Romantic Love

Next, let's take a deeper look at the mutual romantic love and long-term commitment of romantic partnership. First, however, I want to stress the *mutuality* of these components: romantic love and long-term commitment must be mutual in a romantic partnership. If only one party is in love with the other and committed to them and the relationship, then the relationship is not a romantic partnership. For that we need two people in love with each other who are committed to each other and the relationship.

Let's start with the mutual romantic love component, which is based on the following sketch of romantic love.<sup>11</sup> Similar to some theories of love from other commentators (e.g., Franklin-Hall & Jaworska 2017; Hurka 2017), my account of romantic love construes it as something that constitutively varies across cases. More specifically, it understands romantic love as admitting of a paradigmatic form along with deviations from it. Let's begin, then, with the paradigmatic form of romantic love. In agreement with other commentators, who understand love in general as an affectionate phenomenon,<sup>12</sup> my account of romantic love understands it as such a phenomenon, as it seems impossible for genuine love to involve no feelings of affection for its object unless it occurs in very unusual or completely unrealistic circumstances.<sup>13</sup> Though reducing romantic love to feelings of affection would greatly misconstrue it, it surely must, barring those very unusual or completely unrealistic circumstances, involve feelings of affection or else it is, at best, something that merely resembles or approximates genuine love. However, the feelings of affection for their beloveds that lovers experience are inconstant, fleeting mental states that come and go, and so they cannot be partly constitutive of romantic love, which remains constant. Rather than understanding romantic love as partly constituted by feelings of affection, then, my account of such love maintains that *an essential constituent of romantic love is a disposition to feel affection for the*

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11. The nature of romantic love deserves much more extensive treatment than I can give it here, but I will offer a sketch of it that is hopefully sufficient for the purpose of defending the idea that romantic partnership is a romantic, close friendship. Also, while my account of romantic love is similar to other accounts and, indeed, weaves together ideas from other commentators, I do not intend this to mean that this account simply arises from reading the literature.

12. Hoffman (1980: 115), Brown (1987: 32), Noller (1996: 100), Abramson & Leite (2011: 677), Jollimore (2011: xiii), Shpall (2018: 91, 114), and Stringer (2021: 489) all endorse this idea in some form or another.

13. The very unusual circumstances that I have in mind here are ones where a romantic lover is tragically deluded into believing that their beloved is an imposter, which would result in no feelings of affection due to this delusion. The completely unrealistic circumstances that I have in mind, by contrast, are ones where a divine entity puts an end to the lover in the moment between the onset of their love and the triggering of their disposition to feel affection for their beloved.

*beloved*.<sup>14</sup> This disposition is something that does not come and go like the feelings of affection do; instead, it remains constant like romantic love does. Because of this, it can function as a constituent of such love. Furthermore, such a disposition will, at least barring those very unusual or completely unrealistic circumstances alluded to above, manifest itself in actual feelings of affection, and so including it as a constituent of romantic love delivers the feelings of affection that must be involved without misconstruing them as partly or entirely constitutive of such love.<sup>15</sup>

Also, in agreement with the many commentators that construe love as involving care or concern for the beloved,<sup>16</sup> my account of romantic love construes it as partly constituted by caring about its object. More specifically, an essential part of romantically loving someone is caring about their welfare in a special way: the romantic lover, like any lover, cares about their beloved's welfare *non-instrumentally* and *partially*. So, instead of caring about the beloved's welfare simply as a means to her own ends or only because of the benefits she gets from her beloved faring well, the lover cares about her beloved's welfare for its own sake, or as a final end. And compared to how she cares about the welfare of non-loved objects, the romantic lover cares especially about her beloved's welfare and will generally prioritize and otherwise privilege it in her deliberations and actions.

Furthermore, I understand such special caring to contain as components other crucial aspects of love that other commentators have located. So for example, I contend, along with Diane Jeske (2008: 52) and Monique Wonderly (2017: 243), that such caring includes the non-instrumental desire for the beloved to

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14. In light of possible cases of romantic lovers misidentifying their beloveds, it is more precise to say that an essential constituent of romantic love is a disposition to feel affection for *whatever is believed to be the beloved*, but I shall ignore this complication going forward since this is not the place to get into this matter.

15. I do not mean to suggest here that romantic love must last forever, or even that it cannot end before the loving subject does. After all, *we* do not last forever, and so our romantic love for others will not either. And while love will often last as long as the loving subject does, it is possible for one's romantic love for another to end before they do. My repeated claim here about romantic love being constant, then, should not be interpreted as absurdly maintaining that such love must last forever or even as long as the loving subject does. Instead, I am claiming that, unlike their feelings and thoughts that come and go, and that disappear entirely when they enter a dreamless sleep, the lover's love is a relatively constant aspect of their psychologies. It does not appear and disappear over and over again as occurrent thoughts and feelings do; it is not something that dreamless sleep kills and that waking up resurrects. Love remains constant unless something with enough force, such as an awareness of severe, negative qualitative change in its object, comes along and erodes its deep psychological constituents, such as the disposition to feel affection.

16. Brown (1987: 28–29), Soble (1990: 172, 263), Giles (1994: 345), LaFollette (1996: 19), Noller (1996: 100–101), Brink (1999: 252–253, 272), Frankfurt (2001: 5; 2004: 42, 59, 79), White (2001: 4, 6), Kolodny (2003: 136), Helm (2010: 2), Jollimore (2011: 29), Smuts (2013: 4; 2014a: 510; 2014b: 522), Franklin-Hall & Jaworska (2017: 23), Wonderly (2017: 236), Shpall (2018: 112), and Stringer (2021: 487) endorse this idea. For Abramson and Leite (2011: 677, 682–684), other-regarding concern is a characteristic expression of love, where love is understood as an affectionate attachment.

fare well (i.e., the desire for this for its own sake).<sup>17</sup> I further maintain, along with several other commentators,<sup>18</sup> that special caring about the beloved's welfare involves what Niko Kolodny (2003: 152) dubs "emotional vulnerability," which refers to the susceptibility to a wide range of welfare-focused emotional reactions.<sup>19</sup> The beloved's happiness and things that make her happy, for instance, tend to make the lover happy, whereas she tends to feel sadness or compassion in response to the beloved's unhappiness along with anger or indignation toward any event that promotes negative welfare states in the beloved. Generally, the lover as such is disposed to experience (a) positive emotional reactions to her beloved's positive welfare states and to things that promote them, along with (b) negative emotional reactions to her beloved's negative welfare states and to things that promote them.

