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ERRATA

Social Isolation in America: Changes in Core Discussion Networks over Two Decades

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In September 2008, NORC announced that it had miscoded 41 cases in the 2004 General Social Survey: 41 people who had refused to answer a question about the people with whom they had discussed important matters (NUMGIVEN in the publicly released data sets) were erroneously coded as answering that they had discussed important matters with no one (given a value of zero, rather than “refused/missing”). NORC has posted a more complete explanation of the error and a corrected data set on the General Social Survey Web site. Here, we focus our attention only on the changes in our published results due to the 41 cases that were misclassified by NORC.

The data from 1985 and 2004 (as corrected) still show that the number of close confidants that a representative sample of Americans report has declined significantly (see complete corrected tables and figures below). Figure 2 below is a corrected version from the 2006 article, displaying the fitted probabilities of social isolation (NUMGIVEN = 0) at different levels of education. This figure corrects two problems with our original Figure 2. It uses the corrected data, and it is based on our re-estimated Model V in Table 5, which includes the interaction between wave (1985, 2004) and education. The original Figure 2 used Model IV and did not include the interaction term, even though the text described a figure with the interaction term. The corrected figure shows a roughly 10 percent increase in social isolation from 1985 to 2004 in the middle of the range of education, shrinking somewhat at the extremes.

As we say in the original article, we remain surprised (and even skeptical) of such a large social change based only on two data points. We believe that the number of people who report having no confidants is probably still overstated, as we argued in the abstract of the original article. But, based on the 1985 and (corrected) 2004 data, our analyses continue to show a significant increase in the number of people who report that they do not discuss important matters with anyone, and a downward trend in the average number of confidants.

