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Erotic Love’s Prevalence Among Heterosexual Friendships – Is Lewis Correct?

**Introduction**

In C.S. Lewis' book The Four Loves, Lewis introduces an idea that friendships between men and women can seldom exist without their friendship turning into eros. However, he is incorrect in this claim. Even though these relations can occur with time, they are not a certainty and are not nearly as prevalent as he believes. C.S. Lewis' claim is weakened when we consider the concepts of the friend zone, friends with benefits, and dating in the workplace. I will analyze this through current social trends, the episode "The Deal" of Seinfeld, and information from specific careers such as the enlisted soldier and office worker.

**Background**

In his friendship chapter, Lewis claims that a heterosexual friendship, that is, between a man and a woman, is almost always impossible to sustain for a prolonged time without evolving into erotic love. To quote Lewis, "When the two people. . .are of different sexes, the friendship which arises between them will very easily pass – may pass in the first half hour – into erotic love. Indeed, unless they are physically repulsive to each other or unless one or both already loves elsewhere, it is almost certain to do so sooner or later" (Lewis, 67).[[1]](#footnote-1) This essay will aim to argue against his statement.

**Main Points**

The "friend zone" is commonly defined as a friendship where one party, usually the male, is denied eros by the other. While at first this appears to prove Lewis’ claim, as one party is in love with the other, Lewis believes that eros would arise in both parties. In almost all friends with benefits relationships, only one feels attracted to the other. Often, this relationship does not occur as a result of physical repulsion or love elsewhere, but rather, it is an attempt to preserve the friendship. It can also arise out of a lack of desire to date, perceived or real incompatibility in beliefs, distance, or other mitigating factors that could lead to the potential failure of a relationship. The friend zone is exceedingly common, especially among millennials and gen z individuals. Therefore, I can assume that heterosexual friendship does not almost certainly lead to love, when these “friend zone” interactions are so prevalent amongst them, and can sometimes even be encouraged.

Also, the episode "The Deal" of Seinfeld considers the topic of the feasibility of friends with benefits, or, in other words, having sexual intercourse with another without it becoming erotic love. While this episode concluded that a situation similar to this could never work out, it is essential to remember that sitcoms such as Seinfeld are exaggerated and do not necessarily represent how relationships function. Some are even deliberately misleading to prove a point or create a funny show. This episode also fails to analyze the previous romantic relationship between Elaine and Jerry, which could cause them to develop eros. However, since most friends with benefits do not have any prior commitments to each other, this is not a realistic scenario.

Additionally, in "The Deal," Elaine and Jerry discuss ground rules for their new relationship, which are not very clear. Also, the rules, while mutually agreed upon, were not fully understood, and Elaine in particular began to disapprove of them over time. These problems caused conflict to arise. Thirdly, there was little communication between the two parties, also leading to conflict.[[2]](#footnote-2) Finally, Elaine had romantic feelings elsewhere, which caused Jerry to become jealous. This lack of communication about the exclusivity of their relationship led to them clashing. All of these problems combine to assist in the failure of Elaine and Jerry's relationship. However, this is not a telling portrayal of how these relationships naturally occur. A study ran by Psychology Today, for example, states that 80 to 90% of friends with benefits situations do not lead to romantic attachment, and also states that friends with benefits can exist for many years without eros developing.[[3]](#footnote-3) When one considers these numbers, Lewis’ point becomes more and more implausible.

In addition to the friend zone and friends with benefits, interference of the workplace is a common problem that prevents eros from arising. While it is considered bad form to date a coworker in almost every career path, in some, it can lead to much more severe consequences for those involved. An example of this occurs in the United States Military, where dating someone above one’s rank, or fraternization, can lead to penalties as severe as a dishonorable discharge or jail time, among other consequences. They are not alone; many companies have anti-fraternization and anti-dating policies to prevent unnecessary workplace drama and cooperation between workers.[[4]](#footnote-4) However, the military has the strictest policy by far, as employers nearly always only implement sanctions up to the seriousness of termination. In cases where an anti-fraternization or dating policy is present, and in a world where the economy is unstable, and there are not enough jobs for everyone, this is usually enough of a threat to prevent workplace relationships from becoming erotic in nature. That said, while the parties involved must take care not to form an erotic connection, this does not necessarily prove Lewis’ claim. Erotic feelings, when not satisfied, can often dissipate over time. If this is the case, Lewis is still disproven.

**Objection**

One could contend that Lewis' argument is correct after all when one observes the rate of dating between coworkers in professional office situations. These numbers can indeed be high, potentially signifying that love between friends in the workplace is inevitable. However, studies done on this subject have revealed that rates of dating in the workplace have lowered drastically since 1990.[[5]](#footnote-5) This fact signifies that friendships are no longer developing into eros at the rate they once were, therefore encouraging the idea that Lewis is, in fact, incorrect.

**Conclusion**

In this essay, I aimed to prove the incorrectness of Lewis’s claim about the near-impossibility of friendship between the sexes by suggesting that the friend zone, friends with benefits relationships, and office fraternization and dating prevented eros. I made these points by providing information about current societal trends, a sitcom episode, and career policies.

1. C.S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (New York, Mariner Books, 1960), 64. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Seinfeld*, season 2, episode 9, “The Deal,” directed by Tom Cherones, aired May 2, 1991, on NBC. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Vrangalova, Zhana. “What Happens After Friends-With-Benefits?” Psychology Today. Feb 10, 2014. Accessed Feb 22, 2020. https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/strictly-casual/201402/what-happens-after-friends-benefits [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “Regulating Work Place Romances.” FindLaw. Accessed Feb 22, 2020. https://corporate.findlaw.com/litigation-disputes/regulating-work-place-romances.html [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “Office Romance Hits 10-Year Low, According to CareerBuilder’s Annual Valentine’s Day Survey.” CareerBuilder. Feb 1, 2018. Accessed Feb 22, 2020. http://press.careerbuilder.com/2018-02-01-Office-Romance-Hits-10-Year-Low-According-to-CareerBuilders-Annual-Valentines-Day-Survey [↑](#footnote-ref-5)