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& Emily Blamire*

*Mondays and Thursdays
1:05 PM – 2:30 PM*

381: Topics in Sociolinguistics and CMC



**Lecture 3: Networks and Communities
July 1, 2019**

LSA Institute, UC Davis

Olson Hall 267

ethics and CMC

How do we study CMC in a more closed platform such as **Facebook**?

Let's have a look, via D'Arcy and Young (2012).

“Facebook is distinct from other online spaces (e.g. Twitter) in that its content is not aimed at the Net but rather is geared toward a constellation of known actors within the networks of individual users.”

(D'Arcy and Young 2012:533)

In other words, they outline a framework meant to apply to platforms that are shaped more by internal connections and social structure.

ethics and CMC

Facebook is more of a **gathering place** (“agora” – D’Arcy and Young 2012:532) for groups of people.

Less anonymity: most people use their **real names** (D’Arcy and Young 2012:533).

Groups may **exist offline** and set up a Facebook page as an extension of their network (e.g. a group of 35 friends who met at a summer camp in 2003).

Or they may get to know each other and develop networks **through** Facebook (e.g. friends who meet in a group devoted to cosplay for *Game of Thrones*).

ethics and CMC

But most of the take-aways are the same as what Bolander and Locher (2014) concluded for Twitter.

D'Arcy and Young: “visibility is a continuum, and any analytical apparatus must be shaped by the structure of a given site” (2012:533).

“[I]ndividuals targeted for research in online social media are human subjects” (2012:535).

“[U]sers do not respond well to the idea of their posts being used for research without either their knowledge or consent” (2012:535).

In the case of Facebook, content might be intended **only** for viewing by friends, or friends-of-friends!

ethics and CMC

Specific advice for Facebook-based projects:

Seek permission; don't eavesdrop. “[A]ppropriating an eavesdropper role for Facebook research is no different from surreptitiously recording conversations in non-virtual spaces” (D’Arcy and Young 2012:537).

Allow participants to opt in via a landing page (D’Arcy and Young 2012:539-540).

Use your own name and account and make it easy for participants to ask questions (D’Arcy and Young 2012:538).

Specify straightforwardly what will count as granting consent (D’Arcy and Young 2012:539-540).

ethics and CMC

Be thoroughly cautious with data; “anonymity and confidentiality are extremely difficult to maintain”

(D'Arcy and Young 2012:537).

At the end of the study, close everything down carefully, including severing ‘friendship’ connections and informing everyone that the data collection has concluded (D'Arcy and Young 2012:541-542).

ethics and CMC

The ethics of CMC data collection is **elaborate** (D'Arcy and Young 2012:542) and cannot be taken lightly.

What are some considerations that might be necessary for newer or more **multimodal** platforms?

networks and communities

What were some of the first online communities you joined? (Not just **platforms**.) For each one...

What year was it/How old were you?

What sort of setting was it? (A forum? A game?)

Was it a subset of a larger space online?

How many regular members were there?

Did people use pseudonyms? Real names? A mix?

Did anyone end up meeting each other offline? What happened?

Have you kept in touch with any of them to this day?

networks and communities

Users of the Internet tend to be individual humans, and there is the possibility of actual connection anytime there is an interaction that isn't superficial.

Just a few entire doctoral dissertations:

networks and communities

1. What happens to identity when everyone's using virtual avatars in **Second Life**? (Abdullah 2014)
2. How do digital visitors to **Mumsnet** in the UK use language to present themselves as parents? What are the gendered elements? (Mackenzie 2016)
3. The modern **asexuality community** emerged online. What are some of the distinctive keywords that showed up along the way? (Hinderliter 2016)
4. How do power dynamics operate in a **World of Warcraft** guild? Where are there links to offline social inequality? (Collister 2013) – more on this on Wednesday!

networks and communities

That said, **caution is necessary**.

“One cannot safely presume, however, that a random group of people constitutes a community of practice (with its own set of highly localised practices) **merely because** they are participating in an activity together on a regular basis or because they share a social identity” (King 2014:2).

Let's take a step back and talk about communities of practice and social networks more broadly – and for each, how we can extend these to the Internet.

networks and communities

We have to be careful with the term ‘social network theory’ because ‘social network’ here **doesn’t** mean ‘Web 2.0 platform’ (Van Herk 2013:17; Milroy and Llamas 2013:411).

Instead, it refers to which people have connections to each other. Much more like ‘six degrees of separation’.



networks and communities

“[A]n individual’s social network is the aggregate of relationships contracted with others, a boundless web of ties which reaches out through social and geographical space linking many individuals, sometimes remotely”

(Milroy and Gordon 2003:117).

“[S]ocial network analysis examines the differing structures and properties of these relationships”

(Milroy and Llamas 2013:409).

