

# The emotions behind character friendship: From other-oriented emotions to the ‘bonding feeling’

Consuelo Martínez-Priego<sup>1</sup>  | Ana Romero-Iribas<sup>2</sup> 

<sup>1</sup>Departamento de Psicología,  
Universidad Villanueva, Madrid, Spain

<sup>2</sup>Departamento Ciencias Educación,  
Histórico-Jurídicas y Humanísticas y  
Lenguas Modernas, Lenguaje, Cultura y  
Artes, Facultad Ciencias Jurídicas y  
Sociales, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos,  
Madrid, Spain

## Correspondence

Ana Romero-Iribas, Departamento  
Ciencias Educación, Histórico-Jurídicas  
y Humanísticas y Lenguas Modernas,  
Lenguaje, Cultura y Artes. Facultad  
Ciencias Jurídicas y Sociales,  
Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, Madrid,  
Spain.

Email: [ana.romero.iribas@urjc.es](mailto:ana.romero.iribas@urjc.es)

## Abstract

This article aims to theoretically analyse so-called character friendship from the perspective of emotions. From this angle, our research enables us to distinguish different types of emotions, and we propose a conceptual model of the hierarchy of the emotions of character friendship and their influence on social behaviour. With this model in hand, the article discusses whether other-oriented emotions fully explain the emotional underpinnings of character friendship. We find other-oriented emotions to be ambiguous because they may or may not be selfless. Thus we question whether these emotions can adequately explain the bonding content of character friendship. We conclude that there is a higher affective tier related to moral emotions and moral behaviour, which we have labelled the ‘bonding feeling’. This feeling is described with reference to its historical precedents (Rof Carballo’s ‘affective warp’), thus explaining its particularity.

## KEYWORDS

affective warp, bonding feeling, character friendship, emotions, other-oriented emotions, Rof Carballo

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

Friendship is an important bond for healthy and happy human development, from both a personal and a social standpoint (Berscheid & Reis, 1998; Seligman, 2011, 2018; Wal-dinger, 2020a), but its relationship to the emotions behind it has not been fully researched. Accordingly, this article aims to theoretically analyse so-called character friendship from the standpoint of emotions. This is a selfless relationship, valuable in itself, and not concerned with the reciprocation of benefits, and it holds between particular individuals. This form of friendship is interesting for our research because it is more abundant in emotions than other kinds of friendship, and it contains moral emotions which are capable of generating selfless bonds that are relevant to social behaviour.

Psychology has focused on friendship from a social perspective, due to its connection with individual social development (Berndt, 2002, 2004; Hartup, 1998), because it is a source of emotional and instrumental resources for the individual (Mendelson & Aboud, 2014), or because it is crucial for avoiding negative situations such as loneliness (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018; Killeen, 1998), among other reasons.

Moreover, friendship is nowadays addressed by other sciences focused on social behaviour, because it is considered to be a bond whose impact extends beyond the individual. In political science there is an increasing interest in treating friendship as a framework for rethinking democracy and civic relations (Allen, 2006; Schwarzenbach, 2009), and as a political bond in itself (Derrida, 1998; Digeser, 2016; Smith, 2019). International relations takes an interest in friendship as a peace builder (van Hoef & Oelsner, 2018). And sociology recognizes in friendship an element that is relevant for social cohesion in contemporary western societies (Spencer & Pahl, 2009).

From the work of William James to the present day, progress in the study of emotional processes has been extensive from various epistemological perspectives: biological, cognitive and behavioural (Lyons, 1993). In these works, various emotions have been differentiated, distinguishing, among others, those known as other-directed emotions, and those known as other-oriented emotions (Batson, 1987; Batson et al., 1987; Lishner et al., 2011; Spinrad & Eisenberg, 2019). On the other hand, this research continues the investigation of primary relationships from an emotional standpoint (Bowlby, 1968; Rof Carballo, 1961). The present investigation belongs to a more novel line of studies concerning friendship in social psychology, which is centred on character friendship (Hoyos-Valdés, 2018; Kristjánsson, 2019a; Walker et al., 2016).

Thus our objective is to address character friendship (CF) from the standpoint of emotions, describe its hierarchical nature, and see what type of feelings can be found related to people. Our hypothesis is that not even other-oriented emotions (superior emotions) fully explain the affective content of CF. For this reason we have studied the emotions of friendship further, until reaching the field of moral emotions. CF involves a distinctive feeling, in which reference to the other and selflessness take precedence; we have labelled this the 'bonding feeling'. This term, with a precise meaning for CF, dates back to American and European psychology of the 20th century, and specifically to research related to the 'affective warp'<sup>1</sup> (Rof Carballo, 1961) and attachment (Ainsworth, 1989; Bowlby, 1968; Lenzi et al., 2017).