Also, part of the lover's special caring about the beloved's welfare is being disposed to see facts pertaining to how actions positively impact the beloved's welfare as special reasons to perform those actions, whereas facts pertaining to how actions negatively impact the beloved's welfare are perceived as special reasons to refrain from those actions.<sup>20</sup> The lover will sometimes even see these facts as demanding that they perform or refrain from those the relevant actions (Frankfurt 1998: 5). Finally, since mere desires do not dispose the will to action, we must specify that special caring about the beloved's welfare is partly constituted by volitional dispositions to non-instrumentally promote and privilege the beloved's welfare (Frankfurt 2004: 87; Stringer 2021: 493).

In addition to this special caring about the beloved's welfare, the romantic lover has an analogous devotion to the beloved's will (Shpall 2018; Stringer 2021: 493–494). She has a non-instrumental desire for the beloved's desires and ends to generally be met, and she is disposed to experience positive emotional reactions to her beloved's desires and ends being met as well as negative ones to those desires and ends being frustrated. She is also disposed to perceive facts pertaining to how actions promote or frustrate the beloved's desires and ends as special reasons to perform or refrain from those actions (Ebels-Duggan 2008: 155, 162; Jollimore 2011: 112–113), and she has volitional dispositions to non-instrumentally respect, promote, and privilege the beloved's desires and ends.

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17. Green (1997: 216), Frankfurt (1998: 4–5; 2001: 5; 2004: 42), White (2001: 59), Hurka (2017: 163), and Stringer (2021: 488) endorse the idea that such a desire is a constituent of love.

18. Namely: Annis (1987: 349), Jeske (2008: 52), Smuts (2014a: 511), Franklin-Hall & Jaworska (2017: 22), Wonderly (2017: 243), and Shpall (2018: 112).

19. Other commentators who correctly locate such vulnerability as a component of love include Nozick (1989: 68–69), White (2001: 7), Helm (2010: 152), Hurka (2017: 163), Smith (2017: 150–151), and Stringer (2021: 488). Giles (1994: 345) might have this in mind when he claims that vulnerability is a central feature of romantic love.

20. These cognitive dispositions of love are pointed out by Frankfurt (1998: 9; 2001: 3; 2004: 37), Jollimore (2011: 112–113), and Stringer (2021: 492).

In light of this orientation toward the beloved's will, the romantic lover will be particularly susceptible to the beloved's direction, influence, and interpretation. In a romantic partnership of mutual romantic love, then, the parties will each be receptive to the other's direction, influence, and interpretation.

Two further, related components of love that enjoy agreement among commentators are the following.<sup>21</sup> The first is that love involves regarding the beloved as irreplaceable. More precisely, lovers as such must see the replacement of their beloveds without loss as impossible: in contrast to the replacement of their mere commodities with others that fill their roles just as well or better, lovers must regard the replacement of their loved ones with other like objects—even exact qualitative duplicates—as inevitably leading to loss. The second is that love involves a corresponding unwillingness to trade them in for a qualitatively identical or superior replacement or to otherwise accept substitutes for them.<sup>22</sup> The beloved, as such, is a special, utterly irreplaceable object for the lover rather than a mere, fungible commodity, and so the lover will be unwilling to accept a qualitatively identical or superior substitute. Under my account of romantic love, then, essential parts of such love are regarding the beloved as irreplaceable and being unwilling to accept substitutes for them.

Another essential component of romantic love under my account, which serves to set it apart from the various kinds of non-romantic love, is the desire to have a romantic relationship with the beloved (Nozick 1989: 70; Green 1997: 216; Stringer 2021: 496). Romantic love for another, in my estimation, makes no sense without a desire for some kind of romantic relationship with them, and in paradigmatic cases of romantic love, such love is partly constituted by the desire for a romantic partnership (or as Nozick famously put it, the desire for a “we”). Furthermore, my account of paradigmatic romantic love, in agreement with other commentators,<sup>23</sup> includes attachment as a constituent part, which I understand in terms of affective dispositions to feel comfort, security, or relief when in sufficient proximity to the beloved and to feel distress due to separation from the beloved or even the prospect thereof. Attachment can be found in

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21. Something along the following lines can be found in Ehman (1976: 99), McMurty (1982: 169), Brown (1987: 24), Kraut (1987: 425), Nozick (1989: 76), LaFollette (1996: 8), Lamb (1997: 43), Velleman (1999: 368), Frankfurt (2001: 6; 2004: 44, 79), White (2001: 4), Solomon (2002: 6), Kolodny (2003: 140–141), Grau (2004: 113, 119, 127), Landrum (2009: 435), Helm (2010: 180, 205), Jollimore (2011: 127), Smuts (2013: 10; 2014b: 520), Zangwill (2013: 303–304, 308, 310), Stringer (2021: 488–489), and Wonderly (2017: 239, 243). See Soble (1990: 290–297) for dissent.

22. This unwillingness is actually a bit more complicated than this: Lovers, as such, are unwilling to accept substitutes for their beloveds *in certain ways and in certain circumstances*, where this obviously stands in need of specification. Unfortunately, space does not permit me to get into this issue here, so I will just continue to operate with the above, crude statement of the lover's unwillingness as an approximation to the truth.

23. Abramson & Leite (2011: 677), Harcourt (2017), Wonderly (2017: 235, 243).

other forms of love and may appear to different degrees in romantic love; in fact, it is possible for it to be absent altogether. But as Monique Wonderly (2017) has convincingly argued, an essential part of paradigmatic romantic love for another is being attached to them.

