Is Europe pulling apart? Findings from the analysis of social distance

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Part of work on the ERSC Secondary Data Analysis Initiative Phase 1 project ‘Is Britain pulling apart? Analysis of generational change in social distances’
http://www.camsis.stir.ac.uk/pullingapart
http://www.twitter.com/pullingapart
http://pullingapartproject.wordpress.com/
Social structure & social distance

(a) Study associations around a distribution of positions, for connected individuals

Homophily/homogamy trends are important, but are fairly stable, and contrast with popular perceptions of fast growth in separation (e.g. Murray 2012)

(b) Social structure as defined by social distance is revealing

Interaction structure not identical to other structures and of theoretical interest (?the trace of social reproduction)

May be particular connections of interest (e.g. bridging ties)
Finding new evidence on trends?

• Use/compare methods that both estimate and evaluate the social distance structure
  – Based on prevalence of social interactions
  – Previous work on occupations (e.g. [www.camsis.stir.ac.uk](http://www.camsis.stir.ac.uk)) generalised to other forms of social distance

• Take advantage of rich new data resources
  – Vast scale of husband-wife records from resources such as IPUMS-I
  – Current and previous household sharers from longitudinal household survey data
  – {Proxy questions on alters, e.g. on friends}
  – {Administrative data (e.g. shared workplace)}
Methods used

- Summary stats on ego-alter associations and their trends
  a) Absolute association (e.g. Cramer’s V)
  b) Dimensional orientation (1st dimensional structure & ego-alt cor.)
  c) Net association (e.g. Smith et al. 2014’s case control approach – the level of contact relative to chance)
  d) Network summaries of ego-alter relations by cohort or time
(1) trends in time don’t seem to be altered by different permutations in the number of categories measured, or the way that time is used.

Educational homogamy in the UK

Cramer's V

Source: Pooled GHS time series, 1974-2004. Horizontal axis refers to different time metrics by line. Metrics refer to: Years since 1970/5; age in decades-1; birth cohort (year of birth since 1900). Lines show statistics when education is coded into 4 or 14-category versions, and for different measures of time (year, age, year of birth, and year of birth for adults in their 40s).
Different summary statistics can point in different directions

Educational homogamy in the UK

Source: Pooled GHS time series, 1974-2004. Horizontal axis refers to different time metrics by line. Metrics refer to: Years since 1970/5; age in decades-1; birth cohort (year of birth since 1900). Lines show statistics when education is coded into 4 or 14-category versions, and for different measures of time (year, age, year of birth, and year of birth for adults in their 40s). Lines smoothed with local linear smoothing (lowess).
..(3) Social distance trends don’t particularly match up to stories of pronounced social change

• Have you noticed how there’s more and more talk about social change these days?
  – Rise of precariousness and neo-liberalism (e.g. Ross 2009)
  – Growing nepotism, reproduction, exclusionary individualism (e.g. Dorling 2013, Murray 2012, Winlow & Hall 2013)
  – Unerring drive towards modernisation (e.g. Marks 2014)
  – Diffident stability (e.g. Erikson & Goldthorpe 2010)
  ➢ Social distance trends ought to be an important marker of any of these changes
  ➢ To what extent do social distance trends fit these trajectories?
Homogamy in the UK

Cramer’s V

H-W correl. in strat. score

H-W correl. in 1st dim

High-Low distance

Over-representation (high-low obs./exp.)

Case-control r2

Source: Pooled LFS, 1997-2013, cohabiting couples. Horizontal axis refers to time point of observation. 'Lowess' lines plotted (local linear smooth). Colours indicate age cohort within time period (age of husband). N ~ 5k couples per time period.
...the underlying orders change slightly...

*(dimension scores for the same units over time)*

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Data for cohabiting m-f couples from IPUMS-I, or from national Labour Force Surveys (UK, NL) or census (SE)
International trends in social distance

Analysis based on husband-wife associations from IPUMS-I or LFS data. Statistics are ego-alter Cramer's V, Ego-Alt dim1 association, or case-control R.
• It might be more consistent to compare patterns against an anticipated (a priori) trend line?

- Either flatline, or linear change by 1 sd each decade, or quadratic by \((sd/dec^2)\)...

The observed patterns fit somewhat with ‘linear increase’ but of the options, ‘no change’ is best

Unconstrained, a more moderate linear increase fits best

Statistics are a mean value for the squared error expressed as a proportion of the variance

Cramer's V trend with time for education, GHS.
# Social distance trends in Britain

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<tr>
<th>GHS data, 72-04</th>
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<th>Best trend line</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>HW Dim 1 cor.</td>
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UKHLS 2011 - Partners reading diff. papers

Ignores couples which read same paper (39% of younger couples and 73% of older couples).
Partners’ views on family and state in Sweden (LNU 2000)
Deleting diagonals (33% of younger couples, 32% of older)

Husbands born since 1956
(1,035 cases)

Husbands born pre 1956
(754 cases)
Conclusions

• Methodological results
  – Number of categories and time comparisons don’t change trends; but different summary stats may do so, and the better summary stats are probably those that try to control for other changes in social structure
  – Similar (absence of dramatic) trends across domains (socio-economic, demographic, cultural)

• A diffident peroration
  – Both socio-economic and socio-cultural trends in social distance reject a characterisation of dramatic change and might, if anything, suggest a ‘Europe pulling together’
  – Nothing very exciting happening, to be honest
References cited

Older couples links mostly involve Daily Record.

Younger couples show many more links in the papers they read, and more often read different papers.

Evidence that younger couples are more cosmopolitan / Britain isn’t pulling apart?

**UK-HLS 2011 - Partners reading diff. papers**

Ignores couples which read same paper (39% of younger couples and 73% of older couples). UKHLS, 2011 (min. 2 ties).

Males > 50 yrs, females > 45 (Scotland) (98 couples)
Husbands born since 1956 (1,035 cases)

Partners’ views on family and state in Sweden (LNU 2000)

Couples after deleting those cases where both partners held same left/right & traditional/liberal values (33% of younger couples, 32% of older couples)

Husbands born pre 1956 (754 cases)

- Left/right division stable
- Younger cohort: more ties; older cohort: more homophily
- No evidence of ‘pulling apart’. Similar % homophilous on both factors (around 1/3rd). If anything, evidence of becoming more diverse.