networks and communities

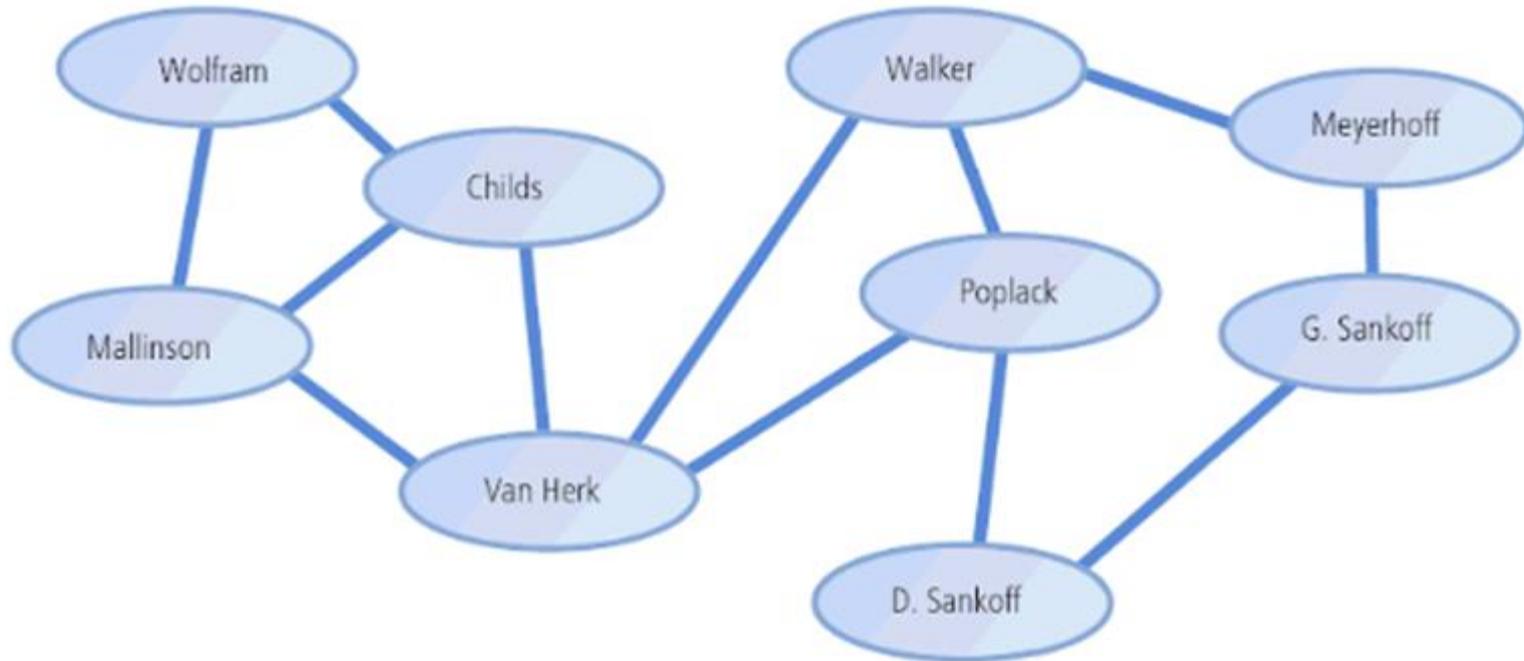


Figure 2.1. A simple social network diagram. In this case, the links are between people who have co-authored papers.

(adapted from Van Herk 2013:18)

networks and communities

What is a community of practice?

Eckert (2006): “A community of practice is a collection of people who engage on an ongoing basis in some common endeavor. [CoPs] emerge in response to common interest or position, and play an important role in forming their members’ participation in, and orientation to, the world around them.”

In short: a group of people who **do a thing together, repeatedly**, based on a shared interest/motivation. Might shape identity, worldviews, behavior, etc.

Idea comes from sociology and human development (Lave and Wenger 1991; Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 1992; Wenger 2000; Eckert and Wenger 2005).

networks and communities

Two essential criteria (Eckert 2006): “**shared experience over time**” and “**a commitment to shared understanding**”.

As a unit and a methodological entity, CoPs are an intermediate step between **individual** and **speech community** (Eckert 2006).

“A white working class Italian-American woman does not develop her ways of speaking directly from the larger categories working class, Italian-American and female, but from her day-to-day experience as a person who combines those three (and other) memberships” (Eckert 2006).

networks and communities

King (2014): a bunch of people sharing an online space does **not automatically qualify as** a CoP, so...what criteria are needed?

People doing things together isn't enough. Not even if they share some kind of identity.

“Describing social organization in any research setting is potentially fraught with problems if the describer (i.e. the writer of research) has not paid close attention to how the people there have come to understand one another within a particular setting” (King 2014:61).

networks and communities

Take-away message: don't simply assume that a group is a community of practice: look for **telltale signs** that it is operating as one!

A community of practice has a “distinct character” (King 2014:62) resulting from the history of “shared interaction.”

What people do in that community eventually becomes unique, shaped by the forces and personalities of the initial mix.

Short version (King 2014:67): “mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire”.

networks and communities

Long version (King 2014:67):

- “• Sustained mutual relationships—harmonious or conflictual
- Shared ways of engaging in doing things together;
- The rapid flow of information and propagation of innovation
- Absence of introductory preambles, as if conversations and interactions were merely the continuation of an ongoing process
- Very quick setup of a problem to be discussed
- Substantial overlap in participants’ descriptions of who belongs
- Knowing what others know, what they can do, and how they can contribute to an enterprise”

networks and communities

- “• Mutually defining identities
- The ability to assess the appropriateness of actions and products
- Specific tools, representations, and other artefacts
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- Jargon and shortcuts to communication as well as the ease of producing new ones
- Certain styles recognized as displaying membership
- A shared discourse that reflects a certain perspective on the world.”

networks and communities

Social network analysis and the CoP model have something in common: there is no single strategy that works across all social contexts.

As ever, “we need procedures which allow us to examine the **specifics of local practice** and local conditions, and which are sensitive to the local social categories and locally contracted ties with which speaker operate in their everyday lives”

(Milroy and Gordon 2003:116).

networks and communities

Classic example: Holmquist (1985), studying variation in Spanish word-final /o/ in a small rural town in Spain. Some speakers pronounced it [o], some more like [u].

The answer? In general, the **dairy farmers** were saying [o] and the **mountain-animal farmers** were saying [u].

This aligned with a general modern/traditional split, but was difficult to capture using other social factors.

This was a relevant social division in this town, and as such, it had linguistic effects!

Relevant social divisions might be extremely particular to locations, subgroups, networks, etc.

