



Rethinking Friendship: Hidden Solidarities Today

Liz Spencer, Ray Pahl

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From Aristotle to contemporary soap operas, friendship has always been a subject of fascination. But scholarly investigation of the broad social relevance of friendship has been neglected. *Rethinking Friendship* describes the varied nature of personal relationships today, and also locates friendship in contemporary debates about individualization and the supposed "collapse of community." Exploring friendships with partners and family as well as "friends," the book reveals ways in which friends and friendlike ties are an important and unacknowledged source of social glue.

Using a rigorous analysis of in-depth interviews, the authors develop a set of innovative concepts--friendship repertoires (the range of friendships people have); friendship modes (the way people make and maintain friendships over time); and patterns of suffusion (the extent to which boundaries between friends and family become blurred). These concepts form the basis of a typology of personal communities that vary in the roles played by friends, family, partners, and neighbors.

Combining scholarly depth and rich description, this absorbing and accessible book will appeal to all those interested in informal social relationships, including students of methodology and policymakers. With its challenge to pessimistic commentators, *Rethinking Friendship* urges us to resist sweeping generalizations and to acknowledge the sheer diversity of social life today.

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