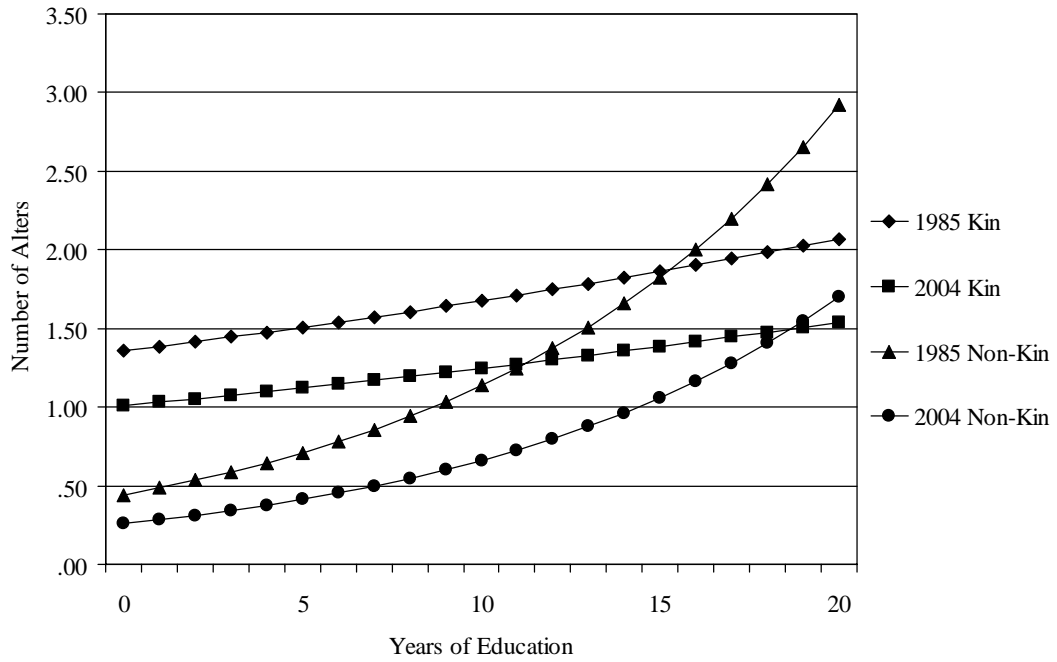


Figure 1. Ego Network Size for Kin and Non-Kin Ties, 1985 and 2004

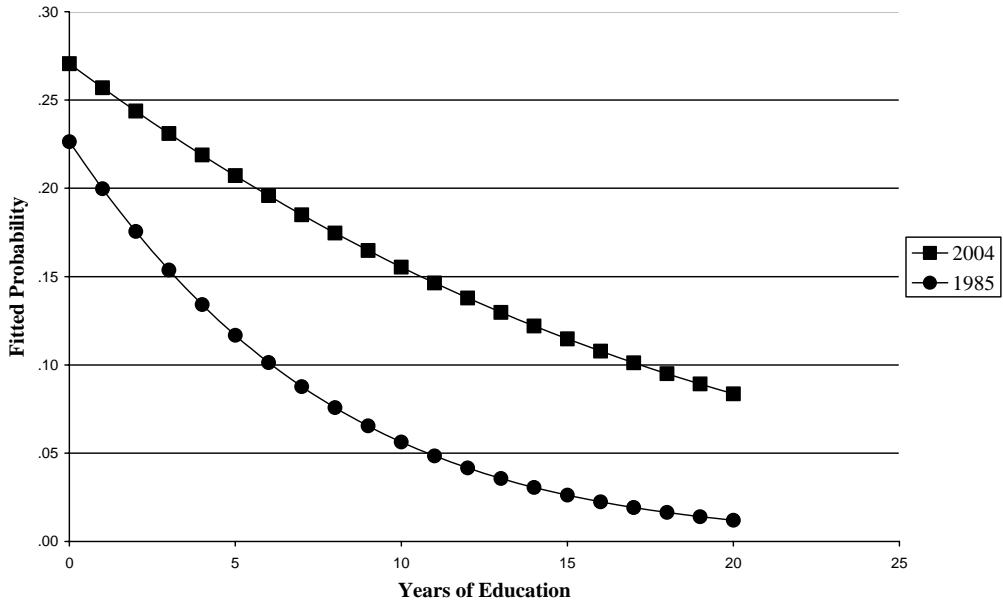


Figure 2. Fitted Probabilities of Social Isolation for Married 25-Year-Old White Males

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Table 1. Size of Discussion Networks: 1985 and 2004 (1985 N =1531, 2004 N = 1426)

	Total Discussion Network		Kin Network ^a		Non-Kin Network ^a	
	1985	2004	1985	2004	1985	2004
0	8.10%	22.60%	24.40%	37.80%	36.10%	52.60%
1	14.80%	19.80%	29.70%	30.70%	22.30%	22.30%
2	14.70%	19.80%	22.60%	16.40%	19.80%	14.40%
3	21.60%	17.10%	13.10%	9.50%	12.70%	6.20%
4	15.40%	9.20%	6.70%	4.40%	6.10%	3.10%
5	20.00%	6.60%	3.50%	1.30%	3.00%	1.40%
6+	5.40%	4.80%				
Mean	3.06	2.12	1.58	1.16	1.39	.89
Mode	3	0	1	0	0	0
SD	1.88	1.99	1.45	1.38	1.49	1.35

^a Information on kinship was collected on the first five alters cited. Therefore, the sum of kin and non-kin alters is not equal to the overall network size distribution.

Table 2. Number of Respondents That Had Various Relationships with at Least One Discussion Partner (e.g., What Percent of the Sample Mentioned a Spouse/Parent/etc. as a Person with Whom They Discussed Important Matters?)

	1985	2004 ^a
Type of Relationship to Respondent ^b	(N = 1,531)	(N = 1,426)
No Confidant	8.10%	22.60%
Spouse	43.20%	39.20%
Parent	26.50%	21.60%
Sibling	20.40%	14.70%
Child	15.90%	10.40%
Other Family Member	18.50%	12.20%
Co-worker	26.50%	16.00%
Co-member of group	16.70%	8.70%
Neighbor	14.10%	5.90%
Friend	59%	40.80%
Advisor	16%	8.40%
Other	3.70%	2.30%
Spouse ONLY	7.20%	9.60%
At least one non-spouse kin	58.70%	44.10%
At least one non-kin confidant	63.90%	47.10%

^a All of these differences are statistically significant at the $p < .01$ level.

^b Since more than one type of relationship can be mentioned for any given discussion partner (e.g., a co-worker can also be a co-member of a group, an advisor and a friend), the percentages do not sum to 100.

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Table 3. Structural Characteristics of Core Discussion Networks

	1985 N = 1,167 ^a	2004 N = 788 ^b
Network Density		
< .25	6.80%	7.30%
.25–.49	17.50%	11.50%
.50–.74	40.90%	39.70%
> .74	34.80%	41.50%
Mean	.62	.66
SD	.29	.33
Mean Frequency of Contact (days per year)		
6–12	3.00%	3.00%
> 12–52	11.20%	10.60%
> 52–365	85.70%	86.40%
Mean	219.39	244.39
SD	121.41	114.52
Length of Association (in years)		
> 0–4.5	10.20%	10.50%
> 4.5–8+	89.80%	89.50%
Mean	6.83	7.02
SD	1.32	1.04
Age Heterogeneity (standard deviation of age of alters)		
< 5	23.90%	29.10%
5 – < 10	22.20%	19.70%
10 – < 15	26.50%	23.90%
>15	27.40%	27.30%
Mean	10.75	10.40
SD	7.11	8.04
Population Age Heterogeneity	18.24	18.12
Education Heterogeneity (standard deviation of alters' educations)		
0–1	31.30%	34.80%
> 1–2.5	41.50%	45.00%
> 2.5	27.20%	20.30%
Mean	1.79	1.49
SD	1.50	1.36
Population Educ Heterogeneity	3.45	3.12
Race Heterogeneity (Index of Qualitative Variation) ^c		
0	92.10%	84.90%
> 0	7.90%	15.10%
Mean	.04	.09
SD	.17	.25
Population IQV	.35	.51
Sex Heterogeneity (Index of Qualitative Variation)		
0	21.60%	24.60%
.01–.90	41.00%	37.10%
> .90	37.40%	38.30%
Mean	.69	.68
SD	.41	.46
Population IQV	.99	.99

^a Density and heterogeneity measures are meaningful only for respondents who mentioned more than one alter. The actual Ns for different analyses vary somewhat because of missing data, ranging from 1,167 for race and sex to 1,132 for education.