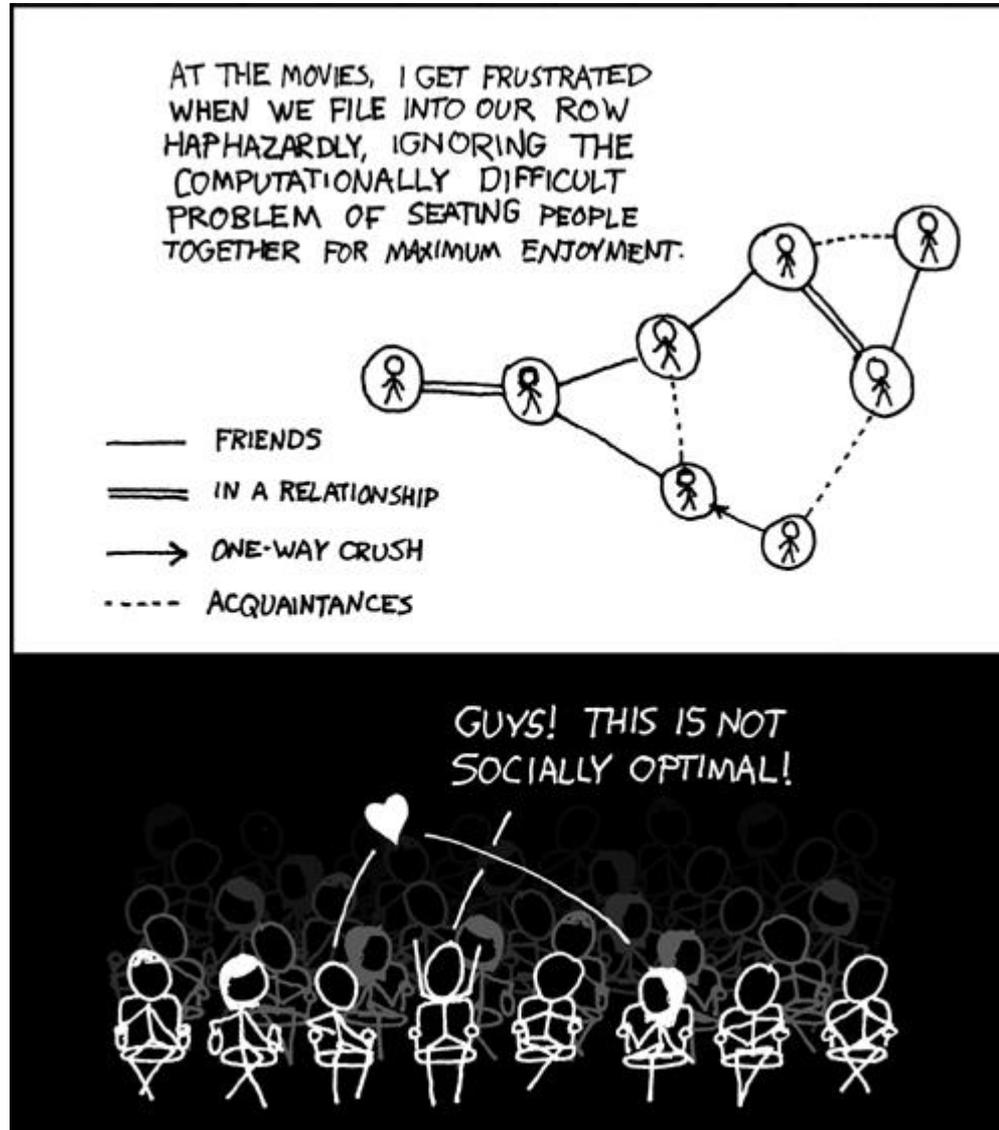
networks and communities

Social networks are **not** broad divisions in the same sense that gender, class, occupational stratum, level of education, etc. are; however, they may hold considerable explanatory power

(Milroy and Gordon 2003:116; cf. Gauchat 1905).

Not all links are the same!

networks and communities



networks and communities

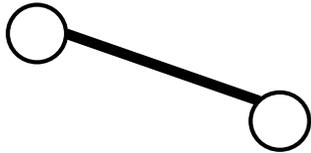
xkcd is playful, of course, but it's getting at a truth: there are lots of axes along which social ties differ, and we can categorize these in several ways in a social network analysis.

networks and communities

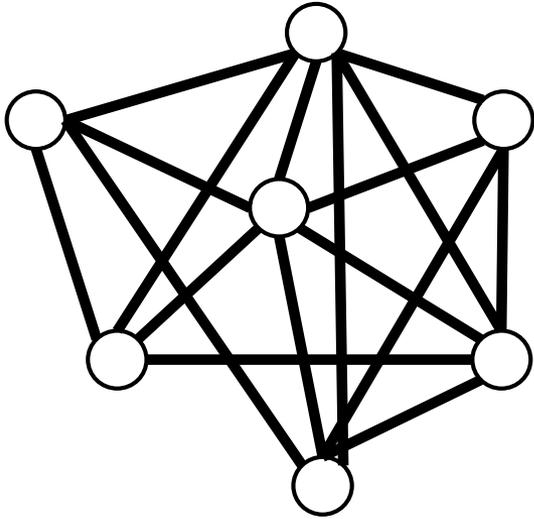
First, the **density** of a network is how **many** of the potential links between members are there

(adapted from Milroy and Llamas 2013:411).

Let's say that this refers to two humans who are acquainted with each other:

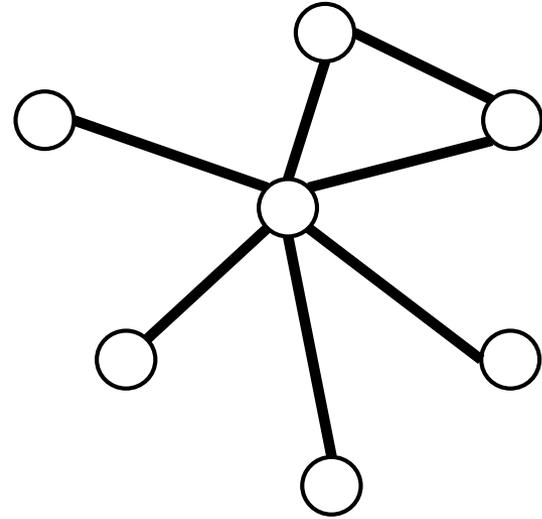


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High-density network:

These people all know all or most of the other people.



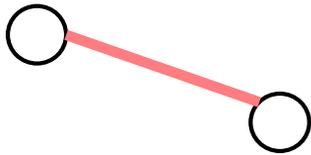
Low-density network:

Most of the central person's friends don't know one another.