Methodologically, we will consider this question from a theoretical standpoint, on the basis of the documentary analysis of empirical and theoretical research concerning friendship, emotions, and both simultaneously. We conducted a search, through the Web of Science database, of journals of social psychology and social issues, from 2014 to 2019, both years

included. In addition to this—and as well as studying the classic literature on emotions in primary relationships, and on friendship—we have taken into account the fundamental contributions of philosophy, partly because the literature on CF deriving from the social sciences is scarce (Anderson & Fowers, 2019; Kristjánsson, 2019a), and also because philosophy is essential for explaining this type of friendship. Also, we should remember that CF is a type of friendship with ethical traits, so it might be questioned whether it can be approached with methodological rigour. This question has already been answered positively by Walker et al. (2016) and Kristjánsson (2013).

In sum, the question we aim to answer is: what does the emotional study of CF contribute to a better understanding of friendship, and of the emotions that link individuals? To answer this question, we first present a literature review of friendship and its connection to emotions, focusing on the contributions of social psychology (Section 2). From this starting point, the theoretical contribution of the manuscript is developed. Specifically, we examine CF emotions and their hierarchy, and we propose a conceptual model of that hierarchy (Figure 1), which requires the explanation of higher types of emotions, such as other-oriented emotions. Since it becomes apparent that other-oriented emotions (OOE) are ambiguous, we focus on the study of the superior emotions and feelings of CF, as related to moral emotions and moral behaviour (Section 3). Finally, we conclude that there is a superior affective tier within CF, which we have labelled the ‘bonding feeling’ (BF), which is the distinctive feeling of CF: the love of friendship (Section 4).

## 2 | FRIENDSHIP, CHARACTER FRIENDSHIP AND PSYCHOLOGY

This section presents a literature review of friendship in psychology, focusing on the contributions of social psychology, followed by a brief description of CF, and finally the specific themes that this research has addressed in relation to friendship-emotions.

### 2.1 | Literature review: friendship in psychology

Friendship has been broadly analysed by various fields of psychology (Hojjat & Moyer, 2017). Evolutionary psychology has placed special emphasis on infancy and adolescence (Aboud & Mendelson, 1998; Bagwell & Bukowski, 2018; Berndt, 1982, 1989; Deutz et al., 2014; Gottman & Parker, 1986; Meuwese et al., 2017; Parker & Asher, 1993; Parker & Gottman, 1989), addressing the effect of the gender variable (Bank & Hansford, 2005; Sears & McAfee, 2017). Personality psychology has dealt with friendship due to its link with the shaping of personal identity (Andrew & McCabe, 2015), the influence of personality traits on friendship satisfaction (Knack et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2015), the importance of agreeableness and neuroticism in developing friendships (Harris & Vazire, 2016), and because knowing other people’s motives is positively associated with a greater quality of friendship (Chloe et al., 2019). In educational psychology, there is interest in the academic benefits of friendship (Baysu et al., 2014; Riegle-Crumb & Callahan, 2009), the effect of biases on selecting friends (Aboud et al., 2003; Stark, 2015) and, more recently, the influence of ethnic and sociocultural variables (Korol, 2018; Miller et al., 2014).

Social psychology is one of the branches that has focused the most on friendship, for various reasons:

1. Because friendship facilitates behaviours that are adjusted to reality, whether these are adaptive or facilitators of prosocial behaviours (Dovidio et al., 2017; Mestre-Escrivá et al., 2002; Padilla-Walker, Fraser, Blach, & Bean, 2015)
2. For its relevance to an individual's socioemotional development (Bukowski et al., 1998). Friendship produces socioemotional benefits such as 'the validation of one's worth; the security of mattering to someone; the companionship and the intimacy made possible by time spent together and by the trust and mutual liking implied by mutual validation and concern' (Walker, 2016, p. 4). It also contributes to relieving loneliness and isolation (Cacioppo & Cacioppo, 2018)
3. In view of its role in preventing and/or mitigating aggressiveness and violence between peers (Felmlee & Faris, 2016; Meter, Casper, & Noel, 2015; Reavis et al., 2015)
4. Because of its current expansion in social media as a new framework for relationships between people. Topics such as the behaviour of adolescents in chats and the quality of friendship (Vanden Abeele et al., 2017) also arise, along with the possibility of online CF (Kristjánsson, 2019b), and the influence of self-disclosure on social support in messenger communications (Trepte et al., 2018)

Finally, recent studies from positive psychology have also highlighted friendship's relationship with well-being and happiness, in particular those carried out by Demir (2015). This research proves that friendship experiences provide an environment where basic needs are met (Demir & Özdemir, 2010), that these are particularly important for providing emotional support (Demir et al., 2013), and that friendship maintenance behaviours are positively associated with happiness (Sánchez et al., 2018). These studies have also been performed on people with disabilities (Bageci et al., 2018). Moreover, the role of friendship contributes to perceived responses that lead to capitalization attempts and its positive relation with friendship maintenance and happiness (Demir, Tyra, & Özen-Çiplak, 2019). Investigations by Taniguchi (2015) and Brannan et al. Stein (2013) also reveal that happiness and life satisfaction are related to friendship, as well as to the genuineness of one's friends (Peets & Hodges, 2018), and to the frequency of one's interaction with them (Li & Kanazawa, 2016). Lane (2000) had previously related happiness with friendship, concluding that the latter is a much more relevant factor than economic income, because it provides people with a sense of belonging and meaning in their lives.