Also, my account of paradigmatic romantic love seems to agree with Gregory Vlastos (1981: 32) and Bennett Helm (2010: 160–161) by including trust as a component. Although romantic lovers can surely trust their beloveds to various degrees and, at least conceivably, may romantically love others without trusting them in the slightest, a rather high level of trust in the beloved will be part of paradigmatic romantic love. And finally, my account of paradigmatic romantic love understands it as including a heightened emotional sensitivity to the beloved's lover-directed words and deeds such that they tend to have greater emotional impacts on the lover compared to how the lover-directed words and deeds of other, non-loved individuals tend to impact them (Stringer 2021: 495). Although there are certainly exceptions here, the beloved's lover-directed words and deeds, especially negative ones, will typically elicit greater emotional responses in the lover compared to the emotional responses that the lover-directed words and deeds of the non-loved tend to elicit.

To summarize briefly, then, paradigmatic romantic love, under my account of it, is made up of (1) the disposition to feel affection for the beloved, (2) special caring about the beloved's welfare, (3) devotion to the beloved's will, (4) regarding the beloved as irreplaceable and being unwilling to accept substitutes for them, (5) a desire for a romantic relationship with the beloved, (6) attachment to the beloved, (7) highly trusting the beloved, and (8) a heightened emotional sensitivity to the beloved's lover-directed words and deeds.

But romantic love can deviate from this paradigmatic form and still count as such love. As Monique Wonderly (2017) points out, for example, a romantic love that lacks attachment is an impoverished form of such love—it is missing something important if it lacks attachment to its object. Nevertheless, such impoverished romantic love is still genuine romantic love, and so romantic love can deviate from the paradigmatic kind by lacking attachment. Similarly, romantic love can deviate from the paradigmatic kind by including a desire for a romantic relationship that falls short of a full-blown romantic partnership. And finally, while it is hard to imagine a real romantic lover that does not trust their beloved at all or that does not have a heightened emotional sensitivity to their lover-directed words and deeds, if someone, *S*, had at least the first four constituents of paradigmatic romantic love for another, *A*, along with a desire for some type of romantic relationship with *A*, then it still seems like *S* would romantically love *A*, although it would be impoverished compared to the paradigmatic form. Overall, then, my account of romantic love understands it as something that either takes the paradigmatic form or else deviates from it by (a) having a desire

for something that falls short of a full-blown romantic partnership, (b) lacking attachment, (c) lacking trust, (d) lacking the heightened emotional sensitivity to the beloved's lover-directed words and deeds, or some combination of these four possibilities. Accordingly, so long as love is constituted by the first four constituents and a desire for a romantic relationship, it counts as romantic love. The mutual romantic love component of romantic partnership, then, consists in the parties involved each romantically loving the other along the lines of this account of romantic love.

Before we move on to the final aspects of romantic partnership, note the following virtues of my account of romantic love. One is that it nicely captures the constitutional complexity of romantic love by (1) allowing it to constitutionally vary across cases, while (2) insisting that such love is at least constituted by a disposition to feel affection for the beloved, special caring about the beloved's welfare, devotion to the beloved's will, regarding the beloved as irreplaceable and being unwilling to accept substitutes for them, and a desire for a romantic relationship with the beloved. This also seems to strike the right balance between being too strict and not strict enough: it avoids being too strict by allowing romantic love to constitutionally vary across cases rather than insisting that it can only come in its paradigmatic form, yet it avoids being too lax by requiring that romantic love be minimally constituted by features that seem necessary for such love.

Furthermore, my account nicely captures the affectionate nature of romantic love without misconstruing such love as something that comes and goes due to being partly or entirely constituted by feelings of affection that come and go. And finally, my account allows us to understand how romantic love differs from non-romantic love: unlike the latter kind of love, the former is partly constituted by a desire for a romantic relationship with the beloved.<sup>24</sup> The first four essential constituents of romantic love are not unique to that kind of love; instead, they are essential constituents of all love. The desire for a romantic relationship with the beloved, by contrast, is the essential constituent of romantic love that is unique to it and that sets it apart from other, non-romantic forms of love. It is this desire, under my account, that puts the "romantic" in romantic love.

### **The Nature of Romantic Partnership, Part 3: Long-Term Commitment and Respect**

This brings us to the serious, long-term commitment component of romantic partnership. As I think of it, this is actually a dual commitment: one to the other

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24. Brogaard (2022) rightfully affirms the need for our theories of love to account for or explain this difference.

person and another to the relationship. The commitment to the other person is one to generally take care of them and respect their wishes, to give them a significant amount of authority over one's autonomy, such as by granting them the authority to set limits on sexual or other social behavior, and to more generally build a life together. The commitment to the relationship, by contrast, is one to sustaining the relationship. These commitments at least involve (a) the autonomous endorsement of caring for the other and respecting both their wishes and authoritative decisions as important ideals to live up to, (b) the endorsement of the relationship as something important to protect and preserve, and (c) volitional dispositions to act on these endorsements.

One final element of romantic partnership that seems important to include is *mutual respect*. In particular, romantic partners paradigmatically have what Stephen Darwall (1977) calls "appraisal respect" for each other, where such respect refers to the positive overall regard of the other based on a positive overall appraisal of them. Accordingly, let's now define the paradigmatic form of romantic partnership as a personal relationship characterized by the following:

*Romance*: non-sexual acts or shared activities, or shared sexual activities, that are (1) intimate and not rushed, (2) wanted and welcome, (3) warm to hot, and (4) intended to be shared and enjoyed with specific others as romantic interests, where this last feature serves to indicate the special status of the other parties as romantic interests.

*Mutual (paradigmatic) romantic love*: mutual dispositions to feel affection for the other, mutual special caring about the other's welfare, mutual devotion to the other's will, mutually regarding the other as irreplaceable and being unwilling to accept substitutes for them, mutual desire for a romantic partnership, mutual attachment toward the other, mutual trust in the other, and mutual heightened emotional sensitivity to the other's words and deeds directed toward them.

