Questionnaires were administered to a sample of adults to assess the extent of social distance between people of different ages. The findings suggest that the greater the age difference (younger or older) between people, the greater the social distance they feel. Moreover, people appear to feel more socially distant from the elderly, regardless of their own age. The source of estrangement seems to be the amount of contact with people of different ages: the less the contact, the greater the social distance.

Social Distance and Intergenerational Relations

I. Jane Kidwell, MA, and Alan Booth, PhD

The concept of social distance has been used extensively over the past 50 years to study racial, religious, and ethnic intergroup relations. We believe the social distance concept can also add significantly to our understanding of intergenerational relations. The purpose of this study is to: (1) construct a scale to assess social distance between age groups, similar to the one Bogardus used to study attitudes between racial and ethnic groups; (2) assess the extent of social distance between different age groups, and (3) understand the role that age segregation has in explaining social distance.

Social Distance

The concept of social distance was first developed in the mid-1920s. Although Emory S. Bogardus, its first methodological developer, is most commonly linked with the beginnings of work on social distance, Robert E. Park (1924) actually preceded Bogardus with his discussion of social distance:

"The concept of "distance" as applied to human, as distinguished from spatial relations, has come into use among sociologists, in an attempt to reduce to something like measurable terms the grades and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterize personal and social relations generally.

Bogardus took Park's concept of social distance and developed a scale for its assessment. Racial, religious, and occupational distance were the primary subjects Bogardus studied with his scale (1933). His well-known social distance measure was constructed using the Thurstone technique. The scale consisted of the following items:

(1) Would marry
(2) Would have as regular friends
(3) Would work beside in an office
(4) Would have several families in my neighborhood
(5) Would have merely as speaking acquaintances
(6) Would have live outside my neighborhood, and
(7) Would have live outside my country.

The scale has been widely used to assess social distance, and the studies have added significantly to our understanding of intergroup relations. While Bogardus' own scale is seldom used today, scales building on his work have influenced research on status differential (Westie & Howard, 1954), and the acceptance of immigrants into American society (Duncan & Lieberson, 1959), as well as research on race and sex stratification in the high school community (Langworthy, 1959). One of the most frequent uses has been to study racial prejudice as Defleur and Westie (1959) and many others have done. They have found that social distance is a productive means for understanding intergroup relations.

Application of Social Distance to Age Groups

Studies suggest that it is reasonable to assume that the relationship between age groups is characterized by social distance. Indications of social distance revealed by prior research include: perceptual barriers to interaction between age groups; age categories relegated to the status of a minority group, and extensive age group stereotyping.

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1We are indebted to Susan Welch and Nicholas Babchuk, Univ. of Nebraska, who provided useful comments on an earlier version of this paper, which was presented at The Life Cycle: Aging session of the 1977 American Sociological Assn. meetings in Chicago. Reprint requests to A. Booth.
2Department of Sociology, Univ. of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, NE 68588.
Barriers to Interaction Between Age Groups

Goldc and Kogan (1959) administered to college undergraduates a sentence completion questionnaire that was designed to assess attitudes toward old people. They found that these young people were hesitant about having interpersonal relationships with old people.

Little mention is made of reciprocity, spontaneity, warmth, desire to initiate conversation, or other qualities that comprise the essential ingredients of friendly contacts between peers.

The young subjects attributed polar opposite qualities such as serenity and irritability to old people, indicating ambiguous feelings on the part of the former toward the latter. They also indicated that they felt old people resented young people.

Kogan and Shelton (1962) administered the same test, this time to a group of older respondents as well as the college undergraduates. The greatest difference between the young and old samples seems to occur for those item pairs where a personal relationship with a specific other is implied (for example, "When I am with an older person, I . . .", "Most of the old people I have known . . .", and "When an old person I do not know sits down next to me on a train or bus, I . . ."). They conclude:

. . . the age differences observed in images and beliefs regarding "old people" are often suggestive of ambivalence, conflict, and inaccurate perception between generations. Younger individuals, perceiving that older persons resent them, attempt to avoid interpersonal contact and partially justify such avoidance by suggesting that older individuals are really more interested in their families and are preoccupied with death. The belief that "old people" are in need of assistance has a patronizing flavor in the present context, but such a belief may serve to assuage guilt feelings deriving from neglect of old people's emotional requirements.

