

Cyber-stratification and Social Distance over the Internet: Using the Bogardus Scale to
Measure Prejudice among WWW users.

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In partial fulfillment for
Sociology 590: Race, Class, and Gender
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April 11, 2000

Running Head: CYBERSTRATIFICATION

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ABSTRACT

The Internet, long touted as the “equalizer” that provides non-prejudiced access to information, may be simply another means of social stratification. Research shows that the Internet is altering social relationships, but data is inconclusive as to whether the shifting is beneficial or detrimental. Does the Internet foster positive relationships? Do prejudices disappear when contacts are on-line, and for the most part, color-blind? Or is the Internet simply a new way to segregate, fortifying barriers that are already firmly entrenched in our society? The existence of social distance between various ethnic groups over the Internet was investigated. Social Distance was measured by an adaptation of the Bogardus-scale. A questionnaire was designed and built into a “webpage” on the Internet. The survey was listed with most major search engines on the World Wide Web (WWW.) The survey asked various demographic questions and included a social distance scale. Respondents were classified into five broad ethnic groups and an “other” category. The survey was e-mailed to the author via a form-mail cgi script. Data were collected from these anonymous surveys, transformed into a data file and quantitatively analyzed by a computer-driven statistical program. Among the relevant findings, it was shown that social distance does exist, and there are factors that may predict the magnitude of social distance toward outgroups. Social distance also seems to be a function of current worldly events, as had been demonstrated in previous results of other surveys. All variables were assessed at the .05 significance level. Results indicate that there may be more factors that affect social distance than this paper addresses. Further research is necessary to substantiate the claim of the Internet as an “equalizer.”

Cyber-stratification and Social Distance over the Internet: Using the Bogardus Scale to Measure Prejudice among WWW users.

Currently, there are many that tout the Internet as “the great equalizer.” Advocates of such a viewpoint indicate the (cyberspace) removal of barriers that exist in off-line (face-to-face) communication. These barriers include the discriminatory feelings and practices associated with the “isms”: racism, classism, and sexism, among others (Wolf 1998). “The old barriers of sexism, ageism, and racism are not present, since you can’t see the person to whom you’re speaking” (Polly 1992). The Internet offers women ways out of the pink ghetto (Michaud 1996). Small businesses are now able to be just as visible as Fortune 500 companies; it is nice that the Web is fair (Webster 1995). Most research that supports this viewpoint ignores the restricted presence of traditionally underrepresented groups on the Internet. Researchers have stated that there is absolutely nothing “inherently disenfranchising about cyberspace” for any group of people who might entertain the notion of Internet access (Cybercitizen Key Findings 1995).

Virtual Whiteness

Research has shown that the Internet is largely (88%-95%) White (Nielsen & CommerceNet 1995; Kehoe & Pitkow 1996), and predominantly (70%) male (Net User Demographics 1996). Research revealed that home computer use by Whites outpaced home computer use by Blacks by a whopping ratio of 27 million to 1.5 million (“High-Tech Redlining” 1995). Another researcher found that the Internet was 87 per-cent White, whereas the general population was 78 per-cent White (Wolf 1998).

Social Distance Defined

Robert E. Park first defined the term and concept of "social distance" while serving as a Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago. The "American Negro" problem, and the strife caused by the "yellow devils" from the Orient led many social scientists to begin the study of prejudice and racial attitudes. The Negro began to dislike "his place" in society, and Asian immigrants were just beginning to compete for scarce resources in society. Dr. Park defined social distance as, "the grades and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterize personal and social relations generally" (Park, 1924).

Dr. Emory S. Bogardus, professor at the University of Southern California, developed the first scale widely accepted as a reliable indicator of social distance. Bogardus' scale was scrutinized by 100 academia, who rated sixty statements that expressed social distance. The judges ranked each statement on a scale from one to seven, one being the least social distance, and seven being the most social distance. Scores for each statement were added, and the arithmetic mean of each statement was recorded. The statement receiving a mean closest to one was judged to express the least social distance. The statement with the mean closest to the value of two was judged to express the next level of social distance, and so on (Bogardus, 1936).

