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**Sexuality and the Social Sciences**

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1996

# Sexuality and the Social Sciences

A French Survey on Sexual Behaviour

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**Dartmouth**

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For women, more than for men, full sexual pleasure implies above all the involvement of a partner. The specific under-reporting of masturbation by young women attests to the resistance of this notion of sexual pleasure in the face of the development of what can fairly be described as 'sexual individualism'.

But this is not all. Under-reporting of masturbation by women cannot be considered in isolation but must be compared with their under-reporting of their lifetime total of sexual partners (see on this subject Leridon 1993). It is as if women were systematically inclined to exclude from their recollections anything they felt had not counted (or had counted little) for them. This attitude should not be taken as a sign of dishonesty or hypocrisy, but may simply reflect the greater sexual selectivity of most women, a selectivity that applies not just in respect of sexual partners and practices but also to the memories that women retain — and agree to share — of this behaviour.

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## 12 Talking About Sexuality: An analysis of relations between confidants

Alexis FERRAND and Lise MOUNIER

*By its very nature, sexuality has a high relational content. All members of society are moreover involved in different relations with other individuals, some of them virtually obligatory (as with parents or children, for example). Of all the exchanges that occur within these relational networks, the most banal is that of words. Conversation deals with subjects of varying importance, some of which can only be discussed with particularly close interlocutors known as confidants. Attitudes and behaviour in respect of sexuality are thus in part at least determined by the scope for exchanging information on this theme with one or more confidants. The ACSF survey collected data on this type of relation: how many people does one confide in about questions of love and sex? From where are these confidants recruited (friends, family, colleagues)? How does the relational network evolve in the course of a lifetime? What influence does it have on sexual behaviour? These are the sort of questions examined here by Alexis FERRAND and Lise MOUNIER.*

In his *Report on AIDS* presented in October 1988, Professor Claude Got remarked on the shortcomings in our understanding of the social and psychological dimensions of human sexuality. Few researchers have in fact explored sexual behaviour in its own right; attention has instead tended to be focused exclusively on the legitimate and institutionalized expressions of sexuality such as the family and kinship. This is why attempts to understand sexual behaviour have to draw on knowledge and techniques originally developed in other fields of enquiry.

### Sexuality: behaviour or relations?

The approach adopted in what follows is the result of one such transfer. It is derived from research into relations of friendship and sociability undertaken since the mid-1980s and that employs the methodology of personal network analysis (Ferrand 1985, 1987). Arguably from friendship to love, the distance is not too great.

At the heart of this approach lies a straightforward idea. In the sociology of roles importance is attached primarily to institutionalized behaviour, to interactions governed by the norms specific to a particular social framework, norms that individuals are reckoned to have internalized. Yet what does this perspective have to say about an interpersonal relation that is invested with romantic love or blunt sexuality? Is there such a role as that of the 'lover'? Powerful images certainly abound in the collective consciousness; but they are disparate and present a range of contrasting roles rather than one single role. To what extent do interpersonal relations actually obey these models? The answer is: only very indirectly. Individuals are in fact able to 'play' on the disparity between the more or less ideal definition they adopt and their own practices (Bidart 1991).

Interactionist sociology challenges the a priori existence of such roles and instead emphasizes the complex dynamics of mutual adjustment between the actors (Rose 1962). Furthermore, each relationship is characterised by diversity and a succession of interactions: far from being a repetitive or static reality, each relationship must be viewed as an evolutive process between its actors (Lazarfeld, Merton 1954). And in the course of this process the protagonists 'negotiate', implicitly or explicitly, what is relevant to their relationship as it evolves (Allan 1979). The result is a rich variety of relational contents, that it is possible to delineate if survey subjects are presented with a sufficiently wide range of possible answers (Ferrand 1989b).

In this interactionist perspective, no attempt is made to apprehend the 'sexual behaviour' of an individual actor. Instead it is the relationship, the encounter between two actors, the agreements and disagreements that are produced, which constitute the object of analysis. After all, common sense tells us that sexual life is made up of 'intercourse' and 'relationships': more often than not it involves two protagonists and who, for one reason or another, 'do things together'.

### The role of norms in the negotiation between partners

Various standpoints can be used to apprehend the dynamics of the 'unit' thus formed by the two partners (Peto et al. 1992).<sup>1</sup> One possibility, for example, involves exploring the diversity and conflict between the expectations of the protagonists, either by observing the disparity between the social capital they possess and the investment they make in the relationship, and which determine an individual's capacity to impose his desires; or by the norms that control the relationship itself ('equity'/'equality').

1. The 'factors of intelligibility of the typology' in the presentation of this research mobilize simultaneously the individual and inter-individual characteristics (dynamics) and the relational networks; the shift from this 'simultaneity' to the theoretical integration of these factors remains a subject for future research.

Our response to the invitation for research into sexual behaviour<sup>2</sup> was to treat 'norms' and interactions as a particular dimension of and element in the negotiations between protagonists. Between the uncontrollable urge of sexual desire and the cold calculation of risk by a rational and well-informed individual, the existence of 'norms' is precisely one of the ways in which the socialized character of the participants becomes apparent. Between what is desired and what is calculated, there exists a place for the commendable and the condemnable.

The assumption that social 'norms' have a real impact could be seen as a return to a functionalist perspective. Everything in fact depends on how we view norms and the ways they impinge on individual behaviour. Our research has been guided by the following postulates:

- instead of immutable precepts that the individual internalizes to varying degrees during early socialization, 'norms' are treated rather as principles of conduct that are subject to adjustment in the course of a lifetime.
- these principles operate in interpersonal relations to influence the way in which an individual is 'recognized' by his or her peers; an individual is more sensitive to these 'close' judgements and appreciations than to divergences between his or her behaviour and some general and abstract norms.
- individuals may live in relational contexts (social circles) and have relations that involve contrasting or even contradictory principles of conduct.
- such contradictory relational contexts can destabilize an individual and bring about changes of behaviour (which from the standpoint of prevention may be in a 'good' as well as 'bad' sense).<sup>3</sup>

### Close influences: confidants

Analysis of these 'influences of the relational environment' requires answers to two main questions: which relations have a significant influence on sexual life, and how does this influence operate?

Quite how an individual is sensitive to the judgement of others can be envisaged in a variety of ways. It may, for example, be thought that explicit opinions, that is stated principles, are what matter, in which case

2. These invitations began to circulate within the CNRS (sector SHS) at the end of 1988, and were formalized by the Agence Nationale de Recherches sur la Sida in April 1989. See the chapter by N. Bajos and A. Spira in this volume.

