

Integrating Social Networks into Research on Youth and Technology

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Indiana University Bloomington, Herman B. Wells Library, Room LI001

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ABSTRACT:

Socially interactive technologies (SITs), such as instant and text messaging, are beginning to redefine the social networks of today's youth. The research paradigms that we have previously used to study the relationship between youth and technology, however, do not fully capture the dynamic, social nature of these technologies. Building on previous research in computer-mediated communication, social and communication networks, and adolescent development, this presentation will call for a new line of research that focuses on the coevolution of youth's online and offline social networks, in order to better understand how technology is integrated into the lives of children and adolescents. A preliminary research project in this vein will be discussed. The project used social network data collection and analysis to look at 1) whether adolescents are creating more, but weaker ties using SITs; 2) to what extent adolescent SIT-facilitated networks overlap with friendship networks; and 3) whether SIT relationships are important for adolescents who have fewer offline peer ties. The results of the research point to a very complex dynamic between offline and SIT-based friendships, and will be used to highlight some of the challenges (and rewards) of conducting this type of research.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH:

Alison Bryant is an assistant professor in the Department of Telecommunications at Indiana University. She is interested in understanding networks at multiple levels, with particular emphasis on macro-level organizational communities, such as the children's television community and transnational crime networks, and social-level networks formed by socially interactive technologies, such as adolescent instant messaging networks. Within this larger research agenda, her current primary focus is on employing social network theories and methods to try to understand the evolution of the media industry and the way that media affect society, especially families and youth. Her latest book, *The Children's Television Community*, an edited volume that brings together the perspectives of the various populations whose creative, financial, political, and critical input go into children's television, is currently in press with Lawrence Erlbaum Associates. Alison received her Ph.D. from the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California. See more about her at: <http://mypage.iu.edu/~albryant/>