Bogardus used the scale throughout his distinguished career as an aid in valuable research. His most widely read studies were conducted at ten-year intervals. The results of these studies (no study was carried out in 1936 because Dr. Bogardus was out of the country) indicated that studies were decreasing over time. These studies also revealed that the relative positions of distinct ethnic groups were stable.

Literature Review

Dr. Bogardus' death in 1973 threatened to end a distinct line of research in American sociological history. Fortunately several sociologists, and social-psychologists have continued Dr. Bogardus' studies. A 1975 study found a higher overall social distance score than Dr. Bogardus' last study (Crull and Bruton, 1976). Another study in 1977 found that social distance scores were relatively stable (Owens, et. al, 1978). Kleg & Yamamoto found in a 1993 study that the rank order had remained remarkably stable over 70 years, but the trend for decreasing

distance scores was continuing (Kleg & Yamamoto, 1998). Another study in 1993 found a higher social distance mean, that may have been attributable to the study being done at a university in the deep south of the U.S. (Nix, 1993). The overall social distance score means and standard deviations for the referenced studies are presented in table 1.

Insert table 1 about here

Studies on social distance in other countries have demonstrated Americans to be less prejudiced than those countries' citizens. Perhaps this trend can be explained by the increasing diversity in the United States (Sell, 1989; Hraba, Hagendoorn, and Hagendoorn, 1989; Goldberg and Kirschenbaum, 1989; McAllister and Moore, 1991; Netting, 1991).

An interesting trend that has surfaced is that social distance tends to be a function of worldly events. Bogardus (1926, 1946, 1956, and 1966) found that this trend continued over time. In his 1926 study, the Turks were the most outcast of all groups surveyed. This was attributed to the national and worldly headlines, detailing the Turks' atrocities toward the Armenians. Bogardus' 1946 research had the Japanese at the bottom of the list, probably due to the attack on Pearl Harbor. In the 1956 study, the Japanese rose dramatically, and Bogardus attributed this to the newly democratized Japan, under U.S. occupation (Bogardus, 1968). In the 1966 survey, Koreans were at the bottom, while "negroes" began their upward move in the rankings (Owen, et al, 1978). In the same 1978 study, Owen, et al, found that Southeastern Asians occupied most of the lower rankings on the social distance scale. In a 1993 survey it was found that Iraqis and mid-Easterners in general were the lowest ranked groups (Nix, 1993).

In a study conducted in Texas (Dyer, Vedlitz, and Worchel, 1986) concluded that minorities place more social distance between themselves and other minorities, than between themselves and whites. This study claimed that minorities might possibly model their behavior after the members of the majority, since the majority constitutes a powerful model in our society. Prejudice seems to be one of the behaviors that might be modelled. This same study also found that social distance decreased as educational level increased, particularly among minority groups. Similar results had been noted in a study at Syracuse University (Ames and

Sakuma, 1969). The same results were found in a study at the University of Mississippi (Nix, 1993).

Hypotheses

The hypotheses formulated for this study, based on the review of literature are:

- 1) Persons from an urban background should have had more opportunities to interact with other ethnic groups. Following from this, they may place less social distance between themselves and the out-group, than people from a rural background.
- 2) Females are socialized to be more caring and nurturing than males are. Women have traditionally been discriminated against and should be more empathetic to minority groups than men are. This should effect less social distance than men place between themselves and out-groups.
- 3) Individuals who are highly educated have had a greater chance to associate with other ethnic groups. They should have less social distance than less-educated persons. Furthermore, since parents constitute powerful role models, respondents with highly educated parents should also place less social distance between themselves and out-groups.
- 4) Members of the majority make up powerful role models for minority groups. Following from this, prejudice should be a modelled behavior. Minority groups should place more social distance between themselves and other minorities than between themselves and whites.
- 5) Internet Social Distance means will be greater than those of the general population, since the Internet is “virtually” White. If the Internet is the new “suburbia for White Flight” (Carter

1999) then prejudiced feelings toward non whites should increase.