3. Faced with a 'social demand' concerned with the possibility of modifying sexual behaviour, it would be paradoxical to reply with an interpretative framework in which sexual activity was explained by structural determinisms that admitted of little change. Change is conceivable within the approach adopted here.

we need to find out how an individual actually perceives the opinions of his entourage.<sup>4</sup> However, we prefer to take the view that on a topic as delicate as sex life, individuals are very well aware that there may be a discrepancy between an expressed norm and actual conduct, so much so that it can be other people's behaviour which provides the more significant point of reference.

Before other people's behaviour can exert an influence it must of course become known. The usual forms of sociability reveal no more than who is 'going out' with whom; and activities beyond this stage usually remain private or hidden, notably in the case of the sexual practices likely to hasten or slow the transmission of HIV infection. In order for these activities to become known they have to be disclosed and receive a verbal expression. For this reason we have assumed that a system of relations within which it is possible to discuss matters of sexuality and love, though not embracing the totality of relational influences, does register at least a significant proportion.

In 1985 the National Opinion Research Center of the University of Chicago conducted a nationwide survey using the following question: 'who are the people with whom you discussed matters important to you?' (Marsden 1987, Burt 1985). The answers served to delineate a core of close relations of special significance to the respondents. We adopted an analogous procedure to isolate the relations of 'confidence'.<sup>5</sup> The ACSF questionnaire asked: '... besides the person with whom you live, with how many people do you discuss your romantic and sexual adventures, sexual problems or diseases, or your life as a couple?'

The questionnaire provided the basis for a detailed description of a maximum of three relations. The first point to be examined was the identity of the confidant (sex, age, profession); then the characteristics of the relationship (its length, frequency of contact, type of bond: friend, relative, or colleague; and whether or not it had a sexual content); attention turned lastly to the interviewee's perception of certain aspects of the confidant's sexual behaviour (number of partners, changes since the appearance of AIDS, homosexual orientation).

The results examined here deal with what could be described as the 'social pattern of confidence'. This constitutes in fact a sort of preliminary to an analysis of relational influences: discussion of one's private life takes place only with selected individuals, and so what conditions the terms on which sexuality is discussed also 'pre-conditions' or interacts with the influences that may result. First of all we shall examine which individuals are more or less likely to develop relations of confidence. In the next stage we explore the characteristics of the relations of discussion,

4. This perspective, present in the idea of 'social circles', is also examined in the *Analyse des Comportements Sexuels en France (ACSF)* survey by A. Degenne.
5. A pilot study (N = 200) had shown that this procedure was possible (Ferrand, Mounier 1990).

and in particular the question of between whom confidences are exchanged. Lastly, given that an individual can recompose his or her network so as to achieve a normative coherence (reduction of dissonance) we examine the length of relations and their renewal.

### I. - Having confidants: a specific element of sociability

An initial overview of the place held by relations of confidence in French society can be expressed in just three figures: 40% of those questioned report having no confidants, 40% report two or more, and 20% just one (Table 1).

More men than women have no confidant at all (46.7% compared with

TABLE 1. - DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY NUMBER OF CONFIDANTS

Number of confidants				
0	1	2 and more	Total	Number
%	%	%		
38.7	21.6	39.7	100.0	2 342

30.6%). Men over sixty are four times less likely than the youngest men to have anyone to confide in (60.5% for the 60-69 age group, and 16.3% for men of 18-23); the sharp fall in the number of people with whom men discuss love and sex occurs after the age of forty. A different pattern is observed among women: the number of their confidants for 'matters of the heart' declines between the age of 24 and 29, continues its fall between 30 and 39, and again after 40, though less sharply than for men.

Since differences of socio-professional group vary between the sexes, men and women must be examined separately (Table 2). For men, existing and former members of the category of 'managers and professionals' count the highest proportion of reserved individuals (61.4% without a confidant), followed by the category of 'intermediate professions' (54%). A low number of confidants is particularly surprising in the case of the senior managers, a group generally supposed to have extensive personal relations and whose professional activities involve a large amount of socializing. By contrast, the proportion of reserved individuals is especially low among men not in paid employment, though most of these are young (66.7% of men in this category are under 24).

Among women, manual workers were the most reticent to discuss matters of love and sex.<sup>6</sup> And as was the case for men, the proportion is smallest among women not in employment.

6. A stronger tendency is observed among female 'shopkeepers and self-employed', though the actual numbers involved are small.

Except then for those not in work, the influence of socio-professional status on the likelihood of having confidants differed significantly between men and women. The disparity between the sexes on this point was greatest among the managers, with women being half as likely not to have a confidant (31.1% and 61.4%). Proportionately more male white-

TABLE 2. - DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY NUMBER OF CONFIDANTS REPORTED

	Number of confidants reported				
	0	1	2+	Total	Number
	%	%	%		
All	38.7	21.6	39.7	100.0	2 342
Men	46.7	16.6	36.7	100.0	1 303
Women	30.6	26.7	42.7	100.0	1 039
18-23 years	16.3	26.6	57.1	100.0	548
24-29 years	23.0	27.3	49.7	100.0	541
30-39 years	31.4	24.4	44.2	100.0	589
40-49 years	45.1	21.2	33.7	100.0	371
50-59 years	54.6	14.6	30.8	100.0	182
60-69 years	60.5	15.6	23.9	100.0	111
Size of locality of residence					
Under 5,000 inhabitants	42.4	20.0	37.6	100.0	527
5,000-50,000	44.0	19.9	36.1	100.0	375
50,000-200,000	40.7	20.2	39.1	100.0	314
200,000 and above	29.1	27.0	43.9	100.0	654
Paris region	35.9	21.2	42.9	100.0	468
Present or former socio-professional categories					
<i>Male respondents</i>					
Farmers	38.8	13.6	47.6	100.0	25
Artisans, shopkeepers, self-employed	42.3	15.7	42.0	100.0	55
Managers and liberal professions	61.4	10.8	27.8	100.0	235
Intermediate professions	54.0	10.0	36.0	100.0	275
White-collar workers	42.3	24.8	32.9	100.0	146
Manual workers	47.7	18.1	34.2	100.0	353
Inactives	17.1	22.4	60.5	100.0	206
Total	46.7	16.6	36.7	100.0	1 295
<i>Female respondents</i>					
Farmers	0.0	4.6	95.4	100.0	5
Artisans, shopkeepers, self-employed	58.0	23.9	18.1	100.0	24
Managers and liberal professions	32.1	18.9	49.0	100.0	86
Intermediate professions	28.3	32.1	39.6	100.0	226
White-collar workers	26.4	29.7	43.9	100.0	398
Manual workers	47.0	22.5	30.5	100.0	92
Inactives	21.7	20.9	57.4	100.0	206
Total	30.6	26.7	42.8	100.0	1 037

collar workers had just a single confidant; this tendency was less marked among their female counterparts, who were also the least likely to have anyone to confide in about questions of sex and love.