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The **complexity** of a network refers to the number of **ways** in which people are connected.

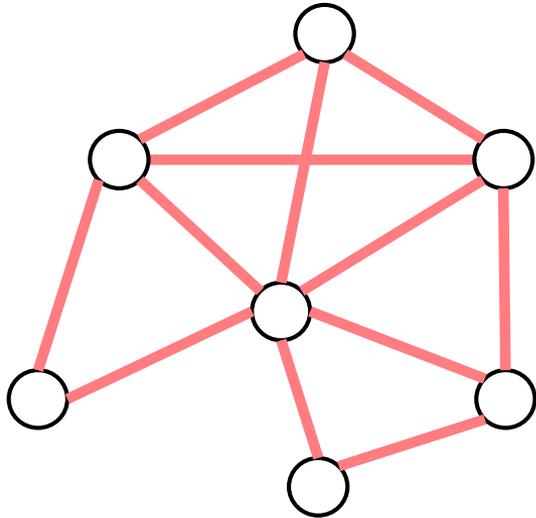
Let's say this means that two people share a workplace:



And that this means they go to the same house of worship:

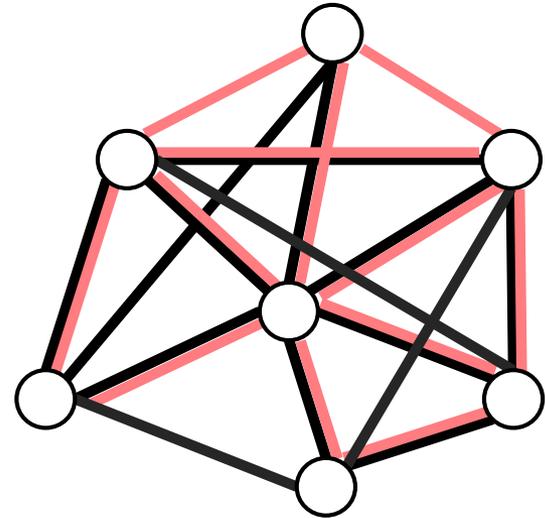


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Uniplex network:

There is only one type of connection among these people.



Multiplex network:

Multiple kinds of ties (sometimes both at once)

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We can also talk about **first-order ties** (direct links) and **second-order ties** (indirect links or greater degrees of separation).

Milroy and Llamas (2013:411):

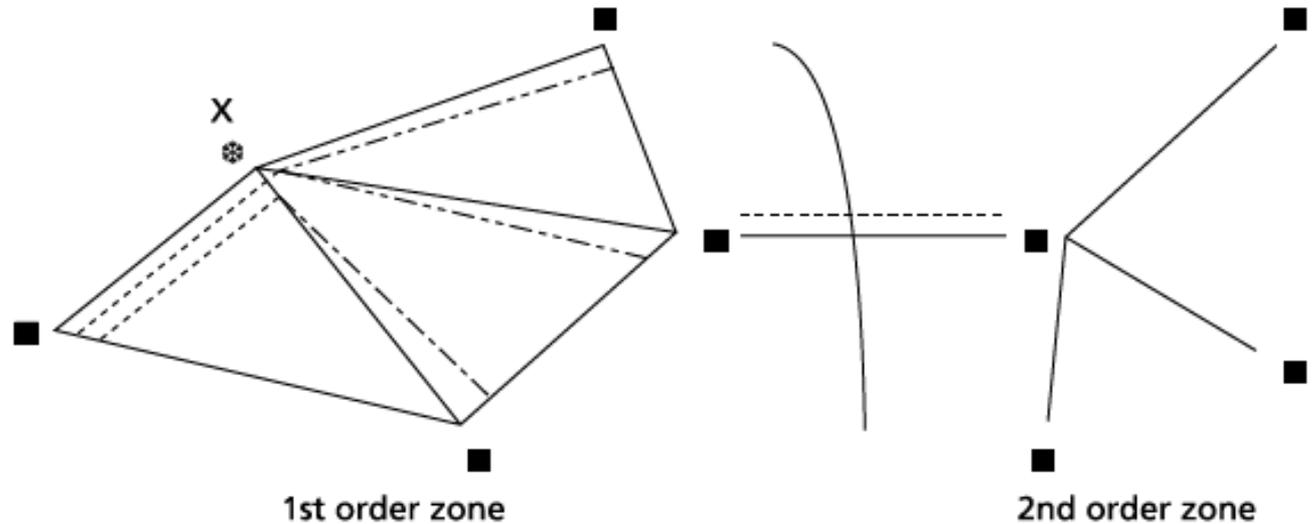


Figure 19.1 High-density, multiplex personal network structure, showing first and second order zones.

networks and communities

Granovetter (1972)'s classic paper in sociology has laid much of the groundwork for network theory (well beyond human beings!).

He introduces **strong ties** and **weak ties**, which is about how tightly attached two people are.

Even if we hold density and complexity constant (e.g. a workplace of 6 people where everyone knows everyone but they don't see each other outside the office), some pairs of people will see each other **more often** and/or feel **emotionally closer**. This is tie strength.

networks and communities

Duncan Watts, a mathematician who works on networks, has also introduced **latent** networks (always present, but only sometimes activated – like extended family) and **emergent** networks (not pre-existing; might be short-term and/or prone to change).

networks and communities

Online social networks can be **vast**, but might also be easier to measure than offline relationships.

If the CMC we are studying is all text-based and time-stamped, and if the transcripts necessarily persist, then we can quantify how much interaction there has been between two people (Bergs 2006:8-9).

The biggest catch is that even when people meet online, it doesn't necessarily all **stay** online (Bergs 2006:8-10).