Method

Subjects

The respondents in this survey were drawn from a non-random sample. The sample was purposive due mainly to an interest in Internet users in particular. The subjects generally were drawn from three primary groups of Internet users. Group one, Internet users who found the site by accident, were interested, and completed the survey. Group two would have been searching for this particular topic of research, social distance or Bogardus, and would have decided to take the survey. Group three consisted of people that received e-mail from this researcher, saw the link to the page in the researcher's e-mail signature lines, and decided to browse the site. Rs for this questionnaire from January 1994 to December 1999 totalled 1,754. The questionnaire was halted and re-worded this semester. This researcher is enrolled in a survey methodology class; the questionnaire was be re-designed with concepts garnered from the course. This paper represents only 127 surveys received after receiving exempt status from the WSU IRB for this course research project, due to time constraints. There were 64 males and 63 females in this group. 85% of the respondents had at least a high school education; 50% were college graduates. 104 Rs were U.S. citizens, and 23 were not. 42 Rs were married and 85 were single. 79% of the Rs identified themselves as European, or 'white', 15% were "other", seven per-cent were Asian, five per-cent were Native American, four per-cent were African. 55% of the Rs were between the ages of 18 and 29 years. See table 2 for an age by social distance breakdown.

Insert table 2 about here

Rs received nothing for their participation other than a heartfelt "thank-you" (sent automatically via e-mail) from the experimenter unless they filled in the 'comments' field on the survey. Some respondents indicated a desire to received the results via e-mail when data had been collected and analyzed.

Procedure

Questionnaires (see appendix) were posted on the Internet at three universal resource locaters (url)s:

<http://www.dixie-net/~jvnix/surveyfrm.htm>;

<http://www.fortunecity.net/~blackmage/surveyfrm.htm>; and

<http://www.focusasia.com/~blackmage/surveyfrm.htm>.

Surveys were emailed to the researcher via a freely available form-mail cgi script, downloaded from [Matt's Script Archive](#) over the Internet. When a respondent finished the survey, he or she simply clicked a 'submit' button with the mouse and the responses were mailed to the researcher in text format. After the surveys were collected, the researcher then transformed the copied the responses into a single spreadsheet program on a PC. The values had to be transformed into raw numbers, then saved as a *.csv (comma separated value) text file using a function of the spreadsheet program. Once the data were in *.csv format, they were uploaded to a Unix account where the statistical package SPSS-X was used to analyze the data; ANOVA was the test used. Interaction effects were not tested due to lack of physical memory on the system, and the numbers and levels of variables involved. Social Distance as a dependent variable was computed by adding all of the social distance scores given to each of the groups named on the survey and dividing by the number of groups (45). This procedure has been used in all social distance studies to date, reviewed by researcher. It was possible to compute several dependent variables using these data. The main dependent variable used in analyzing data from this experiment was Social Distance, computed as described. Table 3 gives an overall view of the different "social distances" that were computed from this data, and their scores.

[Insert table 3 about here](#)

Analysis of variance was used to determine whether or not the independent variables had any significant effect on the social distance scores obtained. It has been shown that

Analysis of variance is one of the most powerful statistical tools, especially when two or more independent variables are being examined (Runyon in Heydari, 1988). This technique avoids the ambiguity of assessing differences in variances using multiple comparisons.

Results

So that the analyses of this quasi-experiment may be compared to most other social distance studies, results are reported in arithmetic means. The overall social distance score for the 45 ethnic/racial/religious groups was 1.85 ($SD = 1.21$).