A more complex link exists between the propensity to confide over these questions and the fact of being in employment at the time of the survey. The effect of age is observed both among retired people, a majority of whom had no confidants (60.1% as against 38.7% in the sample as a whole), and among students, who reported having several confidants (66.7%). Individuals who were unemployed at the time of the survey (4.6% of the total sample) had patterns of behaviour as regards confidants comparable to the average for the population questioned: overall, unemployment appears not to be characterized by a dislocation of the intimate relational network under discussion here. However, the logic of unemployment did vary according to sex: unemployed men reported more confidants (46.3% against 36.9%), whereas unemployed women, regardless of age, were characterized by a lower level of communication on questions of love and sex (33.5% as against 30.6%). At the origin of these differences are the recently unemployed (Reichmann 1991) or those unemployed for less than six months in the last five years - individuals at present unemployed and who have experienced unemployment for more than six months in the last five years (70% of the unemployed) have a propensity to confide over questions of love and sex equal to that of the others.

The fact of confiding in someone is an aspect of sociability that is influenced by the actual subject of the conversational exchange, in this case the individual's sex life. Comparison with results from another representative national survey, which focused on the whole field of conversational relations (Héran 1988), reveals a number of differences: the discrepancy between men and women, and the decline with age, are more pronounced in the case of confidences.

Set against this background, the type of sex life (number of partners in the last twelve months: Table 3) is associated with a sharp contrast: men with multiple sexual partners are found to be only half as likely as those with single partners to have no confidants (25.8% as against 49.8%); and women are three times less likely (11.3% against 31.1%). Nine out of ten women with multiple sexual partners have at least one confidant. In other words, ease in finding people in whom to confide about one's sex life appears to increase in line with the intensity of that sex life: a relational expansivity can be said to characterize both the act and its verbal expression.

Similarly, 44.5% of people living in a couple report having no confidant (other than the conjoint), as against 25.9% of those who live on their own. The fact of living alone actually provides an incentive to having at least two confidants: 50.5% compared with 34.8% of those 'living in a couple'. However, those in the latter situation may be disadvantaged on this count by the fact of not being allowed to report a stable sexual partner as a confidant.

TABLE 3. — DISTRIBUTION OF RESPONDENTS BY TYPE OF SEX LIFE AND NUMBER OF CONFIDANTS REPORTED

	Number of confidants reported			Total	Number
	0	1	2+		
	%	%	%		
<b>Mode of life</b>					
Live in a couple	44.5	20.7	34.8	100.0	1 164
Men	52.3	15.4	32.3	100.0	652
Women	35.9	26.5	37.6	100.0	512
Live alone	25.9	23.6	50.5	100.0	1 178
Men	32.7	19.6	47.7	100.0	651
Women	19.9	27.2	52.9	100.0	527
<b>Number of sexual partners in last twelve months:</b>					
<b>Men</b>					
No partners	61.4	6.1	32.5	100.0	35
Single partner	49.8	16.3	33.8	100.0	686
Multiple partners	25.8	19.2	55.0	100.0	566
All	46.9	16.4	36.7	100.0	1 287
<b>Women</b>					
No partners	42.6	12.8	38.7	100.0	64
Single partner	31.1	28.9	40.0	100.0	626
Multiple partners	11.3	23.1	65.6	100.0	297
All	30.8	27.8	41.5	100.0	987

## II. The nature of relations and the structure of networks of confidence

The questionnaire allowed each respondent to supply detailed information about a maximum of three relations of confidence. In all, the characteristics of 3,546 relations were made available for study.

### *The bases of confidence*

Relations of confidence could be defined according to whether the bond was one of friendship, of the workplace, or of family. Such an approach to definition is eminently social: by characterizing a bond according to one of these three categories, the respondents are assumed to be referring to the social model (the 'role') which best defines this relation.<sup>7</sup> The way in which composition of the network varies with the socio-demographic profiles of the respondents reporting relations will be analysed subsequently.

7. The relations are often 'multipurpose' or 'multiplex' — a colleague can also be a friend etc. The constraints of the survey made it necessary to select a single model.

Of the various types of bonds upon which discussion of love and sex can be based, that of friendship predominates largely (Table 4). Relations with the members of one's family occupy a place very similar to that in the 'Contact between people' survey, and professional colleagues feature less frequently among the confidants than among the conversational relations with 'all comers'. The respondents who were not in employment and who therefore necessarily had no colleagues as potential confidants, were not observed to fall back on the other formal pole of sociability, namely the family. Friendship in fact accounts for three-quarters of the relations reported by members of this category.

TABLE 4. — DISTRIBUTION OF RELATIONS OF CONFIDENCE BY THE NATURE OF BOND AND ACTIVITY STATUS OF RESPONDENTS

	Colleague	Family	Friend	Total	Number
	%	%	%		
Total	13.8	24.2	62.0	100.0	3 546
Respondents: active and former active	16.4	24.9	58.7	100.0	2 761
Inactive	1.9	20.8	77.3	100.0	785

The subject of sexuality can be evoked within relationships that exist already and for other reasons. Once again, however, confidence is found to occupy a selective place in sociability: certain sorts of relationship actually inhibit discussion of intimate matters;<sup>8</sup> others on the contrary seem to favour it, to the point of existing for that very purpose. Within 'friendship', the importance of mutual affinities and the essentially private character of a bond that is largely independent of institutionalized roles, constitute the formal characteristics of the relationship; and these harmonize with the object of the discussion when this is the individual's sex and love life, in both its 'official' and more discreet forms.<sup>9</sup>

### *How individuals construct their networks*

General analysis of the relations reported by different categories of individuals enables us to delineate the mean network. In addition to the broad tendencies outlined above, it brings to light the specific social pattern of relations of confidence. So as to achieve a consistent treatment of the workplace as a potential context for relationships of confidence, the

8. In the specific pilot study, for example, it was observed that relationships with neighbours or those made in clubs and associations were seldom reported (Ferrand, Mounier 1990).