*Mutual respect*: positive overall regard for each other based on positive overall character appraisals.

*Mutual commitment*: mutual autonomous endorsement of (a) the relationship as important to preserve and (b) caring for the other and respecting both their wishes and authoritative decisions as important ideals to live up to, plus (c) volitional dispositions to act on these endorsements.

We should admit, though, that romantic partnerships can slightly deviate from this paradigmatic kind and yet still count as such partnerships. We have already

seen how romantic love, under my sketch of it, can deviate from the paradigmatic kind and still count as such, and so romantic partnership can deviate from its paradigmatic kind by containing romantic love which deviates in the same way. Also, while romantic partnership cannot survive the loss of romance, mutual romantic love, or mutual commitment, if it lacks the component of mutual respect, while it does seem like it could still exist, it would do so in an odd and impoverished form. Accordingly, romantic partnership can deviate from the paradigmatic form of it by lacking the mutual respect component or by lacking paradigmatic romantic love in both parties so long as there is still romance, mutual romantic love, and mutual commitment.

In addition to its virtuous inclusion of constitutional variability across cases of romantic partnership, my account of such partnership is inclusive in another very important, virtuous sense: It allows non-heterosexual, asexual, polyamorous, and even patriarchal arrangements to involve romantic partnership. Since romance can be present without sex, asexual individuals can enjoy romantic partnerships. Also, there is no requirement of heterosexuality or monogamy. Although it might turn out that many people may only be able to have a monogamous romantic partnership, for all that my account says, a paradigmatic romantic partnership can consistently be maintained with multiple people, and so polyamorous individuals can enjoy them. And though patriarchy and patriarchal ideologies are detestable, so long as those that adhere to such ideologies are genuinely capable of having personal relationships together that meet the above conditions of paradigmatic romantic partnership, then even couples that have internalized and adhere to patriarchal ideologies can enjoy such partnership. Now this does not mean that such internalized patriarchy is not a hindrance to romantic partnerships. It might be that such relationships, at least between men and women who have internalized and adhere to patriarchal ideologies, are more difficult to achieve. All I am claiming here is that, for all that my account says, it is possible for those who have internalized patriarchal ideologies to enjoy paradigmatic romantic partnerships.

However, despite its inclusiveness, my account of romantic partnership might seem too strict.<sup>25</sup> While my account allows romantic partnership to constitutionally vary across cases, it becomes strict when claiming that such partnership cannot survive if there is no romance, no mutual romantic love, or no mutual commitment. Under my account, then, romantic partnership requires these three things, which might seem too strict. But while this is strict in that it demands that certain conditions obtain between two people before they can share a genuine romantic partnership, this seems appropriately demanding rather than too strict. After all, a partnership that is romantic in nature must

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25. Thanks to an anonymous reviewer from another journal for pressing this objection.

contain romance or else it is not romantic in the first place, and so the requirement of romance seems appropriate. Furthermore, when two people describe themselves as “romantic partners,” they are indicating that they are in a serious, long-term relationship of mutual commitment, and if one of them turned out to not romantically love the other, then it would no longer seem appropriate to call them “romantic partners” even if they might still be close to being such partners. At any rate, the requirements of romantic partnership that my account affirms—romance, mutual romantic love, and mutual commitment—seem entirely appropriate rather than too strict. In fact, my account seems to strike the right balance between being too strict or too lax: it avoids being too strict by allowing romantic partnership to deviate from its paradigmatic form, yet it avoids being too lax by requiring romance, mutual romantic love, and mutual commitment, which all seem to be required for a genuine romantic partnership.

## **The Nature of Close Friendship**

Now that I have described and modestly justified my account of romantic partnership, I can move on to my account of close friendship. Like my earlier account of romantic love, my account of close friendship is both informed by what other commentators have said and attempts to weave these ideas from others together into a plausible account of close friendship, but the account is novel. Also, my account of close friendship, like my accounts of romantic love and romantic partnership, understands such friendship as admitting of a paradigmatic form along with deviations from that form. I shall start, then, with paradigmatic close friendship and then explain an important way that it can deviate from that paradigmatic form.

Under my account of close friendship, such friendship is, like all friendship, a personal, historically extended relationship that involves repeated interaction over time between particular individuals. More generally, friendship involves shared activities and experiences,<sup>26</sup> and close friendship—at least in its paradigmatic form—must involve a very healthy level of these interactions and other shared activities and experiences. It is hard to say how “healthy” this must be, but paradigmatic examples of close friends are those in which the friends consistently and frequently interact and share other activities and experiences. Let me elaborate on the character of these activities and experiences before moving on to the psychological elements of paradigmatic close friendship.

Besides interacting frequently, close friends will paradigmatically spend time together, whether they are just passing the time with one another or engaging

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26. Telfer (1971: 223, 230), Blum (1980: 198), Armstrong (1985: 213, 215), Annis (1987: 349), Badhwar (1993: 13), Jeske (2008: 46–47, 59–60), Helm (2010: 34; 2013), Seglow (2013: 91, 95–96), and McKeever (2022) all endorse this idea.

in more defined joint pursuits. Like all friends, close friends do not only spend time together coincidentally or as a foreseen by-product of doing their own things; they do so intentionally. Moreover, they do not engage in activities with each other only as part of a cooperative venture ultimately aimed at personal benefit, or only as part of occupying certain roles that demand such activities (e.g., members of an admissions committee). Friends do and experience things together when their agency runs free, whether it is talking, goofing around or partying, playing games, going on outings, or just “hanging out.” Their shared activities and experiences are intended to be shared specifically with the other party or parties (Helm 2013), which indicates the special status of the other(s) as one’s friend(s).

