

Internet access at home increases the likelihood that adults will be in relationships

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Adults who have Internet access at home are much more likely to be in romantic relationships than adults without Internet access, according to research to be presented at the 105th Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association.

"Although prior research on the social impacts of [Internet use](#) has been rather ambiguous about the social cost of time spent online, our research suggests that Internet access has an important role to play in helping Americans find mates," said Michael J. Rosenfeld, an associate professor of sociology at Stanford University and the lead author of the study, "Meeting Online: The Rise of the Internet as a Social Intermediary."

According to the study, 82.2 percent of participants who had Internet access at home also had a spouse or romantic partner, compared to a 62.8-percent partnership rate for adults who did not have Internet access. The paper uses data from Wave I of the How Couples Meet and Stay Together (HCMST) survey, a nationally representative survey of 4,002 adults, of whom 3,009 had a spouse or romantic partner.

In addition to finding that people are more likely to be in [romantic relationships](#) if they have Internet access in their homes, Rosenfeld and study co-author Reuben J. Thomas, an assistant professor of sociology at the City University of New York, found that the Internet is the one social arena that is unambiguously gaining importance over time as a place where couples meet.

"With the meteoric rise of the Internet as a way couples have met in the past few years, and the concomitant recent decline in the central role of friends, it is possible that in the next several years the Internet could eclipse friends as the most influential way Americans meet their romantic partners, displacing friends out of the top position for the first time since the early 1940s," Rosenfeld said.

The study also found that the Internet is especially important for finding potential partners in groups where the supply is small or difficult to identify such as in the gay, lesbian, and middle-aged heterosexual communities.

Among couples who met within two years of the HCMST Wave I survey in the winter of 2009, 61 percent of same-sex couples and 21.5 percent of heterosexual couples met online.

"Couples who meet online are much more likely to be same-sex couples, and somewhat more likely to be from different religious backgrounds," Rosenfeld said. "The Internet is not simply a new and more efficient way to keep in touch with our existing networks; rather the Internet is a new kind of social intermediary that may reshape the kinds of partners and relationships we have."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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