9. Claire Bidart, LASMAS has conducted a qualitative study on behalf of the ANRS to elucidate the dynamic of confidence in an individual's interpersonal relations.

TABLE 5. — DISTRIBUTION OF RELATIONS OF CONFIDENCE BY GENDER OF RESPONDENTS (ACTIVES OR FORMER ACTIVES)

	Colleague	Family	Friend	Total	Number
	%	%	%		
Total Respondents:	16.4	24.9	58.7	100.0	2 761
Men	21.7	18.0	60.3	100.0	1 457
Women	11.5	31.2	57.3	100.0	1 304

analysis that follows deals only with the relationships reported by interviewees who had (or had had) a professional activity.<sup>10</sup>

Women are found to confide more readily than men in members of their own family, which is consistent with what is known of the place occupied by the family in female sociability. The most striking feature of their relations of confidence, however, seems to be the importance accorded to bonds of friendship, which unusually account for nearly the same proportion as they do for men (Table 5).

Although sexual jokes do find their way into conversations with colleagues, the workplace is not in fact a propitious context for discussions about an individual's private life. Broaching the sexual theme in the workplace seems to be more legitimate for men: they are twice as numerous as women to discuss private matters with their colleagues. This difference between the sexes as regards confiding in colleagues may reflect a distinct sociability of work (Lazega 1992) or a general attitude of reserve intended to forestall sexual advances by colleagues or superiors.

The distribution of relations according to an interviewee's socio-professional category is consistent with the results from the analysis of sociability (Table 6): manual workers are slightly more disposed to discuss intimate subjects with their colleagues (especially true of women); white-collar workers instead favour members of their family; while managers and professional people tend to chose confidants from among their friends.

Whereas the mean number of confidants drops by a half with age, conflicting tendencies are observed in the composition of networks and in the process of the selection of relations (Table 7). After remaining generally stable (at around 58%), the proportion of friends then rises after the age of sixty. The changes observed affect primarily the proportion of family relations, which falls (from 36% to 12.9%), while the share of relations with work colleagues follows the cycle of personal investment in a career — from being low before the age of 24 (6.2%), it increases

10. Relations reported by individuals who were or had been active accounted for 82% of the whole. Those not qualified on the grounds of work, family or friendship (the 'other' and 'non-response' categories were 1.3%) were included with relations of friendship since they had similar characteristics on other items.

TABLE 6. — COMPOSITION OF MEAN NETWORK BY PROFESSION (EXISTING OR LAST) OF RESPONDENTS

	Colleague	Family	Friend	Total	Number
	%	%	%		
All	16.4	24.9	58.7	100.0	2 761
Farmers	20.5	16.0	63.5	100.0	45
Artisans, shopkeepers, self-employed	14.3	12.9	72.8	100.0	106
Managers and liberal professions	17.8	17.3	64.9	100.0	484
Intermediate professions	16.8	21.2	62.1	100.0	759
White-collar workers	13.2	33.1	53.7	100.0	813
Manual workers	20.3	22.6	57.1	100.0	554

TABLE 7. — COMPOSITION OF MEAN NETWORK BY AGE OF ACTIVE AND FORMERLY ACTIVE RESPONDENTS

	Colleague	Family	Friend	Total	Number
	%	%	%		
All	16.4	24.9	58.7	100.0	2 761
18-23 years	6.2	36.0	57.2	100.0	363
24-29 years	12.1	29.9	58.0	100.0	800
30-39 years	19.4	23.7	56.9	100.0	902
40-49 years	20.0	21.6	58.4	100.0	450
50-59 years	18.0	26.6	55.4	100.0	159
60-69 years	14.7	12.9	72.9	100.0	87

up to the age of 50 (reaching 20%) but declines thereafter. Confidants to replace those of the workplace are recruited more from among friends than from members of the family.

### III. The social selectivity of relations of confidence

It has been seen how individuals confide in others to a greater or lesser extent, and that they do so in the context of different types of relationship. A third important dimension of the social logic of confidence that remains to be explored is the process whereby a relationship is established between some individuals and not between others. In this extremely private sphere, as for the neighbouring sphere of friendship and the more institutionalized one of choice of spouse, it is reasonable to expect that a relationship is more likely to be established between individuals of similar biographical and social backgrounds. Social proximity is known to favour such relationships (Rogers, Bhowmik 1971).

Depending on what is at stake and the content of relationships, this general principle, known as homophily, can undergo specific modifications.



For example, relations with a predominantly utilitarian basis differ in this respect from those with a mainly affective basis. What is the position for relations of confidence? Between which types of individuals are they most likely to be formed? A number of approaches exist for examining the social selectivity of relations of confidence.

One involves examining just the preferences of those who report confiding in others: the choices made by a particular category of respondents are compared with the average distribution of choices for respondents as a whole.<sup>11</sup> The model of reference in this method is the distribution of reported confidants: it rests on the assumption that all respondents have an equal probability of reporting any given type of confidant, and reveals the type of confidant that is favoured or rejected by a particular category of respondent.<sup>12</sup>

Another approach concentrates on the process whereby relations of confidence are established between the different categories that make up the population. Under this process, any two categories of people may be linked by many, few or no bonds at all. Instead of taking as reference the confidence that exists between individuals who have reported having confidants and examining solely the internal disparities, this approach assumes that a relationship is possible between individuals of any group, in proportion to the relative importance of these categories in the overall population: the average distributions used as references are those of all individuals as potential partners in relations. The probabilities actually registered are then compared with the theoretical probabilities for each cell in the matrix.

In this second comparison, the non-existent relations, those precluded by differences of sex, age and social status, have as much place as the bonds that do exist and thus become more visible. In addition, the contrasts in relational expansivity are not neutralized: within the global structure of the matrix, the categories who report more confidants are able to 'over-select' themselves while 'under-selecting' other categories relatively little. The same relational freedom is not available to those respondents who report a below-average number of confidants.<sup>13</sup> It is important to note this point, since it is known that beyond a minimum threshold an increase in the number of relations is often accompanied by their diversification: in the case under review, even with a limited variation admitted in the number of bonds (0 to 3), the existence of contacts with categories

11. The method used in the presentation of some results of the INED survey on the choice of spouse (Bozon, Heran 1987), for example.