Furthermore, according to many commentators, the shared activities and experiences of friendship involve some degree of intimacy, while some commentators further maintain that these intimate activities involve the disclosure of self-information.<sup>27</sup> As Armstrong (1985: 215) suggests, however, it might be too strong to think that friendship in general must involve intimacy and personal self-disclosure. Hugh LaFollette (1996: 108–110) maintains that intimacy occurs when someone privately and sensitively reveals something significant about themselves or their personality, where this information can be revealed verbally or through non-verbal behavior. It seems at least possible, however, for two people to be friends even if they do not have an intimate relationship. Imagine two people who meet at work and, after some cordial interactions, eventually get together each weekend to play racquetball. They genuinely desire to spend time specifically with each other playing racquetball and enjoy the time they spend together, and they both like the other and non-instrumentally care about them. This gives them at least a strong claim to being friends. However, although there is no way for them to avoid revealing information about themselves, their verbal and non-verbal behavior never quite reaches the level of genuine intimacy because they never speak or act in ways that are specifically designed to *privately* convey personal information about themselves. Although they are open about themselves and thereby reveal information about themselves, this openness does not amount to intimacy.

But even if, in light of such examples, we grant that friendship per se need not involve intimacy and personal self-disclosure, the same surely is not true of *close* friendship. As Lawrence Thomas (1987: 217) points out, the idea of close friends that do not confide in each other seems unthinkable. Indeed, the

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27. Blum (1980: 194), Friedman (1989: 8), La Follette (1996), Helm (2010: 5, 34, 255), and Seglow (2013: 95, 101) endorse this first claim in some form or another, while Annis (1987: 349) endorses the second. Jeske (2008: 46–47) can also be understood as endorsing the first claim by using friendship as the representative of intimate relationships in general. Thomas (1987: 217, 223, 226–227; 1990: 49) and McKeever (2022) endorse them both.

presence of intimacy—or perhaps a high level of it—between friends seems to be a plausible candidate (perhaps among others) for distinguishing them as close friends rather than basic ones. At any rate, I shall treat intimacy and mutual self-disclosure as paradigmatic features of the shared activities and experiences of close friendship, and so we can provisionally define paradigmatic close friendship as *a personal, historically-extended relationship between two people that involves repeated interaction and other shared activities and experiences, where these activities and experiences (1) are intentionally undertaken when agency runs free and intended to be shared specifically with the other party, and (2) sometimes involve intimacy and mutual self-disclosure.*

We now need to supplement this incomplete definition with the psychological realities of paradigmatic close friendship. Staying focused for now on the activities and experiences of friendship, friends must non-instrumentally desire to share some of these activities and experiences (Telfer 1971: 225; Cocking & Kennett 2000: 284; Jeske 2008: 46–47, 54–55). Someone who does not really want to spend time with you, but only does so because you buy the beer, or because they feel sorry for you, or because they want to do good deeds, or because it is prudent to do so, is not a true friend, let alone a close one. Furthermore, friends must be disposed to enjoy the activities and experiences they share together as friends (Blum 1980: 198; Hoffman 1980: 111; Badhwar 1993: 2–3; Seglow 2013: 90). People who never enjoy spending time with you, and whose lack of enjoyment here cannot be traced to depression or some other condition that compromises their ability to experience joy, certainly do not seem to be friends. At the very least, they are not *close* friends.

Besides these psychological realities focused on the shared activities and experiences of friendship, close friendship will be partly constituted by various psychological realities focused on the other person as well as others focused on the relationship itself. Beginning with the former, friendship involves a mutual affective dimension: friends must like each other.<sup>28</sup> If people do not like you,

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28. Not surprisingly, many commentators agree: Blum (1980: 198), Armstrong (1985: 215), Annis (1987: 349), Friedman (1989: 3, 5), Badhwar (1993: 2–3, 13), Cocking and Kennett (2000: 284), White (2001: 27), Arneson (2003: 389), Jeske (2008: 46–47, 50–52), Seglow (2013: 90, 95), and McKeever (2022) all endorse something along these lines. Nevertheless, two anonymous reviewers have questioned this widely endorsed idea by pointing to alleged counterexamples. One reviewer cites so-called “frenemies” as counterexamples: It is not uncommon, they maintain, for people to have “frenemies” that they do not like but still call friends. However, as the very concept itself suggests, a “frenemy” is not quite a friend and not quite an enemy; instead, it is something that resembles both but lies somewhere in between. Accordingly, the person who calls a genuine “frenemy” a friend is mistaken in calling them a “friend” rather than a “frenemy.” Moreover, if “frenemies” are to be understood in part as people that we do not like, then far from showing that friends need not like each other, this serves to shed light on the nature of these so-called “frenemies” and how they differ from friends while resembling enemies: they differ from friends that are liked and resemble enemies that are not liked by not being liked. The other reviewer claims

then they are not your friends no matter how much time they spend with you. Of course, friends do not constantly experience occurrent feelings of liking each other even though they are constantly friends, and so this mutual liking cannot be understood in terms of these constant feelings. Instead, this mutual liking is better understood in terms of mutual dispositions to feel affection for each other, since these dispositions, unlike the feelings that they produce, are constant and therefore can be part of why two people are constant friends. Also, according to many commentators, friendship involves mutual concern for the other's welfare,<sup>29</sup> where this mutual concern is the same kind of special concern (i.e., non-instrumental and partial) that we saw earlier when discussing the constituents of romantic love. As part of this mutual special concern, then, friends will each desire, for its own sake, that the other fare well and flourish (Telfer 1971: 224; Arneson 2003: 389). If people do not care about your welfare at all, or if they only care about it because of how beneficial you are to them when faring well, or if they care about it only as much as they care about the welfare of strangers, then they are not your friends.

