

Segregation in Social Networks based on Acquaintanceship and Trust

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Abstract

Using recently collected data from the 2006 General Social Survey, we compare levels of segregation by race and along other dimensions of potential social cleavage in the contemporary United States. Americans are not as isolated as other recent evidence suggests. However, hopes that “bridging” social capital is more common in broader acquaintanceship networks than in core networks are not supported by the GSS data. Instead, the entire acquaintanceship network appears to be as segregated as the more restricted and much smaller network based on trust. Social divisions based on religiosity, political ideology, family behaviors and socioeconomic standing are high and in some cases rival racial segregation in their intensity. The major challenge to social integration today comes less from the risk of social isolation – complete isolation is rare – than from the tendency of many Americans to isolate themselves from others who differ on race, political ideology, level of religiosity, and other salient aspects of social identity.