12. In this context it is worth noting that 74.1% of relations are formed between members of the same sex; 56.9% between members of the same decade age group; and 39.2% between members of the same socio-professional category.

13. It is clear from these remarks that the logic of the analysis cannot be the same as for the choice of spouse in a monogamous society: in the present case each individual can report several confidants or none at all, and in turn be cited several times or not at all. Conversely, the question dealt with here is comparable to that posed by sexual relations over a given period of time, when multiple partners are taken into account.

who are a little or very different is favoured, relatively, by a greater relational expansivity. Lastly, although this analysis is of course concerned with socially preferential choices, it can also be interpreted as an account of the consequences of these choices on the flows of information and influence that traverse or not the social fabric. A category that reports a particularly small number of confidants appears here exactly as it is: at once particularly 'disconnected' from the other categories and with a low level of internal communication. Viewed in this light, relational expansivity is seen to open the way to flows which appear relatively more powerful or more widely distributed within the social arena.<sup>14</sup>

Tables 8a to 8c present an analysis of two processes in the social distribution of confidence:

- the overall distortions in the range of choices, such as emerges from a comparison between the theoretical and actual marginal distributions.
- the strength of self-selection process by category.

#### *The age barrier (Table 8a)*

The differences between the marginal totals of the rows and columns and the theoretical distribution  $T$  provide a measure of, respectively, the relative relational expansivity ( $E - T$ ) and attractivity ( $R - T$ ) of each category. They are found to decline with age, and become negative after forty for the former (individuals report fewer confidants) and after fifty for the latter (individuals are less often cited as confidants). Advancing age thus has a lesser effect on the status as confidants as on the person making confidences. Beyond the age of fifty, however, the exchange of confidences as a societal phenomenon suffers a general 'shrinkage'.

For the table as a whole, the sum of absolute deviations is around 80%. Four in ten relations result from a socially oriented selection between age groups.<sup>15</sup>

For its part, the index of homophily shows that at all ages confidences are especially likely to be exchanged with people of similar age. Under 24, homophilic relations are six times more numerous than they would be under a model of equal distribution. Pressure in favour of homophilic choices thereafter declines regularly up to 60, at which point the ratio drops to 1.7 before climbing to 2.7.<sup>16</sup> However, it does not follow from this strength of homophilic choices among the young that these groups

14. For the matrix as a whole, the algebraic sum of the differences between the model and what is observed equals zero: every 'missing' relation being necessarily compensated by an 'over-present' relation elsewhere in the matrix.

15. In other words, the partners of four relations in ten would have to be transferred in order to re-establish a flow of exchange that was 'equitable' or proportional to their importance in the whole population, between each pair of partners.

16. The observed probability divided by the expected probability (see Table 8 last column).

TABLE 8. - HOMOPHILY AND HETEROPHILY IN RELATIONS OF CONFIDENCE

**Interpreting the tables**

The first line (R) gives the distribution of relations of confidence depending on the age of the 'receivers' (marginal distribution in rows of the table).

The second line (T) indicates the age structure of the population: this is thus the theoretical distribution of relations of confidence in a non-preferential exchange (the same marginal distribution as in the columns).

Column (I) gives the distribution of relations of confidence depending on the age of the 'issuers' (marginal distribution in columns of table).

For each age combination of 'issuers' and 'receivers' there is an observed value (by breakdown of the total R of the column), a theoretical value (by breakdown of total T in the row) and the difference between these two figures.

The homophily index (last column) is calculated by dividing the observed number by the theoretical number for a same age group of issuers and receivers. The calculation is made on the diagonal element.

**(8a) The age effect**

Number of relations reported: 3 546

	Receivers of relations						Obs prob I	Theo prob T	Expansivity I-T	Homophily index (obs/theo)
	18-23	24-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+				
Obs prob R	17.6	16.9	24.3	20.4	11.0	9.8				
Theo prob T	14.7	13.3	21.7	19.6	16.4	14.3				
Attractivity R-T	+2.9	+3.6	+2.6	+0.8	-5.4	-4.5				
<b>Initiators:</b>										
18-23										
theo prob (R)	2.2	2.0	3.2	2.9	2.4	2.1				
obs prob (T)	14.2	2.9	1.1	1.7	0.9	0.1	21.0	14.7	+6.3	6.5
obs-theo	+12	+0.9	-2.1	-1.2	-1.5	-2.0				
24-29										
theo prob (R)	2.0	1.8	2.9	2.6	2.2	1.9				
obs prob (T)	2.0	8.3	3.3	1.6	1.2	0.3	16.7	13.3	+3.4	4.6
obs-theo		+6.5	+0.4	-1.0	-1.0	-1.6				
30-39										
theo prob (R)	3.2	2.9	4.7	4.2	3.6	3.1				
obs prob (T)	0.9	4.1	13.2	4.0	0.8	1.2	24.3	21.7	+2.6	2.8
obs-theo	-2.3	+1.2	+8.5	-0.2	-2.8	-1.9				
40-49										
theo prob (R)	2.9	2.6	4.2	3.8	3.2	2.8				
obs prob (T)	0.3	0.7	4.8	8.2	2.1	1.3	17.4	19.6	-2.2	2.1
obs-theo	-2.6	-1.9	+2.6	+4.4	-1.1	-1.5				
50-59										
theo prob (R)	2.4	2.2	3.6	3.2	2.7	2.3				
obs prob (T)		0.9	1.6	3.1	4.6	1.6	11.7	16.4	-4.7	1.7
obs-theo	-2.4	-1.3	-2.0	-0.1	+1.9	-0.7				
60-69										
theo prob (R)	2.1	1.9	3.1	2.8	2.3	2.0				
obs prob (T)	0.1	0.1	0.3	1.7	1.5	5.3	8.9	14.3	-5.4	2.7
obs-theo	-2.0	-1.8	-2.8	-1.1	-0.8	+3.3				