Additionally, just as we saw with love between romantic partners, this mutual special concern for the other in friendship is mirrored by analogous orientations toward the other's will, where these orientations explain the mutual receptivity to direction and interpretation from the other.<sup>30</sup> The mutually regarding the other as irreplaceable and being unwilling to trade them in for a replacement that we saw in romantic partnership also reappears in friendship as well: friends, especially close ones, will see each other as irreplaceable (McMurty 1982: 169; Seglow 2013: 91; Baltzly & Kennett 2017: 112) and will not be willing to accept

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that it is tempting to see friends that are sources of "stress, struggle, or psychological challenge" as ones that are sometimes not liked. But now imagine that you regard two people—Smith and Jones—as friends. Smith, however, does not actually like you because of how stressful you are to them or how much of a struggle it is for them to be in a relationship with you, whereas Jones still likes you despite the stress or the struggle that they endure as a result of their relationship with you. In this case, it seems justified to think that Jones could still be a real friend, especially because they still like you despite these costs that they pay to be in a relationship with you. By contrast, it seems like you would be completely justified in thinking that Smith is not really your friend after all, precisely because, it turns out, they do not like you. I myself would wonder: why is Smith even spending time with me? If it is not because they like me and want to hang out with me, then it must be for some other reason, perhaps because they pity me or because they just don't want to hurt my feelings by admitting that they don't really like me and don't want to spend time with me. But even though these reasons might betray the fact that Smith still cares about me, they seem to reinforce the idea that Smith is not really my friend after all.

29. This idea is endorsed in some form or another by Telfer (1971: 224), Blum (1980: 194–195, 197), Hoffman (1980: 112), Annis (1987: 349), Friedman (1989: 8), Badhwar (1993: 14), Cocking & Kennett (2000: 283), White (2001: 27), Jeske (2008: 46–47), Helm (2010: 2, 5, 34, 255; 2013), Seglow (2013: 90, 95, 97), and McKeever (2022).

30. Cocking and Kennett (2000) stress this mutual receptivity to direction and interpretation as the defining characteristic of friendship.

substitutes for them.<sup>31</sup> Close friends will also typically be attached to each other in at least the minimal sense of being disposed to experience distress at the prospect of long-term separation from the other. Furthermore, according to many commentators, friendship must involve mutual trust.<sup>32</sup> Close friends, especially, will typically trust each other. And finally, close friends will typically have a heightened emotional sensitivity to the other's words and deeds directed at them, especially negative ones: it is likely to hurt much more when close friends say or do negative things toward each other compared to non-friends saying or doing the same negative things toward them. Combining these other-focused psychological realities with the mutual desire for the activities and experiences of friendship together, then, we can say that, at least in paradigmatic cases, *close friends love each other*.<sup>33</sup>

Yet another important, paradigmatic component of friendship is mutual respect (Armstrong 1985: 214–215; Friedman 1989: 5; Badhwar 1993: 2–3, 13; White 2001: 27). In particular, friends typically have what we earlier called “appraisal respect” for each other, where such respect again refers to the positive overall regard of the other based on a positive overall appraisal of them, which can be as simple as thinking that the other person is “cool.” These appraisals may of course be mistaken, but they definitely tend to characterize people that are friends.

As for the psychological realities focused on the relationship, close friends will care about their friendship and will be committed to it: just like romantic partners, close friends will endorse their friendship as a very important end worth sustaining and will have volitional dispositions to act on this endorsement. We can now define the paradigmatic kind of close friendship as a personal, historically-extended relationship characterized by the following:

*The interactions, activities, and experiences of close friendship:* repeated interaction and other shared activities and experiences that (1) are intentionally undertaken when agency runs free and intended to be shared specifically with the other party, (2) sometimes involve intimacy and mutual self-disclosure, and (3) tend to be enjoyed by the parties involved.

31. Helm (2010) indirectly endorses the point about irreplaceability by endorsing both that friends love each other and that love involves regarding the beloved as irreplaceable.

32. Blum (1980: 194), Armstrong (1985: 214–215), Annis (1987: 350), Thomas (1987: 217, 222; 1990: 49), Friedman (1989: 3, 7–8), Badhwar (1993: 2–3, 13–14), Lamb (1997: 29), White (2001: 16), Jeske (2008: 61), Seglow (2013: 91), and McKeever (2022) endorse this idea.

33. The idea that friends love each other is found in Thomas (1990: 49), Badhwar (1993: 2–3), Simon (1993: 121), and Helm (2010: 5, 34, 255; 2013). My only official claim here is the narrower one that, in paradigmatic cases of close friendship, the friends love each other, which is very similar to Brogaard's claim that close friendship is the most natural context of friendship love (Brogaard 2022). I remain non-committal with respect to the wider claim that friends love each other, although I suspect that it is too strong.

Mutual love: mutual dispositions to feel affection for the other, mutual special concern for the other and its analogue that grounds mutual receptivity to direction and interpretation, mutually regarding the other as irreplaceable and being unwilling to accept substitutes for them, mutual desire for the activities and experiences of friendship with the other, mutual attachment to the other, mutual trust in the other, and mutual heightened emotional sensitivity to the other's words and deeds directed toward them.

Mutual respect: positive overall regard for each other based on positive overall character appraisals.

Mutual commitment: mutual endorsement of the relationship along with volitional dispositions to act on these endorsements.

And, similarly to romantic partnership, close friendship can deviate from its paradigmatic kind and still count as such friendship (although deviations here do seem to render such friendship less close than the above paradigmatic form of it). It seems possible, for instance, for close friends to lack mutual attachment toward each other. Though mutual attachment does seem to make friends closer than they are without it, it does not seem warranted to think that the lack of mutual attachment automatically makes friends non-close ones: two friends who satisfy all of the above conditions of paradigmatic close friendship except for the mutual attachment condition still seem to count as close friends even if they could be even closer friends by being mutually attached to each other. It also seems possible—albeit very odd—for close friendship to lack the mutual respect component since it seems possible for a close friend to lose appraisal respect for the other and still continue to be close friends with that person. At any rate, these close-but-odd friendships seem metaphysically possible, and my account of close friendship recognizes them as such.