Now in 2019, there's a joke out there that so many marriages come from **online dating** that computer algorithms have started to breed humans.

networks and communities

Even if we disregard geographically local matchmaking that quickly moves offline:

“[S]ome online ties are qualitatively no different from offline ties, i.e. they can sometimes show a very high degree of transactional content, e.g. through exchange of information, support, and trust”

(Bergs 2006:11).

networks and communities

“Online networks are very interesting for linguistic analyses simply because they are **solely based on verbal, linguistic cues**. While offline networks are based on and influenced by a multitude of extra-linguistic factors, **online network participants only know each other by what they actually say or don't say**. In a pure online network there are practically no nonverbal cues to social identity; hence everything is of great importance for linguistic analyses. Even the fact that some participants do not directly participate or cooperate in a given network can be meaningful f[ro]m an interactional point [of] view” (Bergs 2006:12).

Do you agree?

networks and communities

Bergs (2006:2-3), summarizing Granovetter (1972):

“[D]ense, multiplex networks with high transactional content, and therefore many strong ties, tend to generate and enforce uniform network norms [...] Granovetter's theory of strong and weak ties has been particularly fruitful in its application to language variation and change in social networks”.

In other words, people who come into close, frequent social contact start acting a lot like each other, including linguistically. Could **enforce standardization**, or preserve nonconformity.

networks and communities

Bergs (2006:13): **not clear** whether this applies to online groups, especially if “innovation is the norm”.

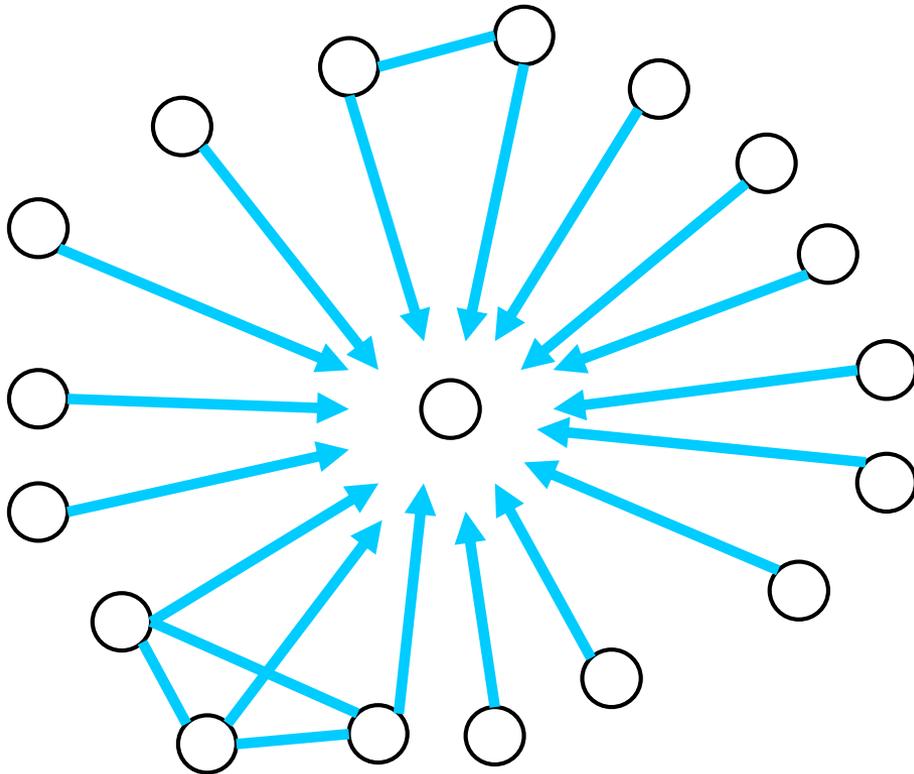
“While linguistic innovation is often regarded as a threat to the role central network member in traditional SNA, **innovation may often be the decisive advantage of the key figure in online communication.**

... When innovations become the norm, the actually observable functional phenomena in networks change. Dense, close-knit networks are still – obviously – norm-enforcing; but **since innovation is the norm, innovations now come from within**, from the central network members, not from bridges or marginal positions.”

networks and communities

The Internet has moved beyond text alone, and chatrooms and message boards.

What kind of online situation is this?



Types of ties:

unidirectional (one-way, like knowing who a celebrity is)

bidirectional (mutual, like a pair of friends).

networks and communities

One-sided interpersonal relationships established by an onlooker with e.g. a television personality, fictional character, etc. is called a **parasocial relationship**

(Rubin and Rubin 1985, etc.).

In a parasocial relationship, you get to know someone, but they do not get to know you.

The Internet is full of the potential for parasocial relationships...but some Internet celebrities do interact with their fans!

What does this mean for network theory? For language? **What are your thoughts?**

networks and communities

Let's look at communities of practice again.

When is an online group a **community of practice**?
This question underlies the article by King (2014).

Remember: CoPs involve “mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire” (King 2014:67).

networks and communities

“**MusicTreeHouse**” or **MTH** (pseudonym)

Target: kids and teenagers on the English-speaking Internet interested in Western classical music.

Original forum: 1997-2006.

Later: individual friendships, Facebook connections, and one attempt (2009-2014) at getting most of the group going again.

17 primary long-term regular users, from 5 countries. Mostly white or Asian-American, almost all born in the 1980s, mix of sexual orientations. Geographic distribution roughly as follows...

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“Amy”

“Ian”

“Laura”

“Kevin”

“Daniel”

“Roberto”

“Nigel”

“Barbara”

“Ben”

“Alexandra”

“Dwight”

“Brian”

“Alfred”

“Tyler”

“Oliver”

“Mark”

“Martin”

“Anne”

“Samantha”