**(8b) The effect of socio-professional category**

Number of relations: 3 534

	Receivers of relations								Obs prob I	Theo prob T	Expansivity I-T	Homophily index (obs/theo)
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8				
Obs prob R	1.3	4.8	10.3	13.8	26.3	9.4	8.3	25.8				
Theo prob T	1.4	3.9	8.3	13.1	25.9	20.1	15.0	12.2				
Attractivity R-T	-0.1	+0.9	+2.0	+0.7	+0.4	-10.7	-6.7	+13.6				
<b>Initiators:</b>												
1 Farmers												
theo prob (R)		0.1	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.2				
obs prob (T)	0.2	0.1	0.1		0.4	0.1	0.1	0.1	1.1	1.4		
obs-theo	+0.2			-0.2		-0.2	-0.1	-0.1			-0.3	
2 Artisans, self-employed, shopkeepers												
theo prob (R)	0.1	0.1	0.3	0.5	1.0	0.8	0.6	0.5				
obs prob (T)		0.8	0.6	0.3	1.0	0.1	0.1	0.6	3.6	3.9		8
obs-theo	-0.1	+0.7	+0.3	-0.2		-0.7	-0.5	+0.1			-0.3	
3 Managers, liberal professions												
theo prob (R)	0.1	0.3	0.7	1.1	2.1	1.7	1.2	1.0				
obs prob (T)		0.5	3.0	2.2	1.1	0.1	0.4	0.9	8.2	8.3		4.3
obs-theo	-0.1	+0.2	+2.3	+1.1	-1.0	-1.6	-0.8	-0.1			-0.1	
4 Intermediate professions												
theo prob (R)	0.2	0.5	1.1	1.8	3.4	2.6	2.0	1.6				
obs prob (T)	0.1	0.7	1.5	4.3	3.9	0.4	0.3	2.2	13.6	13.1		2.4
obs-theo	-0.1	+0.2	+0.4	+2.5	+0.5	-2.2	-1.7	+0.6			+0.5	
5 White-collar workers												
theo prob (R)	0.4	1.0	2.1	3.4	6.7	5.2	3.9	3.1				
obs prob (T)	0.1	1.3	2.4	3.4	11.9	2.3	2.8	5.7	29.9	25.9		1.8
obs-theo	-0.3	+0.2	+0.3		+5.2	-2.9	-1.1	+2.6			+4	
6 Manual workers												
theo prob (R)	0.3	0.8	1.7	2.6	5.2	4.0	3.0	2.5				
obs prob (T)	0.1	1.2	0.9	1.0	4.2	5.1	0.5	3.7	16.7	20.1		1.3
obs-theo	-0.2	+0.4	-0.8	-1.6	-1.0	+1.1	-2.5	+1.2			-3.4	
7 Retired												
theo prob (R)	0.2	0.6	1.2	2.0	3.9	3.0	2.3	1.8				
obs prob (T)	0.6		0.5	0.8	1.4	0.6	3.6	1.9	9.4	15.0		1.6
obs-theo	+0.4	-0.6	-0.7	-1.2	-2.5	-2.4	+1.3	+0.1			-5.6	
8 Inactives												
theo prob (R)	0.2	0.5	1.0	1.6	3.1	2.5	1.8	1.4				
obs prob (T)	0.1	0.3	1.3	1.7	2.4	0.7	0.5	10.7	17.5			7.1
obs-theo	-0.1	-0.2	+0.3	+0.1	-0.7	-1.8	-1.3	+9.3			+5.3	

<b>(8c) The sex effect</b>						
Unweighted relations: 3 539						
R: receivers of relations, I: initiators of relations						
	Receivers of relations		Obs prob I	Theo prob T	Expansivity I-T	Homophily index obs/theo
	Men	Women				
Observed probability I	45.9	54.1				
Theoretical probability T	50.5	49.5				
Observed probability R	37.8	62.2				
Attractivity R-T	- 12.7	+ 12.7				
Initiators of relations						
men						
theo prob	25.5	25.0		50.5		
obs prob	28.9	17.0	45.9		- 4.6	1.1
obs prob-theo prob	+ 3.4	- 8				
women						
theo prob	25.0	24.5		49.5		
obs prob	8.9	45.2	54.1		+ 4.6	1.8
obs prob-theo prob	- 16.1	+ 20.7				

are totally closed in on themselves as regards exchanging confidences on intimate matters.

Homophily results in fact from two processes: a high degree of self-selection and/or an under-selection of all those who are 'different'. Which of these logics predominates here?<sup>17</sup> Before the age of 30, self over-selection is twice as important as under-selection of other categories; between 50 and 59, by contrast, under selection of other categories is three times more important than self over-selection. The relational expansivity characteristic of the young age groups is responsible for a high degree of contact both with members of the other groups and, still more so, with one's contemporaries; the concentration of confidences on one's own type that occurs in later life is very largely due to a lack of contact with the other categories. Two typical profiles can thus be contrasted: first, the confidences exchanged by the young and which are homophilic by 'excess', second the confidences of old people, which are homophilic by 'default'.

#### *Socio-economic status (Table 8b)*

Measurement of homophily according to social milieu has to make allowance for the crude character of the information an interviewee can be asked to supply about a confidant: in particular, the former activity of

people now retired cannot be known. Furthermore, this category and that of individuals 'not in employment', most of whom are in full-time education, include an age effect that is present at each end of the life-course.

Overall comparison between the distribution of interviewees and confidants exposes this effect (an over-representation of the 'young people' not in employment and an under-representation of retired 'old people'), plus just one significant trait relative to social milieu — a massive under-representation of manual workers, a phenomenon that appears all the more striking when it is observed that all the other categories of active individuals are present roughly in proportion to the place they occupy in the population as a whole.

In all, three in ten relations are inconsistent with an equal distribution of confidence. However, the contrasts of socio-professional status are less than those of age.<sup>18</sup> choice of individuals with whom to exchange confidences about intimate matters is conditioned less by differences in socio-economic status than by differences in age. If we accept that conversation requires a normative proximity, not least at the level of language, it appears logical that the 'sub-cultures' of sexuality should be influenced primarily by age, which can also be interpreted as an effect of generation.

The degree of selectivity in relations of confidence is differentiated by social hierarchy: thus the 'self-employed tradespeople' report members of their own category as confidants eight times more than their importance in the total population, whereas for manual workers the figure is only 1.3 times (the former are present, it is true, in very small numbers which could account for sizeable relative differences). A sharp difference separates the 'professionals and senior managers' (4.3) from members of the 'intermediate professions' (2.4). Exchange of confidences about sex and love lives are thus sensitive to social differences: in the upper reaches of the social hierarchy confidences are exchanged primarily with equals; intermediate and white-collar workers are more open to different social categories, though not necessarily in the sense of choosing confidants more 'prestigious' than themselves, since members of the intermediate professions over-select white-collar workers (1.1) nearly as much as managers (1.4).