## Romantic Partnership as Close Friendship

With my accounts of romantic partnership and close friendship now on the table, we are ready to see how romantic partnership satisfies my account of close friendship and thereby counts as such friendship. Just like the paradigmatic form of close friendship just sketched, romantic partnership is a personal relationship characterized by mutual love (and thus by mutual receptivity to direction and interpretation), mutual respect, and mutual commitment. Of course, the mutual love and mutual commitment involved in these relationships are different. The

mutual love of romantic partnership is romantic because it distinctively contains the mutual desire for a romantic relationship, while the mutual love in just close friendship is non-romantic because it only contains the mutual desire for the activities and experiences of friendship. However, even though I did not stress them earlier when discussing the nature of romantic partnership, such partnership—and indeed romantic relationships more generally—will be largely constituted by what I have been calling *the interactions, activities, and experiences of close friendship*: repeated interaction and other shared activities and experiences that (1) are intentionally undertaken when agency runs free and intended to be shared specifically with the other party, (2) involve intimacy and mutual self-disclosure, and (3) tend to be enjoyed by the parties involved. Even romance, which is intimate and enjoyable, undertaken when agency runs free, and intended to be shared specifically with other parties, counts as such interactions, activities, and experiences! To have a desire for a romantic relationship, then, is to have a desire for something that is largely constituted by the activities and experiences of friendship, and so the desire for a romantic relationship counts as a way of desiring the activities and experiences of friendship. The mutual romantic love that is a constituent of romantic partnership thus counts as an instance of the mutual love that is a constituent of close friendship (although the reverse is not the case).<sup>34</sup>

As for the different mutual commitments involved, the mutual commitment involved in romantic partnership is partly a commitment to care for the other partner and to give them a significant amount of authority over one's autonomy, which is not required for close friendship. While just close friends will be committed to generally respecting each other's wishes and will care about each other non-instrumentally and partially, they need not give each other—and typically will not give each other—significant authority over their autonomy as romantic partners do. However, since both relationships involve a commitment to preserving the relationship and some commitment to the other person, we can understand the difference here as one of simple addition: The mutual commitment

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34. One might object by maintaining that it does not follow from the fact that someone desires something that they then count as desiring each of its constituents. Many people, for instance, desire to be philosophy professors but do not desire to grade papers. Similarly, then, those that desire romantic relationships need not desire the activities and experiences of friendship that largely constitute them. But while it is certainly true that the desire for some complex object, O, does not imply the desire for any given constituent of O, it is hard to make sense of someone who wants a romantic relationship with someone without wanting the interactions and activities of friendship that will largely constitute the relationship. After all, while we need not desire every part of a romantic relationship to want one, we must want at least *some* parts of one to want one; and if we want a personal *relationship* that is *romantic*, which is, by its very nature, something that requires ongoing interaction that contains at least some romance, then what else would we want instead of these activities and experiences of friendship that largely constitute the relationship? If we did not want romance or other, non-romantic activities and experiences of friendship, then how would we still want a romantic relationship rather than something else entirely?

of romantic partnership is like the commitment one finds in paradigmatic close friendship, plus a distinctive commitment to grant the other partner some authority over one's autonomy. The mutual commitment of romantic partnership, then, counts as an instance of the mutual commitment that is part of close friendship.

It should now be evident that paradigmatic romantic partnership, along with romantic partnership that slightly deviates from its paradigm by containing only a mutual desire for a romantic relationship of some type, will both satisfy all of the defining characteristics of paradigmatic close friendship and thereby count as such friendship. The mutual respect in them all is the same, and the mutual romantic love and mutual commitment of the romantic partnerships count as instances of the mutual love and commitment of paradigmatic close friendship. Also, these romantic partnerships are largely characterized by the interactions and other activities and experiences of close friendship, and such partnerships further include romance as a distinctive kind of such activity. Furthermore, romantic partnership that deviates in other ways from its paradigmatic form will count as close friendship that deviates from *its* paradigmatic form, since the former relationships will satisfy the conditions of close friendship that deviates from its paradigmatic form. *Romantic partnerships, then, are close friendships.*

Accordingly, the characteristics that are present in romantic partnership but absent from close, just friendship—romance, a mutual desire for a romantic relationship and thus mutual romantic love, and mutual commitment to give the other some authority over one's autonomy—do not serve to mark off romantic partnership as a different kind of personal relationship from friendship altogether. They rather mark it off as a specific, romantic kind of close, loving friendship that is importantly different from close, loving, just friendship. One can still say “we’re just friends” to indicate only a close friendship. In this case, the friendship might satisfy my account of close friendship, but not my account of romantic partnership. This is consistent with romantic partnership satisfying both accounts and thereby counting as a romantic kind of close friendship. People can also say “we will remain close friends” when their romantic partnership ends to indicate that they will continue to be close friends, which is something that we could not say if the shift from romantic partnership to close, just friendship amounted to a shift from one kind of personal relationship to a completely different kind (we would have to say instead that “we will *become* close friends”).

## Responding to Objections

This brings us to addressing the three critics mentioned at the outset. Let's begin with Caroline Simon (1993: 125), who claims that romantic partnership and friendship are different kinds of affectionate human relationships. Although

she treats them both as kinds of love that involve a tension between union and shared identity, on the one hand, and autonomy and independence on the other (121), she nevertheless wants to draw a sharp distinction between these affectionate human relationships (124), which she does with the intriguing idea that, in romantic partnership, the balance between the things in tension leans in favor of union and shared identity, whereas in friendship, the balance leans in favor of autonomy and independence. She also claims that an essential element of friendship is “standing at a distance” (1993: 121), which is certainly going to be at odds with the *close* relationship of romantic partnership, and so this important difference between the two relationships further indicates a sharp distinction between different kinds of affectionate human relationships.