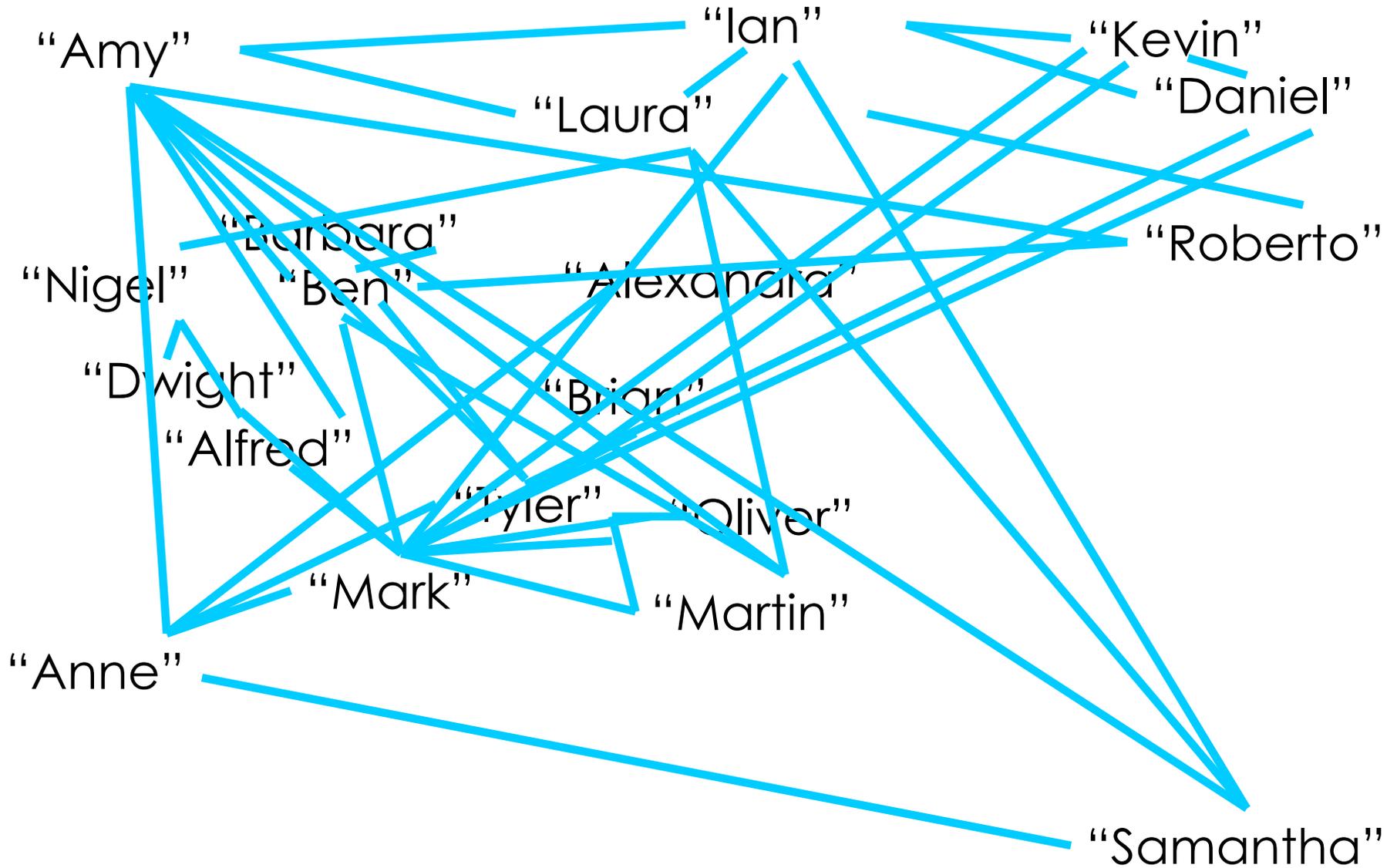
networks and communities

Most of these people used real names or altered forms of their real names, but uploading pictures was slow and difficult, so it was mostly text-based, and many of the friendships emerged between people who did not know what the others looked like.

networks and communities

Who got along well?

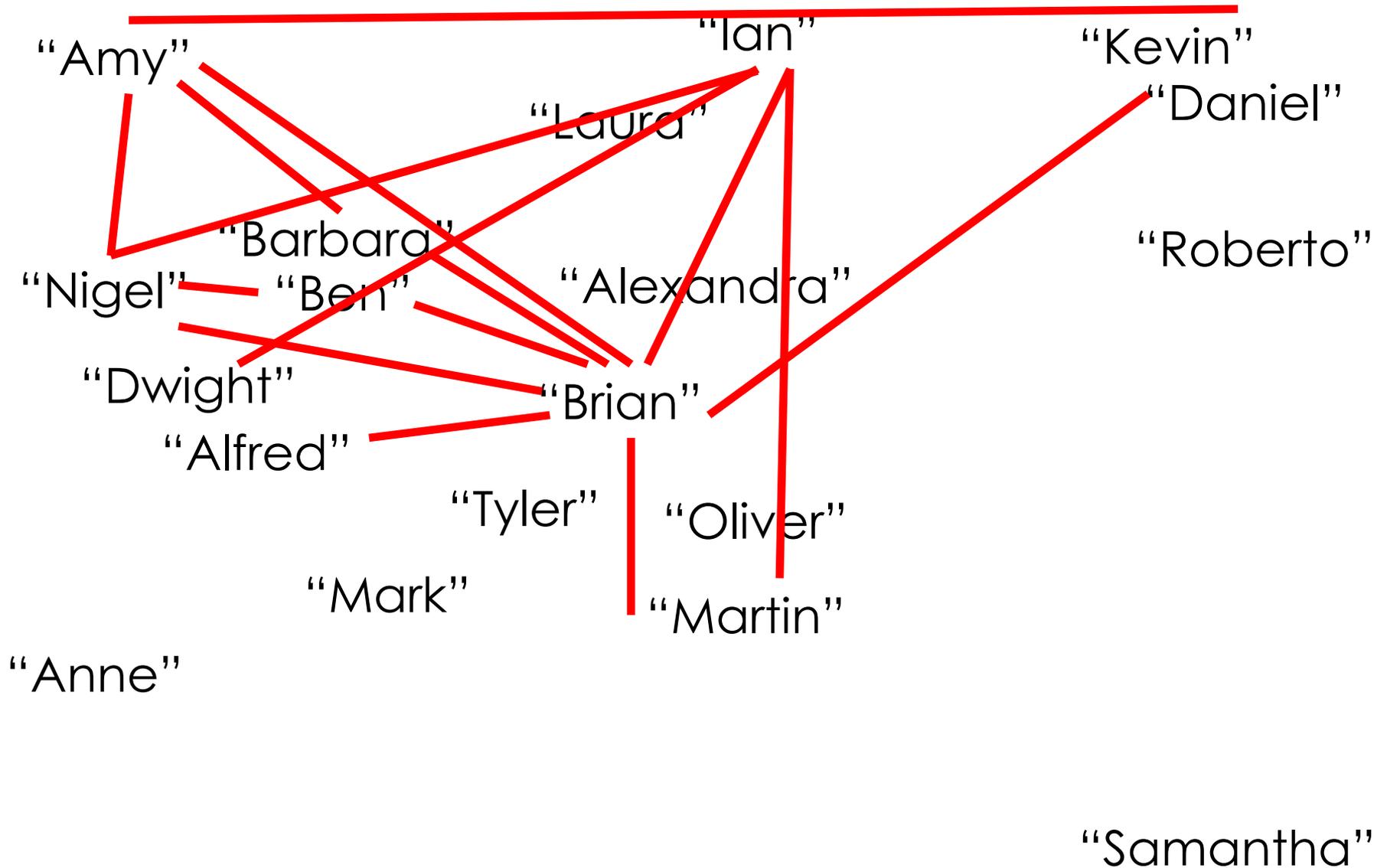
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Who didn't?