It should be stressed that only 127 questionnaires have been coded. Even though I have postulated results, they should be taken with “a grain of salt” until more cases are added to the datafile. Further analyses of the data revealed which independent variables and covariates affected the dependent variable “social distance.” Closer looks at each research hypothesis revealed the following results:

- 1) Social Distance is a function of previous contact with other ethnic groups. The social distances reported generally decreased as respondents' contacts with other ethnic groups increased. There was a marked increase in social distance responses from people who claimed that they had had a great deal of contact with other ethnic groups, different from their own. Table 4 gives an overall view of social distance in relation to this variable. In addition, the covariate “rating of cross-cultural experiences” played a strong role in determining social distance.

Insert Table 4 about here

- 1b) The home-size of the respondent did not significantly affect social distance scores obtained. Persons from a town with a population from 1,000-5,000 scored the least social distance. Table 5 reveals the dispersion of social distance means.

Insert Table 5 about here

- 2) Although males did place more social distance between themselves and the out-groups, as hypothesized, the results were not significant at the .05 confidence level. The mean social distance given by males was 2.06 (SD =1.31). Female data yielded a social distance mean of 1.62 (SD = 1.06).
- 3) Educational level of the respondent did not significantly influence social distance scores. The mean social distance of high school juniors and college sophomores was higher than any other group. Table 6 details these results. Educational level of Ss' parents did not significantly affect social distance. In fact, educational level of Ss' guardians seemingly had no effect whatsoever on social distance scores.

Insert Table 6 about here

- 4) There was no significant difference in social distance for non-whites obtained. Minorities seemingly place the same social distance between themselves and other minorities as themselves and whites. There was however an interesting result. The social distance that Asians placed between themselves and others was the greatest of any ethnic group, 2.654 (SD = 1.38). They also assigned a large social distance score to Asians as a group at 2.619 (SD = 1.64). This lends itself to further study, and would seem that grouping all Asians together as a whole is a rather bad idea.
- 5) The Social Distance Grand Mean of 1.81 is significantly different from the 1993 study (Kleg, Milton, and Yamamoto 1998) which yielded a mean of 1.43. This data is the most relevant, since all of the WWW questionnaires coded were submitted in 1999-2000. This would indicate that Internet users are more prejudiced than the general population, since Social Distance has been shown in virtually all studies to decrease over time. Again, more questionnaires need to be coded before concrete assertions are made. The mean was much lower than the obtained mean (2.43) at the University of Mississippi (Nix 1993). This might be attributable to the sample not being

exclusively drawn from the deep south, which despite marked improvements in race relations since the Civil Rights Era is still lagging behind most of the country in terms of (at least pretended) diversity acceptance..

The data from this research failed to support studies mentioned above, in that Americans seemed no less prejudiced than citizens from other countries. The overall social distance score given by U.S. citizens was 1.85 (SD = 1.21). For internationals the social distance score given was 1.83 (SD = 1.14).

Analyses of variances reveals which of the independent variables of this study significantly affected social distance scores. The results of the ANOVAs are shown in Table 7.

Insert Table 7 about here

The F-statistics in Table 7 are exact.

This research also indicates that social distance is still a function of worldly events. The out-groups receiving the highest social distance scores were the Iraqis (M = 2.41, SD = 2.12) and Iranians (M = 2.31, SD = 1.95). Overall, every group from the region we call the "Mid-East" was ranked low. Table 8 lists all social distance scores obtained.

Insert Table 8 about here

One result that was completely unexpected, and that this researcher has no explanation for is this: the most significant finding $F(1, 36) = 8.85, p = .004$, was in the magnitude of social distance expressed by married persons as opposed to single persons. Social Distance means were 2.26 (SD = 1.29) for married persons and 1.64 (SD = 1.12) for single respondents. Would married Ss have not chosen "welcome into my family by marriage" simply because they were already married? I think not. It might be that since 75% of the sample was white, that the married folks just couldn't see themselves marrying someone of a different ethnicity. A closer look revealed that of the 42 married Rs, 29 were white.

