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Claire Bidart, Alain Degenne, Michel Grossetti
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LIVING IN NETWORKS

How do personal networks emerge from social contexts? How do these evolve during the course of a lifetime? How are relationships established, maintained, connected, disrupted? How does the structure of a network evolve as people face transitions and events? Based on a classic text originally published in France and that has become the standard on the empirical study of social networks there, for the first time, a network analysis perspective is extended from contexts and social circles to relationships and life events through empirical studies. Following in the tradition of personal network studies, this contribution to the field of structural analysis in sociology offers both a synthesis of knowledge and original results from two immense surveys carried out in France. This volume proposes an original theory grounded in relational dynamics, offering novel perspectives on individual social relations over the course of a lifetime through the context of personal networks, access to social resources, and inequalities.

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Michel Grossetti is Research Director in the French National Centre for Scientific Research (CNRS) and the School of Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences (EHESS).

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Living in Networks

The Dynamics of Social Relations

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Preface

This is an English adaptation of a book published in French in 2011 under the title *La vie en réseau: Dynamique des relations sociales* (Presses Universitaires de France, 2011). In writing this book, our project was to build on our research in two French cities – a longitudinal survey begun in 1995 in the Caen agglomeration and a more classical survey conducted in 2001 in the Toulouse region. It was to present a synthesis of what we knew about personal networks, the sets of ties forming the environment of each person. Using long interviews repeated several years apart, the Caen survey included very detailed data of a new type for the study of personal networks; the Toulouse survey made it possible to make the link with more traditional surveys, both in France and in other countries. In particular, for comparative purposes, this survey used a method developed by Claude Fischer for a study conducted in the late 1970s in California¹. As complementary approaches, these two surveys made it possible to generalize the results obtained by multiple comparisons with very varied surveys. We have focused on understanding interpersonal relationships and networks from a social science perspective, thus seeking to link the analysis of personal networks to the broader social sciences.

The book was well received in France and also read by colleagues from other countries who encouraged us to make an English version. When we started working on this version, we immediately rejected the idea of a simple translation and decided to revise our text to take into account the research conducted since the book was originally published. We also wanted to take into consideration the evolution of the problems, in particular, the development of communication technologies and digital social

¹ Claude S. Fischer, *To Dwell among Friends: Personal Networks in Town and City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

networks. The continuation of the Caen panel by an additional survey wave and the realization of other surveys in the Toulouse region allowed us to maintain our line by permanently relying on firsthand data while mobilizing the considerable international literature on our subject.

This version is thus largely revised compared to the original work. Many passages have been reformulated to adapt them to an English-speaking readership, to integrate new bibliographical references, and to take into account the progress of our own research. In particular, we have introduced a new chapter to review the relational uses of new digital communication media and the evolution of relationships and networks in this context.

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For this new version, we warmly thank Mark Granovetter, who took the risk of examining a somewhat unusual editorial project, encouraged us, and took the time to read the text carefully; our translator, Andrew Wilson, who accompanied us during this long work, agreeing to adapt his writing to international usage; and the two anonymous evaluators whose suggestions were very useful to us. The adaptation to English was made possible by the support of the Institute of Labour Economics & Industrial Sociology (LEST – UMR 7317), Aix Marseille University, CNRS, and the “laboratory of excellence” “Structuring of Social Worlds” (SSW – ANR-11-LABX-0066). We also thank the Presses Universitaires de France for having kindly accepted this adaptation.

More generally, many people have contributed to this book, some by agreeing to be asked about their backgrounds and relationships, others by participating in research as investigators or contributing to certain analyses, and others by giving us advice on preliminary versions of the text.

We cannot mention the names of the respondents in Toulouse and Caen because we must respect the anonymity we promised them, but we would like to thank them warmly for their time and for sharing often intimate information. We hope that our analyses will do some justice to the richness of their stories.

The Caen survey was designed and conducted by Claire Bidart, with Alain Degenne, Daniel Lavenue, Didier Le Gall, Lise Mounier, and Anne Pellissier. More occasionally, Dominique Beynier, Bertrand Fribourg, Cathel Kornig, Clotilde Lemarchand, Charlotte Letellier, Charlotte Lê Van, and Madeleine Royet helped us to carry out interviews. Paula Kervennic put together biographical calendars and intermediate files. Patrice Cacciuttolo and Léo Joubert contributed to the exploration and visualization of data processing on networks. Special thanks to Daniel Lavenue, who

The Toulouse survey was designed and conducted by Michel Grossetti. David Pontille assisted with sample development, survey tracking, and coding. Myriam Dereix and Marina Jean contacted the respondents and administered the questionnaires. Fabrice Fernandez, H  l  ne Marche, Paul Roche, Jean-Baptiste Grossetti, and Quentin Grossetti carried out complementary codings. Alexis Ferrand, Claude Fischer, and Barry Wellman made very useful remarks on the comparison between France and the United States.

Among the attentive proofreaders of the French version were Jean-François Barthe, Ainhoa de Federico de la Rua, Florence Maillochon, Philippe Méhaut, Guillaume Pérocheau, and Eric Verdier. Their comments and advice were valuable. We are particularly grateful to them. Mark Granovetter and Claude Fischer made very useful comments on this new version. For their patience during the long journey of writing and adapting this book, we would like to thank Annick, Véronique, and Jean-Claude.