## 2.2 | Which type of friendship is character friendship?

It is conventionally accepted that there are different types of friendship. Psychology, for instance, mentions deep, close or best friends, good friends, casual friends and acquaintances (Mendelson & Aboud, 2014; Walker et al., 2016). In philosophy, the Aristotelian (Aristotle, trad. 1999) distinction between advantage or utilitarian friendship, pleasure friendship and virtue friendship remains in effect (May, 2012), given that sociocultural conditions do not affect the core of his theory of friendship, while sociology has also distinguished social friendship, familiar friendship and communicating friendship (Little, 2000).

Character friendship (Cooper, 1980) corresponds to a philosophical classification whose direct historical precedent is the Aristotelian concept of 'virtue friendship'<sup>2</sup>. Some have also referred to this as 'eudaimonic friendship' (Walker et al., 2016), although we will call it CF.

Since it corresponds to an Aristotelian classification, to study CF theoretically, as we do here, does not imply that it is considered a normative construct or model.

We refer to CF in a psychological investigation (Kristjánsson 2020a, 2020b) because it converges with deep friendship. The latter involves actions that are of an ethical nature (e.g. altruism and loyalty), and thus characteristic of CF,<sup>3</sup> which is based on virtue. And, given that CF does not exclude but rather subsumes the psychological aspects of friendship, studying it allows psychology to broaden its range of hypotheses, as shown by Anderson and Fowers (2019), since the investigations of the social sciences into personal relationships are often conditioned by instrumentalism and individualism (Fowers & Anderson, 2018).

CF is pursued for its own sake and involves affection, mutual well-wishing and a willingness to seek the good of the other for her own sake. Hence it is a selfless relationship, requiring friends to be virtuous. What motivates these friendships is not only one's friend's unique personality traits, but also 'to what extent and precisely how she is virtuous' (Kristjánsson, 2019a, p. 7). This also means that, beyond mutual affection, CF is based on moral character disposition (Blasi, 2005). And unlike Aristotle's characterization, 'the basis for the relationship is the recognition of good qualities of character without [...] implying that the parties are moral heroes' (Hoyos-Valdés, 2018, p. 629). Following Agambem's (2004) reading of Aristotle, CF suggests that, although it requires the exercise of virtue, what is valued or loved is principally the individual: one's friend herself. To define CF, perhaps virtue is not sufficient: the other is the good that is wanted and sought. Thus friendship has value in itself, and not just instrumental value.

However, according to Anderson and Fowers (2019), psychology has construed friendship mostly in terms of its benefits for the individual at a psychosocial level. This notwithstanding, other studies (Clark & Mills, 1979) hold that friends, unlike acquaintances, 'are concerned about each other's welfare, regardless of benefits gained from the relationship. Friendships are usually not exchange-based, [...] members are not concerned with reciprocation of benefits' (Jehn & Shah, 1997, p. 776). This means that friendship can be selfless.

Nevertheless, these are not incompatible positions. Friendship benefits the individual, but this does not necessarily mean that the relationship is selfish. CF entails a mutual desire for goodness, and this exceeds the individual's psychobiological and social need to establish ties, either to survive or to develop as a human being. 'Such friendships are, to be sure, instrumentally and extrinsically valuable in many ways, for they are both highly advantageous and immediately pleasant; but their value cuts deeper, being non-instrumental and intrinsic' (Kristjánsson, 2007, p. 114). In other words, this friendship meets basic psychological needs (Walker et al., 2016), but these are not the drive of, or the reason for the relationship: CF is established voluntarily as something that is valuable in itself.

Why have we chosen CF to explain the emotional underpinnings of friendship?

First, CF is more abundant in emotions, because it seeks one's friend's good for her own sake. Utilitarian and pleasure friendships include a lesser array of emotions, because only oneself is the target of the emotion.

Second, it does not exclude the psychosocial benefits of friendship relationships, but rather amplifies them, thus contributing to the person's flourishing (Walker et al., 2016).

Third, it contains moral emotions, which are capable of generating selfless bonds (Tangney et al., 2007).

Finally, CF triggers emotions that are important for the cultivation of virtue, such as admiration, love, shame, trust and hope (Hoyos-Valdés, 2018). These virtues require voluntary choices, which is interesting because it opens up a realm of higher feelings.

## 2.3 | Friendship and emotions

Following the psychological definition of friendship provided by Hays (1988)—and followed by Asher and McDonald (2010)—it becomes evident that emotions are an essential element of friendship. This is a form of ‘voluntary interdependence between two persons over time, that is intended to facilitate social-emotional goals of the participants, and may involve varying types and degrees of companionship, intimacy, affection, and mutual assistance’ (Hays, 1988, p. 395). For example, love, admiration, trust, hope, security, affinity, self-esteem, life satisfaction, well-being and empathy are some of the emotions that are characteristic of friendship (Tangney et al., 2007).