Two co-variates had a pronounced effect as well, rating of cross-cultural experiences, $F(1, 8) = 5.85$, $p = .018$ and father's occupation type, $F(1, 8) = 7.65$, $p = .007$. We would expect respondents to give higher social distance ratings to a group that they had experienced unpleasantness with, but these are very strong generalizations. Perhaps competition for scarce resources (i.e., jobs) would explain why offspring of blue-collar men placed such strong social distance between themselves and members of an out group.

Discussion

This research has added to the long list of experiments carried out in an attempt to analyze social distance. Hopefully it has been a beneficial addition.

Overall the social distance scores obtained in this experiment were somewhat lower than expected since the researcher expected a majority Caucasian response group. The results are encouraging when seen in that light but must be tempered by the fact that it was such a small sample and the Internet's usefulness as a survey tool is still anything but certain.

The study did not reinforce the trend that social distance is decreasing in our society, simply as a function of time. These data were collected six years later than the most recent major report (Kleg, Milton, and Yamamoto, 1998) who used 1993 data. Perhaps the distance means are due to the study being undertaken solely via the Internet. It could very well be that the impersonal nature of the Internet could begin to erode stereotypes as research has suggested (Polly 1992; Engleman 1995; Webster 1995; Bleier 1996) but that current Internet users held stronger pro-prejudiced beliefs to begin with than a cross-section of society would have.

The main objective of this study was to determine whether or not social distance existed over the Internet, and to determine the feasibility of gathering data via the Internet. It was determined that social distance exists. The Internet has potential as a data gathering tool; there needs to be more research done on just how reliable data obtained might be. There were serious limitations in this research, the number of responses coded being the most pronounced, and as a result of that the sample was rather small to draw serious inferences from. As this researcher has expressed in the past, if this study sparks interest in others to continue the research began by Dr. Bogardus nearly 70 years ago, he will consider it a success.

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Author's Notes

This study relied on Dr. Heydari's study as a reference tool very heavily. While it was not a replication of his study, credit is due Dr. Heydari for defining several variables. Most of the questionnaire in the Appendix was taken directly from the doctoral dissertation of Dr. Ahmad Heydari.

Table 1

Social Distance as a Function of Time

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Year of Study

Statistics	1926	1946	1956	1966	1976	1993	1993b	WWW
<u>M</u>	2.14	2.12	2.08	1.92	1.91	1.43	2.43	1.81
<u>SD</u>	2.85	2.57	1.75	1.56	1.48	0.28	1.49	1.18

b: this author's senior undergraduate thesis.

www: data analyzed for this study.

Table 2

Social Distance by Age of Respondents.

	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>
Less than 13 years of age	1.14	0.32	5
14-17	1.83	1.17	12
18-21	2.01	1.47	32
22-25	1.74	1.22	20
26-29	1.46	0.79	16
30-33	2.54	1.65	7
34-37	1.63	0.85	8
38-41	1.46	0.52	10
42-45	2.44	1.13	4
<u>Over 45 years of age</u>	<u>2.19</u>	<u>1.32</u>	<u>13</u>

Table 3

Social Distance Means of out-group by Ethnicity.

	<u>Ethnic Origin of Respondent</u>				
	African	Asian	Euro.	N.A.	Other
Social Distance					
Overall					
<u>M</u>	1.24	2.65	1.78	1.16	2.09
<u>SD</u>	0.46	1.38	1.15	0.41	1.46
Whites					
<u>M</u>	1.29	2.01	1.44	1.17	1.80
<u>SD</u>	0.65	0.80	0.91	0.41	1.21
Non-Whites					
<u>M</u>	1.14	2.92	1.96	1.17	2.25
<u>SD</u>	0.31	1.70	1.35	0.41	1.70
Africans					
<u>M</u>	1.00	3.22	1.95	1.17	2.30
<u>SD</u>	0.00	1.77	1.30	0.41	1.66
Asians					
<u>M</u>	1.14	2.62	1.90	1.17	2.20
<u>SD</u>	0.32	1.64	1.36	0.41	1.72

Table 4

Social Distance as a Function of Contact with other Ethnic Groups.