#### *Confidants are 'confidantes' (Table 8c)*

Relations of confidence are consistently more likely to be established with women: there is a difference of 12.7 percentage points between the proportion of women in the sample (49.5%) and the proportion of female confidants (62.2%), while male confidants are perforce under-represented

17. The indicator used is simply the ratio by category of the sum of the negative differences (under-selection) and the sum of positive differences (the homophily figure, sometimes another).

18. The matrix of the professional choices contains 64 elements, compared with 36 for the ages: for an equal degree of over-selection, the sum of differences could therefore be greater.

in the same proportion. Accompanying this greater 'popularity' of women is a greater expansivity — women report a relational 'surplus' of 4.6%.

The partners of two relations in ten would have to be switched in order to re-establish a homogeneous distribution of confidence.

Women are 1.8 times more likely to confide in someone of the same sex, compared with a figure of only 1.1 for men. And in general their choices are more sharply contrasted than those of men, with much greater differences between the actual and expected probabilities. In particular, the under-reporting of the opposite sex is twice as great among women as among men: if confidants are very often 'confidantes' this is both because women are more likely to choose other women to confide in, and because they actually do not want to confide in a man.

#### IV. The dynamics of friendship

The relations on which exchanges of confidence are based do not form a static and stable context. Each relation has a beginning and an end, and is part of an individual's network for a measurable length of time. The changes it undergoes in that period are complex and varied. We postulate that there exist different 'temporal forms' of interpersonal bonds: the nature of exchanges between partners may evolve, either slowly or by qualitative jump, or may remain stable. And these forms of the relational procedures depend on the degree — more or less socialized or interpersonal — of regulation of exchanges (bonds that are firmly rooted in a social framework are more stable: Ferrand 1989a).

A knowledge of this 'natural' dynamic of relationships is important to the present discussion: in order to assess the influence of confidants we have to understand if and how some individuals alter the composition of their networks so as to establish a consistency or normative consensus. What follows is no more than a first step and examines just the broad tendencies, and is based simply on measurement of the longevity of the relations described in the questionnaire. The analysis is completed with elements drawn from the qualitative research carried out by C. Bidart.

Considered as a whole, the average longevity of the different types of bond is contrasted.<sup>19</sup> In order to identify the different logics of stability and renewal (Fischer 1982), we examine just one type of bond, namely relations of friendship, whose importance is approximately the same at all ages (unweighted total = 2,406 relations, of which 1,812 reported by individuals who were or had been in work, 594 by those not in employment; they account for 67.8% of the total relations).

19. Since we examine only the relations that exist at the time of the survey we do not know the average 'lifetime' of relations: the term 'longevity' is therefore preferable. Moreover, unlike many British and American colleagues we consider that there is no sense in asking about 'how long' a relative has been known.

#### *The longevity of bonds of friendship*

The length of time that relationships last can be interpreted as a consequence of the personal capacity of individuals to sustain their friendships (Matthews 1986), of external constraints such as geographical mobility, and of particular social models.

The greater reserve of men has been noted already, and their relations of confidence are found to be very slightly older than those reported by women (Table 9).

TABLE 9. — LONGEVITY OF FRIENDSHIPS BY SEX AND AGE OF RESPONDENTS

	Number	Mean longevity (in years)	Coefficient of variation (standard deviation/mean)
All relationships	2 406	10.1	86.5
By sex of respondent:			
Men	1 290	10.4	82.9
Women	1 116	9.8	90.8
By age of respondent:			
18-23	718	6.4	81.8
24-29	610	8.5	71.1
30-39	611	11.0	69.8
40-49	301	13.9	71.2
50-69	166	22.1	68.1

By comparing the increase in the mean age of the respondents with the increase in the longevity of the relationships they report, it can be shown that the latter always 'age' less than the individuals — there is no 'stock' of relations which ages with individuals and that is progressively 'emptied' (as might be inferred from the decrease in the size of the network with age); instead there is a constant process of renewal (Ferrand 1989c), one that slackens only after the age of fifty.

The longevity of relations increases regularly with the age of the respondent; but the greater this age, the smaller the proportion of recent relations in the total, thereby causing the average longevity of relations to rise (Table 10).<sup>20</sup>

For each age group, the coefficient of variation indicates the relative diversity of the relational logics: it reveals an opposition between the youngest and the rest.<sup>21</sup> The stability of this relative dispersion demonstrates that

20. We consider historical changes to have little impact on these relational logics and ignore the 'generation' effect.

21. This arises from the sharper contrast observed in the younger age group between relations reported as having 'always' existed which had lasted at least 18 years and those that were more recent.

TABLE 10. - INCREASE IN LONGEVITY OF FRIENDSHIPS BY AGE OF RESPONDENTS

Age	Mean age	Ageing of respondents	Increase in longevity of friendships
18-23	20.7		
24-29	26.4	+ 5.7	+ 2.1
30-39	34.0	+ 7.6	+ 2.5
40-49	43.6	+ 9.6	+ 2.9
50-69	58.0	+ 14.4	+ 8.2

the absolute disparities are greater at advanced ages but that overall the inter-individual variations remain proportionate throughout the lifetime.

Between the ages of thirty and forty, a contrast emerges depending on the sex of those reporting relations, with the relationships of men having aged by 4.4 years as against 1.6 years for those of women. This indicates that women are renewing their conversational partners at a much faster rate: the factors encouraging them to do this include a decline in the burden of childrearing, a return to work, and perhaps a waning of interest in their marriage.

The individuals who report these relations of confidence possess varied networks; some have just a single relationship but others have several. Given the general logic according to which one establishes new relationships at every age, it might be thought that a larger network is indicative of a relational 'conservatism', in the sense that the longer bonds are sustained the more they necessarily accumulate. In reality, however, the opposite process is at work. Relationships belonging to networks of three confidants are on average two years more recent than single relationships (Table 11): having more confidants also means changing them more frequently. In other words, the expansivity that is responsible for a larger-sized network is accompanied by a more dynamic regime in which relationships are made and unmade at a faster rate.

This link between expansivity and renewal is not the same throughout the life-course: up to the age of thirty, network size is not associated with significant differences in the longevity of bonds of friendship. Beyond this age, the disparities in longevity between single bonds and those in networks of three confidants increase from two to six years. Contrasting logics begin to operate after thirty: on the one hand 'mono-confidant' networks formed by a single but lasting bond of friendship, on the other networks of 'multi-confidants' whose members are subject to more frequent renewal.