To the best of our knowledge, the bibliographic analysis that we have carried out concerning friendship and emotions allows us to identify the following themes:

1. Articles focused on studying friendship as an emotion in itself. These include works that present it directly from this perspective (Berenskoetter & van Hoef, 2017; Holmes & Greco, 2011), as well as those that refer to the emotional closeness it provides (Binder, 2018)
2. Scales that measure friendship and include emotional dimensions among their variables, thus highlighting the affective content of this relationship (Mendelson & Aboud, 2014; Parker & Asher, 1993; Sharabany, 1994)
3. The connection between friendship and socioemotional skills (Bukowski et al., 2018; Miller-Slough & Dunsmore, 2016; Shell & Absher, 2019; Von Salisch et al., 2014)
4. Friendship as tied to other emotional-cognitive variables, such as empathy (Meuwese et al., 2017), rumination (Borowski & Zeman, 2018) and self-esteem (Shimizu et al., 2019)
5. Friendship as a form of mutual knowledge in an emotional key (Morris et al., 2016; Zhang & Parmley, 2015)
6. Friendship as a space for sharing emotions (Legerski et al., 2015; Rebughini, 2011), and how conversation contributes to emotional regulation (Wagner et al., 2015)
7. Publications indicating that this relationship produces emotions of a varying nature. Among others, positive emotions such as admiration, love, trust and hope (Hoyos-Valdés, 2018); negative ones such as anger, envy, competition and guilt (Andrew & Montague, 1998; Orbach & Eichenbaum, 1994); and moral ones, such as respect, compassion, forgiveness, sympathy and concern (Blum, 2010)

This research belongs to the last group of works, which, according to Allan (2011), are the least abundant.

## 3 | THE SPECTRUM OF EMOTIONS IN CHARACTER FRIENDSHIP AND THEIR HIERARCHY

By examining the wide array of emotions of CF, here we analyse them and propose a conceptual model for classifying the emotions associated with CF, which is hierarchical.

### 3.1 | The spectrum of human emotions and friendship

Emotion, either construed as a ‘state’ (Martínez-Priego, 2018) or as a ‘process’ (Fernández-Abascal et al., 2010), includes a cognitive dimension (Lazarus, 1982): evaluation (seeking

survival and adaptation, which are innate dynamics), and appraisal (Moors, 2013), the latter being where the learned-cultural also appears. If we continue with the emotional process (activation and manifestation), we must include another distinctively human element: the subjective experience of emotion, also known as its 'feeling' or the 'feeling of emotions' (Damasio, 2006).

By describing human emotions, we find that we *learn* a great many of them, or else they are influenced by primary relationships in infancy, such as imprinting (Lorenz, 1986), or the 'affective warp' (Rof Carballo, 1961), or attachment (Bowlby, 1968). Through these relationships a child is necessarily affected from the start by culture and moral standards (Demir, 2015). This leads us to distinguish between animal emotions and human ones. For the following reasons, here we diverge to a certain extent from the Darwinian tradition, which posits a strong continuity between animals and humans (Brent et al., 2013).

Although relevant, the Darwinian contribution concerning primary emotions does not always sufficiently address the variables of learning and culture, which are essential elements of the human emotional universe. Also, a clear distinction between emotion and feelings is possible only in humans, i.e. the capacity to attribute the felt emotion to a conscious self (Damasio, 2006). Third, the difference between positive and negative emotions, which is tied more closely to the dimensional classification of emotion than to the discreet one, is essential to friendship. And lastly, CF entails voluntary interdependence (Ardelt & Ferrari, 2014; Hays, 1988), in other words, a voluntary decision that is foreign to the world of animals.

In sum, whatever is learned-cultural in emotion, the emotion-feeling distinction, and the attention that must be given to valence and free will, make it necessary to focus on emotion in human terms. We will not engage in the neuroethology of friendship, which establishes a high degree of consistency between the relationships of non-human mammals and people (Brent et al., 2013); focusing instead on what is distinctively human. Indeed, the human aspiration to happiness has a motivational nature that exceeds biological survival; it surpasses the content of the functions of emotion that we share with animals. Likewise, people's unhappiness reaches higher and more complex levels than that of animals. Consider the case of loneliness as a social pathology (Killeen, 1998).

On the other hand, unlike filiation, maternity and paternity, friendship does not have a prior biologically conditioned emotional basis or one favoured by the person's neuroendocrine structure (Martínez-Priego, 2012). However, the unconditional nature of CF does not preclude an affective proximity between individuals before mutually choosing each other as friends.

Because in CF there are feelings in addition to emotions and since, for the reasons mentioned, we diverge from the Darwinian tradition, here we propose a classification of the emotions associated with CF, which is hierarchical (Romero-Iribas & Martínez-Priego, 2019). To that end, we focus on two fundamental axes: (1) the trigger, i.e. the known and valued stimulus capable of eliciting an emotion, and (2) the target of the emotion or its main beneficiary (Figure 1).