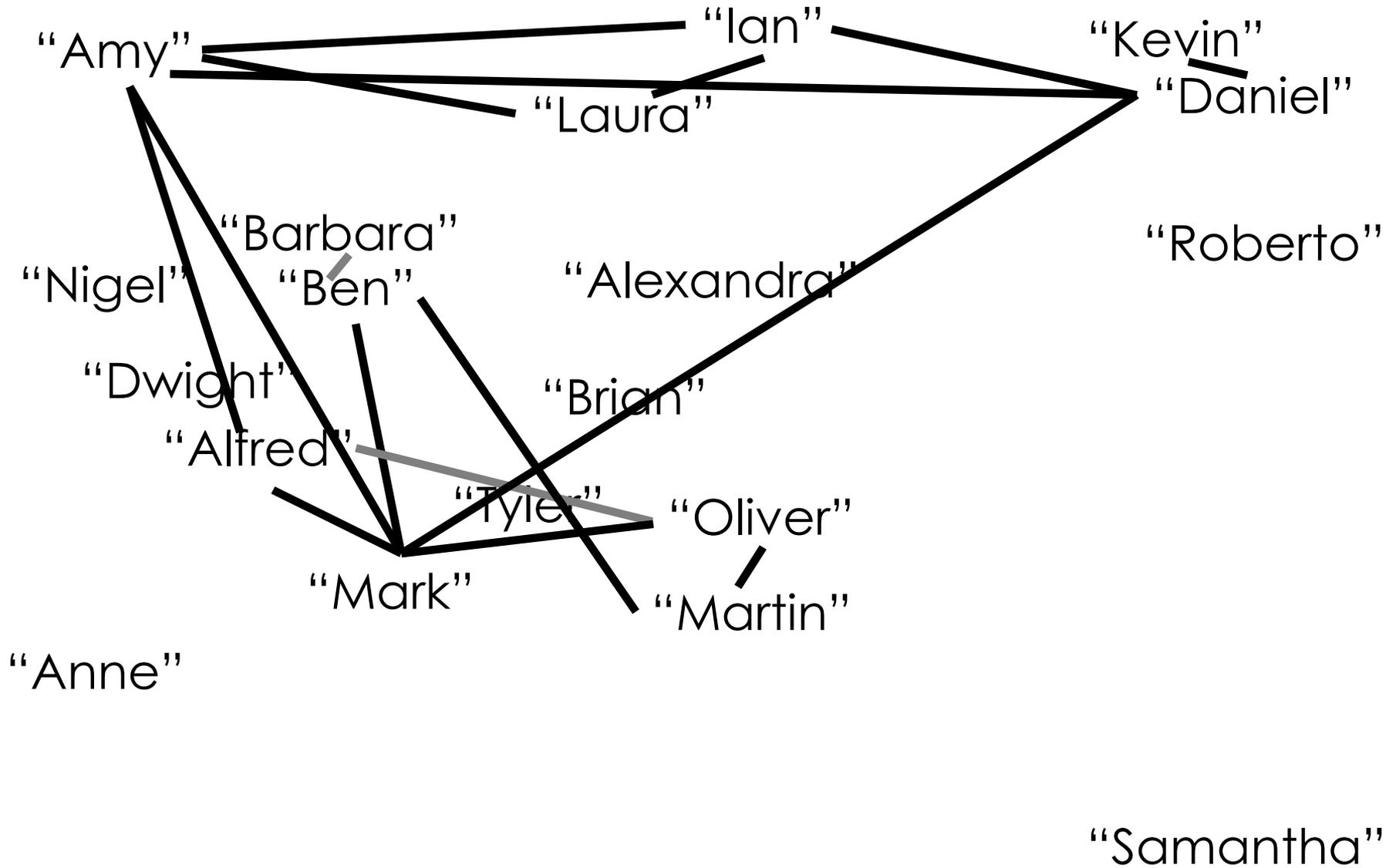
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Who ended up meeting each other in person?