But while Simon appears to argue for a position at odds with my view, it is not entirely clear that this is so. She clearly wants to draw a distinction between friendship and romantic partnership (which she calls, following Nozick, a “we”), but it is not clear if we should understand her as drawing a sharp distinction between romantic partnership and friendship *per se*, or instead as drawing a distinction between romantic partnership and what I call “just, basic friendship,” which is a valid distinction that my view acknowledges and understands as that between a specific form of romantic, close friendship and non-romantic, non-close friendship. In fact, at one point Simon presents the difference between romantic partnership and friendship as “the proverbial difference between black and white” (1993: 125), which suggests that she is drawing a distinction between different, non-overlapping kinds of friendship that nevertheless exist on the same friendship continuum. In the terminology adopted here, she seems to be drawing a distinction between a specific form of romantic friendship and just, basic friendship, which are indeed different, non-overlapping kinds of friendship that are plausibly differentiated in the ways she describes. Just, basic friendship—or non-romantic, non-close friendship—does seem to essentially involve some distance between the friends that helps to mark off such friendship from close friendships, which include the romantic ones of romantic partnerships, but differences in this distance only serve, at most, to differentiate between different kinds of friendship—they do not show that romantic partnership and friendship are different kinds of relationships altogether.

Moreover, Simon speaks of “the union/individuation continuum” and asks where friendship ceases and romantic partnership begins (1993: 125), which further supports a friendly interpretation of her ideas that render them consistent with the view defended here: she is again suggesting that just, basic friendship and romantic partnership lie on the same friendship continuum, where the former lies on the individuation end and the latter on the union end. This is yet another way of understanding different kinds of friendship that lie on the same friendship continuum: just, basic friendships—which again are non-romantic,

non-close ones—have the most distance, autonomy, and independence, and as these change in favor of closeness, union, and shared identity, we eventually move into the territory of close friendship, and once we reach the height of union and shared identity, we have romantic partnership. Overall, then, Simon's interesting ideas about romantic partnership and friendship, while in need of development and scrutiny, are quite compatible with my view.

Next, we have James Conlon (1995), who argues that the union between lover and friend is an impossible ideal because love and friendship are two discrete genres of human intimacy that, like the poem and the novel, cannot be combined.<sup>35</sup> According to Conlon's unfriendly position, romantic partnership cannot be a species of friendship because these relationships constitute discrete genres of human intimacy as seen in the differential gains and losses from shifting between the two. Moving from just friendship to romantic partnership, for example, may increase physical intimacy, but it may also come with a loss in non-physical intimacy (perhaps just friendship is slightly more fertile for personal self-disclosure). Conversely, breaking off a romantic partnership in favor of being just friends will almost certainly reduce physical intimacy and, indeed, the level of intimacy in general, and it will certainly involve less of what McMurty calls a "life-sharing" between two people. In a nutshell: Since romantic partnership and friendship have different profiles of intimacy, they count as discrete kinds of personal relationship, and so romantic partnership is not a kind of friendship.

However, even if romantic partnership and just friendship have different profiles of intimacy, it does not follow that romantic partnership and friendship are discrete kinds of personal relationships. Different profiles of intimacy, like differences in distance, may rather indicate different kinds of friendship that lie on the same friendship continuum. As I suggested, basic friendship may not have any intimacy in it, and in general such friendship is probably best characterized by comparatively low levels of intimacy. Close friendship, by contrast, must contain intimacy and will characteristically contain comparatively high levels. Differences in intimacy between personal relationships, then, may indicate that these relationships constitute different kinds of friendship—namely, basic friendship versus close friendship. Alternatively, differences in intimacy between personal relationships may instead indicate that we are dealing with romantic friendship versus just friendship. And we can account for these differences in intimacy across friendships by saying that they are only differences in the interactions and other shared activities and experiences of friendship, which is why these differences mark out distinctions within friendship rather than between friendship and other kinds of personal relationships.

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35. Although Conlon's argument can do without the analogy here, I wonder if Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy* constitutes a counterexample to his claim that the poem and the novel cannot be combined.

Lastly, we have Richard White (2001: 66), who claims that assimilating romantic partnership to friendship destroys it. According to this unfriendly position, assimilating romantic partnership to friendship destroys it as romantic partnership, and our claim that romantic partnership is a form of friendship assimilates the former to the latter. In claiming that romantic partnership is a form of friendship, then, we destroy romantic partnership rather than capture its nature, which surely spells doom for the position defended here.

This objection, however, will collapse once we specify what it might mean to “assimilate romantic partnership to friendship.” On the one hand, if this refers to *reducing* romantic partnership to friendship such that there is no longer any real difference between what I have been calling just friendship and romantic partnership, then assimilating romantic partnership to friendship is indeed wrong-headed, but the view articulated and defended here is guilty of no such assimilation. This view maintains that romantic partnership is a romantic kind of friendship that is to be distinguished from just friendship, which preserves and vindicates the distinction between romantic partnership and just friendship. On the other hand, if “assimilating romantic partnership to friendship” only refers to construing romantic partnership as a kind of friendship, as my view clearly does, then it is wrong-headed to say that such assimilation destroys romantic partnership. This assimilation is based on showing that romantic partnership satisfies the conditions of close friendship, which I have done with my accounts of these relationships. No violence is done to romantic partnership by showing that it satisfies the conditions of close friendship and thereby counts as one type of such friendship.

## Conclusion

This paper has attempted to justify the thesis that romantic partnership is a form of friendship by arguing that such partnership is a romantic form of close friendship. After demonstrating the apparent inadequacy of previously suggested attempts to substantiate the romantic-partnership-as-friendship thesis, I offered my own argument for a similar thesis by (1) offering accounts of romantic partnership and close friendship and (2) explaining how such partnership satisfies the account of the latter and thereby counts as a romantic form of close friendship. Then I defended my view by addressing critics of the romantic-partnership-as-friendship thesis, where one of those critics (Caroline Simon) turned out to be more of a friend than foe. Like the suggested arguments from Eric Hoffman and John McMurty, my attempt to vindicate my version of the romantic-partnership-as-friendship thesis could end up failing by relying on an inadequate account of close friendship. It would also fail if I have

inadequately described romantic partnership. My accounts of these personal relationships, however, are quite plausible and suffer from no obvious defects; there is no clear reason, at this point at least, to doubt their adequacy. Therefore, until demonstrated otherwise, we can provisionally conclude that these accounts are correct and thus that romantic partnership is a romantic form of close friendship.

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