1. With respect to the trigger, we may follow the lead of Frijda et al. (1989). In our study, however, the eliciting stimulus is not 'something' but 'someone'. It is well known that the stimulus to which we are most sensitive is the psychosocial one, i.e. other people (Rof Carballo, 1952)
2. The target of the emotion, or its aim, may be equated with the function of emotion (Fernández-Abascal et al., 2010). For instance, there are emotions (fear) that drive us towards a basic self-need (survival). Other emotions (joy) drive us towards a higher good,

such as happiness or human flourishing. Lastly, there are other emotions and feelings that accompany and incline us towards the good of the other

From this we may conclude that a friend (the other) may be someone we know and value, and who triggers emotions such as attachment or trust. Additional emotions of friendship such as respect, forgiveness and admiration also refer to an external subject, another self. However, CF assumes that the friend triggers the emotion, but not as someone who solves or satisfies my own needs, and not because the other is convenient or needed. Here we wish to suggest that CF does not follow a logic of selfishness that results in reciprocal altruism (Haidt, 2003), but rather a logic of selflessness. Indeed, friendship provides satisfaction and well-being, but these are not sought *per se*; rather they emerge as derived emotions.

### 3.2 | The hierarchy of emotions in friendship

Taking into account the trigger and the target, the classification and hierarchy of emotions linked to CF<sup>4</sup> would be as follows:

1. At the base of the pyramid are those emotions derived from friendship (i.e. the hedonic well-being produced by having friends). The other is neither the target nor the trigger; the emotions are elicited by the relationship itself
2. There are emotions triggered by the other (one's friend), although the beneficiary is the self: attachment, for instance, provides security. These may be considered as self-oriented emotions and, developed in an isolated fashion, do not lead to CF
3. Another group are those triggered by the other, the other being the beneficiary as well (the other, the friend, is both the trigger and the target of the emotion). These are selfless emotions, in contrast with self-oriented ones, and on this basis, it is possible to cultivate a friendship. We distinguish two groups:
  - Some, like admiration, have the other as their trigger, but this does not necessarily imply any benefit for that person. They may benefit the one who feels admiration, but the one eliciting the emotion need not feel anything, and may not even be aware of the appreciation that is generated. These are called other-directed emotions (Michie & Gooty, 2005; Ortony et al., 1988)
  - Also, there are those emotions that are triggered by the other, and whose beneficiary is also the other; that is, the aim sought is the good of the friend. These are known as other-oriented emotions (Batson, 2012) and include, for example, forgiveness and empathy (Batson, 1991). As we shall see, these emotions are more complex than they appear, and are ambiguous
4. Character friendship must be complemented with another type of feeling, as it includes traits such as selflessness and loyalty. These always refer to the other and respond to free choices. Emotions are preceded, followed or accompanied by acts, and there are acts that are voluntary, conscious and experienced by a self. Hence voluntary acts are accompanied by feelings. Also, when a bond between two people is freely established (as in CF), a subjective experience or feeling arises due to the free choice that is made. We call this the 'bonding feeling'

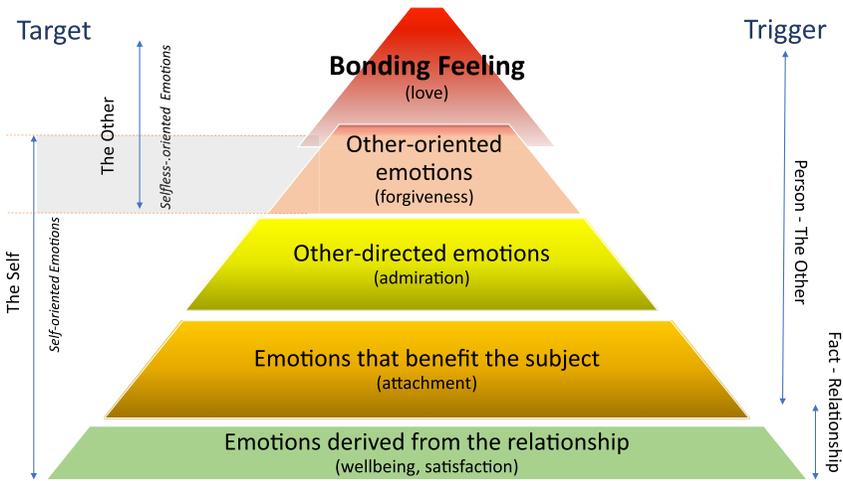


FIGURE 1 Hierarchy of emotions linked to character friendship

As a result, the term ‘BF’ is included at the top of the pyramid, to designate the feeling of the love of friendship. We understand here that this feeling of love is not solely an elicited response, but is also the result of a free choice. In other words, it can be said that CF, which begins with an affective predisposition, is fully realized upon seeking the friend’s good (free choice). In sum, what this hierarchy points out is that from an emotional standpoint, none of the emotional levels preceding the BF (not even the OOE), fully account for CF. Why? Because OOE are either insufficient or ambiguous.

### 3.3 | Other-oriented emotions: problematic issues

Like any other emotions, OOE accompany, precede or follow acts. These acts must be, at least, evaluative knowledge of appreciation or aversion (Frijda et al., 1989; Lazarus, 1982), and the willingness to cope with what is known and valued.

#### 3.3.1 | Other-oriented emotions and character friendship: insufficiency and ambiguity

From our point of view, the reasons why OOE apparently do not sufficiently explain the emotional content of CF are twofold: they are either insufficient or ambiguous.