TABLE 11. - LONGEVITY OF FRIENDSHIPS BY SIZE OF THE NETWORK TO WHICH THEY BELONG

Size of network:	Number	Mean longevity (years)	Coefficient of variation
1 confidant	342	11.5	90.4
2 confidants	777	10.5	83.9
3 confidants	1 287	9.5	85.9

Although men's networks of friendship are smaller on average than women's (1.4 as against 1.6 members), they are subject to the same link between expansivity and change: the greater the number of friends, the more recent the friendships.

### *The internal logic of relational processes: old and new confidants*

Having seen how the age and sex of respondents (attributes of the individuals) and the number of confidants reported (formal attributes of the network) are related to the longevity of the bonds, we now want to see if the attributes of the relationship itself are related independently of its longevity.<sup>22</sup> Such an analysis is based on a hypothesis which stresses the intrinsic logic of a relationship rather than the attributes of the individual reporting them. In short, the formal attributes of a relationship are what account for its evolution.

The age of an individual and that of the person he or she confides in set objective limits to the maximum possible longevity, and have a general influence on the actual average longevity. In order to analyse relational stability independently of the interviewee's age, we have established a variable of relative longevity based on the distribution of longevity of bonds for each age group: bonds in the first quartile are labelled 'recent', those of the fourth 'old', and the others 'intermediate'.<sup>23</sup>

At every age, the most recently-formed (relatively) friendships are reported mainly by women (Table 12). These friends belong to networks containing three confidants, and who are seen at weekly intervals. By contrast, friends of the same sex and age are under-represented. The longest lasting friendships are formed by either men or women, but with confidants of the same sex and same age (plus or minus three years). The frequency of contact has no influence. And socio-occupational homophily is rare: divergences in career paths in the course of a lifetime do not threaten these fundamental bonds. Lastly, the fact of a confidant having also been a sexual partner is without significant incidence on the length of the acquaintanceship.

A link thus exists between the probability of sustaining the bonds of friendship and the formal attributes of homophily and the frequency of contacts. What these differences in the characteristic of a bond mean is that not all recently formed bonds will withstand the passage of time: the most likely to survive are the friendships characterized by the greatest

22. The method used is logistic regression (Glaude 1983, Verger 1983) with which it is possible to measure the effects 'all other things being equal'. It is applied to the relations of friendship, excepting those of people who had not given their occupation, the relationships of confidence for which the occupation was not known and those for which the frequency of contact was not specified (N = 2,336 relations out of 2,406 relations of friendship reported).

23. Our thanks to Marie-Odile Lebeaux (LASMAS) for her methodological advice.

TABLE 12. — RELATIVE LONGEVITY OF FRIENDSHIPS BY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RELATIONSHIPS AND THEIR NETWORK (LOGIT MODEL)

	Recent friendships		Old friendships	
	Estimated parameter	Probability	Estimated parameter	Probability
Variables used				
Gender ego				
woman	0.2491	0.0116	-0.1615	
man				
Number of confidants				
1	-0.2913		0.6110	
2				
3	0.2683	0.0152	0.0124	
Sexual or romantic relations with the confidant				
yes	-0.0117		-0.0913	
no				
no answer	-0.3970		-0.3777	
Frequency of meetings				
more than weekly	0.5406	0.0005	-0.1734	
more than monthly	0.3186		-0.0344	
less than monthly			-0.4164	
Homophilic relations by:				
gender (yes, no)	-0.5962	0.0001	0.5464	0.0001
age (yes, no)	-0.5293	0.0001	0.7041	0.0001
CSP (yes, no)	0.0238		-0.4164	0.0001

The modalities of variables in italic are the reference situation. Probabilities > 0.01 are not shown

similarity between individuals as measured by the cultural dimensions of gender and age.<sup>24</sup>

Identification of these two models can be brought into sharper focus using the analyses of the totality of the relations of friendship and their history carried out by C. Bidart.<sup>25</sup>

On the one hand, 'friendships formed in childhood or youth' have a better chance of lasting if 'the partners enjoy a degree of convergence in the course of their respective life-cycles: if they get married at around the same time and have their children around the same time ... It is also observed that friends who had been separated re-establish contact when the late member catches the other up ... The lasting friendships are also those which at a certain point in their development had become highly

24. A theoretical model for interpreting this type of friendship is in Ferrand 1985.

25. In-depth interviews with subjects in the 'employee' milieu to reconstitute the source of friendships and the specific role of exchanges of confidence. The quotes are from an intermediate working paper of November 1992.

personalized, made to stand out from the original group and given a specific and special dimension. This 'determining moment' in a special relationship is more often than not situated after a dramatic event.

On the other hand, 'friendships formed in adulthood are more rapidly differentiated, removed from the context of the original contact ... More often than not the relationship was favoured or even occasioned by exceptional circumstances or a dramatic event — such conditions reveal points in common and affinities of personality, and which, more than for childhood friends, "forge the bond". These relationships are less homogeneous in terms of age and gender but are more homogeneous on the criterion of socio-professional status, something which is more developed and well defined at these ages and more influential ... These relationships are also much more a part of daily life, and involve much more frequent contacts than the friendships from childhood, many of which are weakened by geographical separation. Rather than an annual occasion for "catching up on the news", the exchange of confidences is here a means of developing personal intimacy on an everyday basis'.

### Conclusion

Analysis of 'personal networks' is paradoxical. Based on a paradigm which emphasizes the interaction between two partners, and if possible the structural effects within a complete relational system, it nonetheless proceeds by examining just one end of the relationship. This type of 'individual-based' survey is of course more straightforward in execution than a monitoring of all the relationships in a given group of individuals, but in order to overcome the paradox analysis has to focus primarily on the formal attributes of the bonds: what becomes apparent is the existence of a process corresponding to the specific relational models, a result that is more consistent with the interactionist paradigm.

Likewise, the description of 'choices' can serve to support a sociology of the 'relational sub-cultures' or 'modes of sociability' specific to the different milieux, conceived as discrete worlds. But it can also, as we have tried to show, sustain a more structural vision, in which relational choices serve as the connecting agents between different areas of the social fabric. On the one hand, all the choices are formally interdependent and retroactive: rather than a differential approach to the norms of sociability this is a structural vision of 'barriers and levels' (tables of generational mobility have a somewhat analogous logic). On the other hand, this vision synthesizes the bonds, and thus the channels of exchange, between the categories of individuals: the exchange in question may be either verbal, contributing to understanding of the logic of information, or sexual, which in the context of AIDS means it is a potential vector of viral infection.

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## PART V

SEXUALITY  
AND AIDS