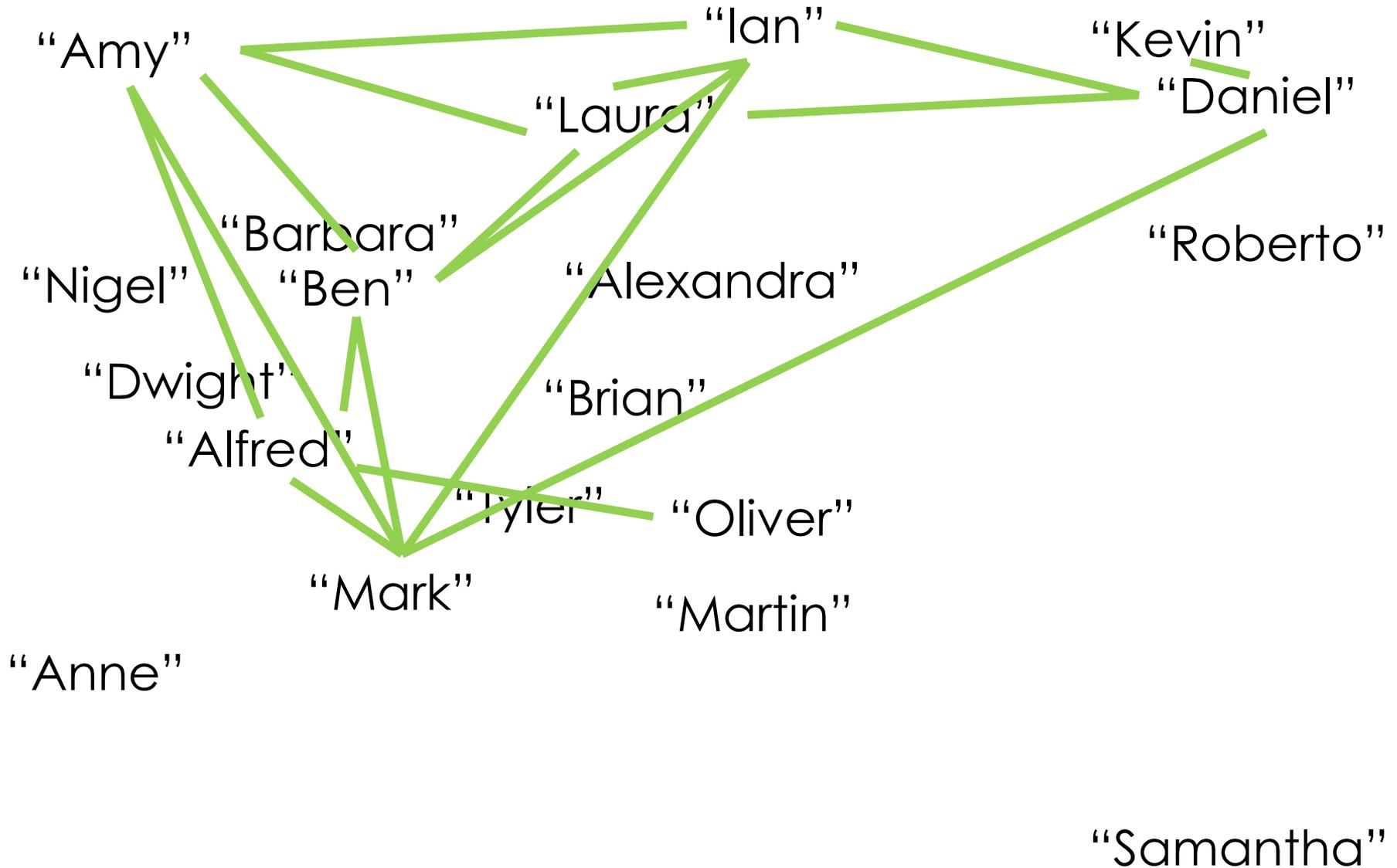
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Which pairs are still friends?

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Inside jokes, memes, forum games, art, fanfiction about each other and/or Harry Potter characters, etc. A lot of knowledge-sharing about classical music history, theory, and performance.

Many, many linguistic catchphrases. Newcomers usually subjected to the oblique jokes of the rest.

Shared impression that “Brian” (volatile/manipulative) and “Nigel” (arrogant/misogynistic) were very likely to irritate others and/or derail discussions. Convergence on the idea that those two did not belong.

Extremely well-developed sense of ‘this is how things work around here’ – boundary around community.

networks and communities

If you want to study the practices of a CoP (linguistic or otherwise!), a detailed, thoughtful ethnographic study is of unmatched value

(cf. Eckert 1988, Wagner 2012, Collister 2016, etc.).

Newcomers may be baffled by insider practices or simply fail to see them (King 2014:68-69).

Here is part of a 2011 thread from MusicTreeHouse (anonymized) called 'Chocolate Cupcake Distribution Rules'.

networks and communities

DANIEL I once received a blancmange as a birthday gift!

IAN Did the blancmange eat anyone?

AMY Only if it was a particularly large blancmange. Chocolate cupcakes are a different matter, and normally vegetarians.

IAN Do we get a list of recipients?

SAMANTHA No. I may be the Chocolate Cupcake Distribution Board, but am much too busy to generate a list. * wipes sweat off forehead *

IAN You could ask our archivist to do it. She'll have it done in an instant.

SAMANTHA Anyone who would like to make a list is welcome.

AMY Our archivist will happily do it. [produces list of everyone entitled to a chocolate cupcake and why]

networks and communities

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networks and communities

The sexuality class in King (2014) “had formed a dynamically evolving CoP by the time the sexuality unit began, it is important to keep in mind that those dynamic influences extend beyond the classroom walls” (2014:77).

The same is true of MusicTreeHouse; even offline, pairs and groups who have met in person have e.g. posed for entertaining photographs (Daniel and Mark; Amy, Daniel, and Ian), gone to great lengths to pursue offline references to inside jokes (Amy and Alfred; Amy and Ian), furthered working partnerships (Alfred and Mark; Daniel and Kevin), and continued other shared practices.

networks and communities

King's account “has provided one example of how the emergence (or nonemergence) of a community of practice can be traced during research. As other examples begin to come to light, one would hope that the empirical identification of communities of practice as part of research will soon become established best practice” (King 2014:79).

networks and communities

King mentions that there **isn't a one-size-fits-all way of identifying a community of practice.**

- a) Why is this?
- b) What might be different about an *online* CoP relative to one that is offline such as the one he examines?
- c) Based on this discussion, did your early online communities function as communities or practice or some other type of social network?

Next class: Wednesday, July 3

Preview the Lecture 4 readings and read **one or more** of them.

Post two **discussion questions** on Orbund.

Homework 2 is due next Monday (submitted online).



networks and communities

Long version (King 2014:67):

- “• Sustained mutual relationships—harmonious or conflictual
- Shared ways of engaging in doing things together;
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networks and communities

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