With respect to the *insufficiency*, CF involves an inclination towards actions that seek the good of the other, i.e. altruistic and prosocial behaviours. We understand altruism to be ‘a motivational state with the ultimate goal of increasing another’s welfare’ (Batson, 2012, p. 41). According to Batson’s (2012) argument: ‘the most likely source of altruistic motivation was an other-oriented emotional response elicited by and congruent with the perceived welfare of the person in need’ (p. 41). In relation to these arguments about altruism, and in connection with CF, it is important to highlight the terms: motivation, help, satisfying needs, and well-being. Some of them correspond to CF and others do not sufficiently explain it. That is why the role of OOE in CF is complex: satisfying needs and seeking well-being are among the behaviours of CF,

but these do not satisfactorily define this type of friendship, or they do not define it in its specificity. CF addresses not only the friend's hedonic well-being, but also her human flourishing or eudaimonic well-being (Ryff & Singer, 2002). Moreover, it not only focuses on satisfying the other's needs, but goes beyond that: CF gives for free, and not only or mainly because of any need; as with gifts that exceed one's need or have no direct connection to it.

As for the *ambiguity* of OOE within CF, the problem centres around the notion of debt, as in the case of gratitude and forgiveness, both of which are linked to friendship. These are altruistic OOE, as they do good to the other (e.g. you forgive, or you thank a friend for something). But the person who forgives or thanks someone may do so in such a way that either an unconditional bond is established, or the bond generates debt or dependency (Steinberg, 2010). Thus, someone might think: 'If I forgive someone, I can do so willingly and forget the fault', or alternatively do so while aware that 'that person owes me something'. In the latter case, the primary good is not for the other but for me; hence we find both conditional and unconditional forgiveness (Miceli & Castelfranchi, 2011). Also, that is why some people do not ask for favours: in order not to owe anybody anything. In sum, OOE are ambiguous because they might generate an obligation (a demand for reciprocity). Indeed, reciprocity can be understood as a donation that requires restitution (reciprocal altruism); or it can be understood as free, like a gift.

There is yet another debate, concerning whether altruism is possible. There are those who believe that friendship is selfish, precisely because true altruism does not exist (Penner et al., 1995). If this were the case, then we would be referring to utilitarian or pleasure friendships. But in the case of CF the context is quite the opposite: the drive of one's behaviour is the other. One's own benefit is attained only incidentally; it is not sought out intentionally. These considerations concerning unconditionality imply that the CF of which we speak is not love of the other's virtue, but rather of the other herself.

### 3.3.2 | Other-oriented emotions, moral emotions, and the bonding feeling

We have discussed how OOE predispose us towards altruistic behaviour, but the opposite may also happen: altruistic behaviours may elicit emotions. However, OOE may give rise to behaviours that are selfless or not, that are generous or selfish (in an ethical sense). Thus OOE are closely related to moral emotions. Tangney et al. (2007) point out that 'moral emotions represent a key element of our human moral apparatus, influencing the link between moral standards and moral behaviour' (p. 345). And moral behaviour implies free actions, although these are not always observable conducts (wishes and intentions).

In order for OOE (which may be ambiguous) to be unconditional, the cognitive-reflexive dimension is required. In this way, voluntary behaviours may take place. Thus, our determination to explicitly exclude debt from CF leads us to include free will in the bond of friendship. This enables us to determine that there is an unwaveringly selfless feeling in CF, but OOE do not guarantee this context. We have called this unwavering feeling the 'BF'.

It is worth emphasizing that the BF is an unwaveringly selfless feeling, i.e. ethically positive. If an act is reflexive and voluntary, there is no guarantee that the behaviour is positive or negative (e.g. prosocial or antisocial). The positivity or negativity of behaviours also depends on the content of the reflection and the intention (i.e. a quest for the common good or just personal interest). If we speak of the contents of reflection, we enter the terrain of intelligence and the will, not only that of emotional motivations.

The dynamic between the emotional and the rational that takes place in the bonding feeling is as follows: intelligence stems from emotional preferences, but its role is precisely to decide on the basis of such preferences: to follow one's emotional inclination or not (i.e., to engage in voluntary action). Its internal drive is not an emotional impulse, although it may be preceded by one. For example, suppose a friend has offended me, and my emotional inclination is to stay away. Nevertheless, I can think that my friend may have had a bad day or a fleeting over-reaction. This reflection helps me to decide to forgive. In this case, I would be overcoming my emotional inclination instead of following it.

In sum, morality (which is free) stems from emotions. Moral judgements (and behaviours) are the results of affective preferences, which are affirmed or not by rational motivations (Kaplan, 2017). In other words, we wish to suggest that there is another internal drive different from the emotional impulse related to motivations, which are rational (Vélaz Rivas, 1996). A bonding feeling is positive in behaviour (it seeks the good of the other) and in the content of reflection (it desires the other's good). The feeling of the love of friendship (the BF) complies with these requirements.

#### **4 | THE BONDING FEELING: A CONDITION FOR CHARACTER FRIENDSHIP**

Thus far, we have explained that OOE are inadequate for describing the emotional content of CF, due to their insufficiency and ambiguity. To overcome this situation, we contend that it is necessary to open up the emotional universe to feelings that are hierarchically superior to OOE; in other words, open the emotional universe towards that which is reflective, intentional, and related to free will (close to moral feelings and behaviours).