	<u>Contact with other Ethnic groups.</u>			
	Great Deal	Some	Very little	None
Statistics				
<u>M</u>	1.70	1.71	2.78	5.96
<u>SD</u>	1.05	0.96	1.74	-----
<u>n</u>	78	35	13	1

Table 5
Social Distance Scores by Respondents' Home-sizes

Home-size	<u>Statistics</u>		
	<u>n</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Less than 1,000	7	1.92	0.64
1,000 - 5,000	11	1.16	0.35
5,001 - 10,000	9	1.45	0.97
10,001- 20,000	11	1.39	0.84
20,001- 30,000	12	1.64	0.82
30,001- 40,000	13	1.28	0.83
40,001- 50,000	11	1.69	1.40
50,000 or More	53	1.61	1.02

Table 6

Social Distance Scores by Current Educational Level of Respondent

	<u>Statistics</u>		
Education Level	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>n</u>
Elementary School	1.02	0.03	2
Jr. High School	2.02	0.51	3
High School	1.87	1.09	19
College Freshman	1.67	1.11	11
College Sophomore	2.61	1.94	16
College Junior	1.86	0.90	13
College Senior	1.65	1.16	18
Graduate/Post-Graduate	1.70	1.04	45

Table 7

Anova Results of the Social Distance Survey Data

Independent Variable	<u>Statistics</u>		
	<u>F</u>	<u>df</u>	<u>p</u>
Cross-Cultural Contact	4.596	3	.003
Home-size of Respondent	1.599	7	.147
Gender	1.068	1	.305
Educational Level of Respondent	1.164	7	.332
<u>Ethnicity</u>	<u>1.172</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>.330</u>

Table 8

Social Distance for each Ethnic, Racial, and Religious Group

Group	<u>Statistics</u>	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
African-Americans	1.95	1.38
Anglo-Americans	1.34	0.89
Africans	1.95	1.40
Buddhist	2.09	1.56
Canadian	1.54	1.21
Chinese	1.86	1.34
Croatian	1.91	1.39
Cuban	1.90	1.48
Dutch	1.60	1.23
English	1.36	0.94
French	1.54	1.18
Filipino	2.05	1.60
German	1.50	1.13
Greek	1.70	1.27
Haitian	2.18	1.79
Hispanic-American	1.85	1.57
Hindu	2.10	1.64
HongKonger	1.90	1.46
Indian	1.85	1.35
Iranian	2.32	1.95
Iraqi	2.41	2.12
Irish	1.49	1.13
Israeli	1.88	1.52
Italian	1.50	1.19

Table 8 (Continued)

<u>Group</u>	<u>Statistics</u>	
	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Japanese	1.85	1.43
Jewish	1.69	1.31
Korean	1.84	1.36
Lebanese	2.11	1.75
Malaysian	2.00	1.60
Mexican	1.91	1.60
Muslim	2.25	1.81
Norwegian	1.60	1.26
Pakistani	2.13	1.73
Palestinian	2.21	1.86
Portuguese	1.73	1.40
Polish	1.65	1.28
Romanian	1.80	1.48
Russian	1.75	1.44
Serbian	2.13	1.80
Scottish	1.53	1.14
Spanish	1.72	1.37
Swedish	1.44	1.03
Taiwanese	1.92	1.56
Turkish	1.98	1.67
Vietnamese	2.00	1.62

APPENDIX

Complete frequencies and breakdowns of data distribution are available at

<http://www.wsu.edu/~jvnix/data/Update.txt>

and

<http://www.wsu.edu/~jvnix/data/Breakdown.txt>

In the spirit of protecting the environment (by saving paper) I have supplied these as on-line rather than printing the extra 32 pages of text.