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### **Social Networks and Social Relationships of Adolescents – Offline and Online**

Internet use is conceived as a way to bridge existing social inequalities by providing access to skills, information and resources that are needed in an information society. In this paper I argue that Internet use can reduce gaps in social inequalities by providing access to social ties that previously were not open to adolescents. Adolescents use the Internet not only to maintain social relationships with distant relatives and friends but also to create new relationships online; some of these friendships become integrated into their social circle. Research has focused mainly on the effect of the Internet on existing relationships or the nature of online only ties, but did not consider how the structure of adolescent social ties is changing as they use the Internet to create new social ties and conserve the existing ones.

The goal of the current study was to explore the extent that adolescents' social networks are becoming more heterogeneous (in terms of age and gender) and less bounded to place of residence. In the current research the relationship between the social context of acquaintance (school, neighborhood, and online) and the structure and quality of friendships among adolescents was studied. Data was gathered through a survey of a representative sample of Israeli adolescents (n=980) and in depth-interviews (n=40). In the survey, each adolescent was asked for the names of six close friends. The respondent provided information on each friend's age, gender, and place of residence; and whether he/she met him/her for the first time at school or through extracurricular activities, in the neighborhood or online. The adolescent was also asked to indicate the length of time that he/she had known him/her, and the extent to which the respondent felt closeness and trust, and would ask for help from each of the friends named.

The results show that adolescents' internet use for communication is changing the structure of their ties, supporting higher heterogeneity according to gender and age. Groups that are more socially segregated tend to use more the Internet to create social ties and these ties provide information and the opportunity for collaboration in shared interests.