Next, we wish to point out that the BF is not equivalent to OOE for at least four reasons:

1. First, because in the BF the cognitive dimension is superior to that of OOE because it accompanies voluntary actions (3.3.2). The higher intensity of the cognitive dimension means that we are in the field of subjective experiences, which is why it is more appropriate to speak of feelings rather than emotions
2. Second, OOE differ from the BF because the acts accompanying the BF seek the other person's good freely and unwaveringly (voluntarily and intentionally)
3. Also, the acts accompanying the BF never generate a debt, which is not guaranteed by OOE. Gratitude in CF is the feeling of joy for being part of a relationship that cannot be reduced to the economics of debt (May, 2012). The recipient is not even obliged to return gratitude for the generosity received. Reciprocity in friendship is not an exchange of benefits, but rather correspondence and mutuality (Romero-Iribas & Smith, 2018). This reciprocity differs from an exchange, and even from win-win situations
4. Lastly, OOE generate altruistic attitudes. But the content of OOE does not depend on the specific person to whom help is provided. However, in the BF the specific person or friend to whom help is delivered is significant. For example, out of compassion, I may donate money to an NGO independently of the specific person who receives my help, while in the BF, in contrast, the specific person does matter

Therefore, in CF, provided that an OOE generates no debt (it is voluntary and expects nothing in return) and is a subjective experience, then strictly speaking, it is a BF, i.e. the feeling

of the love of friendship. Ultimately, it can be said that CF, which starts off with an affective predisposition (a moral emotion), is fully attained only when a good deed is done to a friend (a moral behaviour) because there is a selfless bond between two specific people.

#### 4.1 | Historical precedents of the bonding feeling

It is important to find out whether any recent author in the history of psychology has explained the content of the BF. As we shall see, studies abound from various scientific perspectives (biological, ethological, medical, psychoanalytical, and so forth). These reveal that interpersonal bonds are one of the most significant factors for understanding individuals and the development of their personality.

A privileged environment for studying interpersonal relationships as something that affects those involved in the bond are primal relationships (mother-child relationships). These highlight the importance of the affective domain. Spitz (1963) explains that in the absence of affective relationships, a child may suffer serious illnesses, such as ‘anaclitic depression’ (Spitz & Wolf, 1946). Mahler and Furer (1963) give the mother-child relationship an organizing, activating and catalytic force for the development of the child’s personality. Neumann (1972) himself describes primal relationships as unitive and a decisive influence on ontogenetic and cultural development. Winnicott (1960, 1981) underscores the importance of people and the environment for growth: primal relationships of complete dependency evolve towards the self’s development as a revaluation of ‘one’s self’. Balint (1965, 1968) also refers to the mother-child relationship and focuses on two terms: ‘a form of primal love’ and ‘basic fault’; in other words, the positive and negative sides of that original relationship and its effects. And Bowlby (1968), with the concept of attachment, began a lengthy tradition of studies of this subject. All of these authors study, from various perspectives, the mother-child relationship, which has an affective basis, and is very relevant for healthy development, the formation of one’s personality, and with it, the potential for prosocial behaviours and empathic attitudes.

Inspired by these studies, particularly the works of Rof Carballo<sup>5</sup> (1952, 1962, 1967, 1984), which analyse affective bonds throughout one’s life, we are able to characterize the BF in its essence. This author’s concept of the ‘affective warp’ is the clearest precedent of the BF. Initially, this refers to the mother-child relationship, although it is also present in the various relationships that individuals establish throughout their lives. It is a bidirectional bond of a symbiotic nature, ranging from the biological sphere to the uppermost reaches of the human spirit, including social and cultural fields as well. Due to the affective warp, the child grows healthily in all aspects: neuroendocrine, character and personality, the individual’s perceptive preferences and moral dispositions, and her capacity to interact with others (Rof Carballo, 1970). To the extent that the warp has a biological basis, there is a great deal of need involved in it. But thanks to the warp, the child’s maturity is possible, thus independent, autonomous and free individuals develop. A clear indication of this is that the affective warp includes three levels: the constitutive, order and identity warps (Rof Carballo, 1967).

#### 4.2 | The bonding feeling of character friendship

The affective warp between a mother and her child has a biological basis that conditions and provides a (biological) need for this relationship. Friendship has an emotional

precedent, but the force of the biological need in the mother-child relationship is replaced by the strength of the chosen bond. Because it is free, CF can be a selfless, stable and trustworthy relationship.

The selfless actions that are typical of CFs are voluntary actions, and thus not derived from a mere biological or psychological need. The studies mentioned above (4.1) help us to understand the selfless nature of certain attitudes that accompany these bonds, such as what Winnicott called 'primary maternal attitude' (1960). This refers to the mother's capacity and willingness to forego all interest in herself and focus entirely on her child. This willingness articulates proximity and distance, which enables the emergence of freedom (Rof Carballo, 1972). In the context of CF, this attitude could be described as 'decentring' (Piaget & Inhelder, 2007), which is a voluntary inhibition of self-interest, thus involving a positive moral feeling (3.3.2).

