Relying on such a “social network” sampling method for collecting interview data does pose potential statistical biases.\(^6\) The likelihood that each new interviewee was referred to me because of a friendly relationship with a previous interviewee may mean that those references are “like minded” and not necessarily representative of the population of intelligence professionals. In order to counteract that bias, efforts were also made to enlist individuals without any social network-based introduction. The “cold” contacts were informed of the nature of the research project, its sponsorship, and its goals, given reference information for verification, and then invited to participate. The “cold” contact interviewees were also asked to make recommendations and provide contact information for others who might be interested in participating in the study.

This strategy was used in an attempt to reduce the affects of sampling bias by generating parallel social network samples. The figure below is a visual representation of a parallel social-network sampling model. The central, or first-order, node on the left is a “cold” contact or unknown individual who recommends several second-order contacts, each represented as a node within the left box. The second-order “cold” contacts then make additional recommendations for third-order contacts, and so on. The central (first-order) node on the right is a “hot” contact or a known individual who recommends several second-order contacts, each represented as a node within the right box. The second-order “hot” contacts then make recommendations for third-order contacts, and so on.

Social Network Mapping

In many instances, the contacts from both social network samples overlapped or converged on specific individuals, as represented by the overlapped fourth-order nodes in the central column. There are several possible explanations for this convergence. It may indicate that there are a number of respected “thought leaders” in the Intelligence Community whom each contact believed I should interview for this project, or the convergence of nodes

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\(^6\) Social network sampling is also known as “snowball” sampling in sociology and psychology.