^b The number of respondents is considerably lower in 2004 than in 1985 because fewer respondents mentioned two or more alters. Again, the actual Ns vary because of missing data, from 788 for race and sex to 776 for education.

^c Different race categories are used in 1985 and 2004 (because the 2004 GSS was changed to conform to the new 2000 Census usage. For these analyses, we have re-coded the 2004 categories to match the 1985 codes.

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Table 4. Differences by Age, Education, Sex, and Race in Network Size and Kin/Nonkin Composition^a

Dependent Variables:	Network Size		# of Kin		# of Non-Kin		Proportion Kin		Density	
	1985	2004	1985	2004	1985	2004	1985	2004	1985	2004
A. Age										
Age	.01	.02	-.01	.01	.03*	.00	-.01*	.00	-.00	-.01*
Age ²	-.00*	-.00	.00	-.00	-.00**	-.00	.00**	-.00	.00*	.00**
Constant	3.35**	1.69*	2.26**	.91**	1.16**	.86**	.69**	.50**	.65**	.82**
R ²	.05	.00	.01	.00	.04	.00	.02	.00	.03	.02
B. Education										
Educ (yrs)	.19**	.15**	.04**	.05**	.13**	.09**	-.02**	-.01**	-.02**	-.01**
Constant	.65**	.03	1.03**	.46**	-.27	-.29	.80**	.80**	.88**	.86**
R ²	.12	.06	.01	.01	.09	.04	.03	.01	.05	.02
C. Sex										
Sex (f=1)	-.06	.20	.32**	.24**	-.23**	-.03	.06**	.01	.01	-.00
Constant	3.03**	2.02**	1.42**	1.03**	1.52**	.91**	.53**	.59**	.62**	.67**
R ²	.00	.00	.01	.01	.01	.00	.01	.00	.00	.00
D. Race/ethnic (White is reference category)										
Black	-.93**	-.62**	-.60**	-.51**	-.29*	-.10	-.09*	-.08	.03	.01
Other	-.16	-.68**	-.35	-.50**	.19	-.14	-.07	-.10	.02	.05
Constant	3.16**	2.25**	1.66**	1.26**	1.42**	.91**	.57**	.62**	.62**	.66**
R ²	.03	.02	.02	.03	.01	.00	.01	.01	.00	.00

Note: Unstandardized OLS Regression Coefficients of Network Variables on Respondents' Demographic Characteristics

^a Marsden (1987) also analyzed differences in network size and kin composition by size of place, but this variable has not yet been coded for 2004 so comparable analyses are not possible at this time. (The size of place variable is added to the data set after the data are collected, using the respondents' addresses and current Census tract information.)

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

Table 5. Multivariate Models of Discussion Network Size and Social Isolation^a

Independent Variable:	Dependent Variable: Discussion Network Size (Negative Binomial Regression)			Dependent Variable: Social Isolation (No one to talk to = 1; Someone to talk to = 0) (Logistic Regression)	
	I	II	III	IV	V
Constant	1.118	1.186	.536	-2.087	-1.307
Wave (1 = 2004)	-.366	-.344	-.407	1.418	.192 ^{NS,c}
Cooperative		-.255	-.176	.261 ^{NS}	.259 ^{NS}
Restless		-.558	-.462	1.476	1.487
Hostile		-.693	-.630 ^d	1.662 ^d	1.730 ^d
(Compared to Friendly/Interested)					
Number Missing in Previous Module		-.250	-.196	.397	.407
Education (in yrs)			.058	-.103	-.168
Education*Wave			NS		.104
Female			.059 ^d	-.233 ^{NS}	-.239 ^{NS}
Age ^b			.003	.016	.015
Currently Married			.007 ^{NS}	-.247 ^d	-.249 ^d
Black			-.227	.891	.864
Other Race			-.225	.329 ^{NS}	.314 ^{NS}
Alpha (Heterogeneity Coef.)	.103	.072	.018	N/A	N/A
F	154.75	50.85	53.66	25.78	22.63

Notes: N = 2, 957; All coefficients significant at $p < .01$ unless indicated.

^a This table re-creates the models that were published in our original 2006 article, with the 41 mis-coded cases recoded to missing. Additional statistical interactions in the new data are suppressed to make the analyses parallel to the original.

^b The squared term for age was not significant.

^c Coefficient represents 1985 vs. 2004 difference for zero years of education, which is non-significant.

^d Coefficient is significant at $p < .05$.