In order to describe the BF in more detail, we will begin with some notes on the affective warp (Rof Carballo, 1967, pp. 23–27), as an unconditional interpersonal relationship (not as a mother-child relationship) for describing the BF.

1. Amplitude: the warp covers the entire affective range, from biological aspects to freedom. In CF this amplitude of emotions and feelings reaches freedom, i.e. the BF (Figure 1)
2. Open system: the affective warp is a transactional reality; it is established between two systems that mutually influence each other, which is why ulterior ways of reacting cannot be predicted on the basis of the initial data. Due to the BF, CF implies reciprocity, and has a life as unpredictable as the life story shared by friends
3. Influence: The warp constitutes one's personality and programs mental structures. Individuals are shaped by a style of guidelines that will condition their behaviour, their perception of reality, and their ideas about the world. The BF of friendship affects the friends' preferences and tastes, although not intentionally. Normally, what is shared between friends is expanded and modified by getting to know each other and interacting. The BF of friendship leaves an imprint on people, in such a way that their life story makes no sense without their friends
4. Shaping psychosocial relationships: The effects of the affective warp also extend to the fabric of one's relationships with other people, called the psychosocial warp. The type of future relationships that develop is affected by the preceding bonds. Likewise, the BF among friends is conditioned by earlier friends
5. Identity: The constitutive warp extends to two other very important levels of development: the order warp (i.e. acquiring social standards) and the identity warp (i.e. the formation of one's body image and self-image). The BF in CF enables a deeper understanding of oneself
6. Cultural influence: The warp is affected by situations from preceding generations, and by culture. The affective warp has a transgenerational dimension. Likewise, the BF of CF is culturally shaped

Following the description of these notes and our preceding explanations (3.3.2), we can say that character friendship includes a bonding feeling, which is *a type of feeling characterized by being bound and unwaveringly selfless (ethically positive). It affects all of an individual's emotional aspects (from emotions in psychobiological terms to the moral); it allows friends to share their lives: shaping their way of viewing the world, themselves, and their other interpersonal relationships. Lastly, the BF is culturally conditioned and stems from free choice.*

## 5 | CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of CF provides interesting findings about emotions, their hierarchical nature, and the place of OOE, and shows that the latter do not fully explain the affective content of CF without the BF. This much becomes evident when the classification criterion of emotions is their trigger or target.

Specifically, the findings and conclusions reached here are:

1. The emotions associated with CF are hierarchical, with a pyramidal structure. At the base of the pyramid, 'the other' (the friend) is neither the trigger nor the target of the emotion. In the upper section, 'the other' is the trigger and the target
2. OOE are ambiguous: they do not necessarily target the other as the main beneficiary. This means that they cannot fully explain the emotional underpinnings of CF, because this is an unconditional and selfless bond which requires reflection and free choice
3. Therefore, CF includes what we have labelled as the 'bonding feeling': the feeling that accompanies the love of friendship, which is a type of feeling characterized by being bound and unwaveringly selfless (ethically positive). The BF affects all of an individual's emotional levels (from the psychobiological dimension of emotions to the moral), shapes the individual's psychosocial relationships and social behaviour, and is culturally conditioned and stems from free choice.

From a theoretical perspective, this study may be continued by analysing which other selfless relationships (which are valuable in themselves) include feelings of the 'BF' type. It would also be interesting to apply the hierarchy of emotions to other Aristotelian types of friendship like utility and pleasure friendship. Also, a theoretical model could be developed to investigate more deeply the difference between 'feelings' and 'love', starting with the BF of CF. Empirically, this research could be continued by designing an instrument to confirm these differences and the hierarchy of emotions within CF, according to the trigger or target.

Beyond psychology, this work may be of interest to scholars of other areas of research concerned with the emotions linked to friendship, given that these play a important role in social behaviour, such as sociology, political theory, international relations, philosophy, and education.

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### CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

### ORCID

Consuelo Martínez-Priego  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8479-8790>

Ana Romero-Iribas  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5693-0026>

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> This is the translation that Rof Carballo himself gave of his concept of an ‘urdimbre afectiva’, which is explained in Sections 3 and 4.
- <sup>2</sup> Character friendship presupposes a global ethics. Although this assumption is questioned in some contexts, in others that fit into the Aristotelian approach—as this work does—it is still valid. On the other hand, today we do actually see this type of ethical friendship in psychology (see e.g. the scales of Sharabany, 1994, and Mendelson & Aboud, 2014) and in philosophy (MacIntyre, 2019; Kristjánsson, 2019a, 2019b, 2020a; Lamb et al., forthcoming).
- <sup>3</sup> Some authors (e.g. Nehamas, 2016) think that there are also amoral deep friendships, such as some aesthetic friendships, which are not addressed here.
- <sup>4</sup> This schema can be applied to the other types of friendship discussed by Aristotle, such as civic friendship as a kind of high-utilitarian friendship. In this case, our hypothesis would be that this type of friendship may include emotions up to the level of the other-oriented emotions.
- <sup>5</sup> Juan Rof Carballo (1905–1994) was a prominent Spaniard physician who made important contributions to psychology. His influence is significant and extensive in the medical, psychological and pedagogical fields within Spanish-speaking countries.

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