

I. Introduction

C.S. Lewis, in the “Friendship” section of his work *The Four Loves*, implies that a growing number of women are uncultured and a threat to the humanity-elevating phenomenon of friendship. He derogatorily implies that “Women’s Magazines” and concerns about the personal go hand-in-hand with a nefarious scheme to degrade the culture and friendship of women and particularly men alike. This essay will seek to argue that “Women’s Magazines” and other trivialities of “silly women” are not trivialities but rather a good basis for the matrix of Friendship, similar to the “shop talk” that Lewis attributes to men, and that their increased prevalence and acceptance in society has improved friendship, not degraded it.

II. Background

In the “Friendship” section of *The Four Loves*, Lewis posits that friendship is a type of love shared between two people upon realization of a common perception of life they believed uncommon—an “aha!” moment about not being alone in beliefs, values or interests. Working or spending time together, Lewis argues, is the “matrix of Friendship,” borne from a need for communication for efficiency or even survival. With cooperation comes “talking shop,” and with “talking shop” doors open for the realization of common values and friendship.

As this essay discusses trivialities it is also useful to understand Lewis’s views on the importance of the seemingly unimportant. In chapter two of *The Four Loves*, Lewis describes “pleasures” akin to love, lesser in degree but not in importance. Lewis argues that these pleasures are the foundations of higher-order concepts and priorities, such as (of the former) beauty, societal concord, and (of the latter) survival. In this argument, he references the Latin phrase, “the highest does not stand without the lowest.”

III. Argument

Lewis attributes the phenomenon of “talking shop” mostly to men, originating in hunter-gatherer days, but continuing into the modern era. He acknowledges that women lead separate lives than men but claims a lack of understanding with which to explore them. Lewis does explore their lives when pronouncing an alleged degradation of friendship of and by women caused by a lower emphasis on work and increased educational disparity in mid-20th century middle class society. Being more removed from ‘the shop’ and from conversational equals of any gender, these alienated women might pose a threat to the friendships of themselves and particularly their husbands, some engaging in what Lewis calls “the conscious war against Friendship.” The trivialities which comprise their lives, such as reading “Women’s Magazines” and “narrative” conversation allegedly predispose them to this toxic behavior.

This stance may not be entirely thought out, particularly given Lewis’s own points about the simple throughout his work. Lewis asserts that minutia such as a walk through nature help form our concepts of beauty and aesthetics at large. “Talking shop,” as Lewis describes in the context of men, is a part of the foundation of mutual togetherness which friendship can be built upon or spring from. Lewis underestimates the ability of the women of his time to ‘see the forest for the trees.’ In a society in which expectations imposed upon women include keeping up appearances of the house, of the self, and of the family within society, discussions about who does what or magazine articles about the fashionable are not a dangerous departure from what Lewis calls “real women’s talk,” but rather an adaptation of women’s ‘shop talk’ with the times. As men may no longer discuss the best way to take down a saber-toothed tiger, the content of whatever it is Lewis supposes women talk about cannot be expected to remain static either. It is a common fallacy that radical changes in society can be expected to worsen it. With every new

James Cox

technology or development, such as the printing press, the radio, or the latest generation's music, someone always comes out of the woodwork assuming the worst. Though society may change, it does so and moves on, and the Earth continues spinning unabated.

In the modern age, more women are being educated and more men are being exposed to pop culture and fashion. Men are also more reliant upon themselves for self-care, responsibilities that in Lewis's time may have been delegated to women and written about in "womanly" magazines (keeping a nice house, buying clothes and decorating, etc.). Even ignoring the fact that society has suffered no breakdowns in the occurrence of friendship, the increased prevalence of what C.S. Lewis may have referred to as 'womanly things' provides more fertile soil for friendship or at least its matrix to form across both sexes. It is not uncommon for men and women to know about the latest movie stars and their escapades; if nothing else, it provides fodder for elevator talk. In the age of the internet, bonds can form in activist communities as society now has the means to hold the often-flawed prominent figures we idolize accountable as people, fostering higher orders of conversation about morality and justice. Society is made up of people, and even a "narrative" discussion of people potentially lends itself to talking about concepts rather than merely people. Furthermore, as the influence of gender roles has diminished with time (though they are still prevalent), more women and men are likely to cross typically gendered boundaries in their careers, their home lives, and their social lives. The fresh perspectives brought into fields and discussions by gender mixing have largely brought improvement, not deterioration as supposed by Lewis. Home improvement, for example, has become more informed by ideas of decoration and aesthetics that might be found, say, in *Better Homes and Gardens*, thus leading to better, more pleasing, and more informed homes and gardens. What husband would not like to share the "shop" with their wife, if they truly want to

James Cox

share the “same truth” with them? With boundaries about what may be discussed in polite society dissolving, men and women, men and men, and women and women are all more likely to become friends by helping each other through hard times with informed discussion of problems. Real discourse about stressful feelings is far more effective than a few shared beers or a home-cooked meal and a “there there” in relieving an uneasy mind.

IV. Conclusion

While perhaps in the state of 1950s society C.S. Lewis may have worried about forced attempts to integrate the sexes in friendship and society, it would seem that good things have come from it. Society is more open nowadays, and more doors are open for people to be friends with other people regardless of gender, though especially between genders. Society has improved for consideration of “trivialities,” particularly those which may have been relegated to the feminine.