

# Reconfiguring Friendships: Social Relationships and the Internet

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# The sociability debate

- Are we more or less connected? The decline of social capital and community
- Online vs. offline relationships
  1. What are the determinants of online relationship formation? (*online friendships*)
  2. From online to face to face friendships? (*offline e-relationships*)
    - Sociodemographics
    - Internet experience
    - Channels of communications used
    - Patterns of use

# The Oxford Internet Surveys (OxIS)

- William H. Dutton - Oxford Internet Institute (<http://www.oii.ox.ac.uk>)
- OxIS 2003 & 2005, cross-sectional surveys
- Probability samples of England, Scotland & Wales
- Respondents: 14 and older
- Face to face interviews
- N = 2,185, 72% response rate
- World Internet Project: USC Center for the Digital Future (<http://www.worldinternetproject.net/>)



# Reconfiguration of social networks

- 20% of users have met new people or made friends online
- Over half of these have met online friends in person
- 2.6 friends met in person
- 7 online friends never met

**Online friendships**

**Offline e-relationships**

**SES VARS**

**Gender**

**Age**

**Education**

**Social grade**

**Marital status**

**Employment**

**Health**

**EXPERIENCE**

**Length of use**

**Hours online**

**Self-rated ability**

**Broadband**

**ONLINE CONTEXT**

**Blogging**

**Post msg**

**Post pix**

**Website**

**Dist list**

**Chat**

**IM**

**Email**

**USE**

**Entertainment**

**Information**

**Banking**

**Learning**

**Communication**

**Planning**

**x**

**x**

**x**

**x**

**x**

**x**

**x**

**x**

**x**

**x**

**x**

**x**

**x**

# Conclusions and future directions?

- Internet as powerful networking tool both online and offline
- From adoption to how people use the technology
- Digital divide vs. Participation gap & media literacy
- Transgenerational issues
- From social to civic media?
- The problem with social capital theory – need for theory development: what are the mechanisms?
- Intended vs. Unintended consequences