Knapp and Jackson (1963) compared the responses to a semantic differential test given to a group of young respondents for an old stimulus group ("old-attributed") and the responses given by an old group with themselves as the stimulus group ("old-direct"). The old-attributed responses were more negative than the old-direct, illustrating a lack of understanding between the young and old groups. The authors concluded that such perceptual barriers will interfere with effective inter-generational communication.

Age Groups as Minorities

Friedenberg (1966) and Holt (1974) infer that young people qualify for the status of minority; others say this is an accurate description of old people. The latter is the implication of research by Kogan and Wallach (1961), where they found that unfavorable attitudes toward old people were associated with negative dispositions toward ethnic minorities as well as a variety of physically disabled groups.

Kogan and Wallach claim their results offer support to a minority group theory of aging. They found that their sample of older persons evaluated "Negro" and "foreigner" more positively than the college-aged sample. Since members of racial and religious minorities have been shown to exhibit less prejudice against other minorities (Allport, 1954; Triandis & Triandis, 1960), Kogan and Wallach claim that it is reasonable to infer that older people also constitute a minority group because old people share this sentiment.

Kogan and Shelton (1962) feel that "while underlying sentiments may be less extreme . . . the dynamics of beliefs about old people are sufficiently similar to the ethnic prejudice case to warrant discussion in a minority group context." They suggest Drake's (1958) label of "quasi-minority" is most appropriate. Barron's (1953) results support a minority group theory of aging. Older subjects seem to anticipate the feelings of the dominant majority of younger subjects, attempting to cope with them and trying to avoid rejection by emphasizing certain characteristics and values while suppressing others.

Stereotyping of Age Groups

If a widespread stereotype is indicative of a minority status for a group, age groups again qualify. There is ample evidence that the majority of people subscribe to stereotypes about old people. Not only has it been that lay people subscribe to stereotypes about the old, but even professionals who work with the aged score high on the stereotype scale (Arnoff & Lorge, 1960; Tuckman & Lorge, 1956). However, since there has been no complimentary research focus on stereotypes of other
age groups, no valid assumptions can be made as to whether or not stereotypes exist for other age groups.

On the basis of past research it is very difficult, if not impossible, to know exactly what is the nature of the relationship between all age groups. As late as 1972, Ahammer and Baltes were able to claim themselves to be the first to systematically vary the age of both the perceiving and the perceived groups in their research. When doing this, they found misconception existed between all three age groups they tested—adolescents, middle-aged, and old people. Aaronson (1966) shows three distinctly different stereotypes across the life-span. The first is childhood (ages 5-25), then adulthood (ages 26-54), and finally senescence (55-85). This definite distinction between at least these three age groups, coupled with misconception between all of them, seems to support the assumption that social distance will exist between these three groups, and perhaps others.

In summary, prior research: (1) identifies perceptual barriers to interaction between age groups, (2) finds reason to treat certain age groups as minorities, and (3) reveals extensive stereotyping of some age groups. On the strength of these indicators of social distance, we hypothesize that social distance exists between at least the three major age categories and possibly between even more narrowly defined age categories.

If social distance is shown to exist between age groups, it is then necessary to try to understand its source. We propose that social distance has its roots in the norms for interaction between people in different age categories. Few families (one in eight) have more than two generations living under the same roof (Riley & Foner, 1968). And, with the advent of retirement communities and the migration of families with dependent children to the suburbs, residential patterns are becoming increasingly age homogenous (Friedenberg, 1966). The physical distance entailed by these arrangements discourages interage interaction. The role differentiation between parent and child and teacher and student required in early socialization and between boss and employee in later life also mitigates against the development of close interage ties (Parsons & Platt, 1972). The norms inhibiting interage interaction may, in turn, enhance feelings of social distance between people in different age categories. On the other hand, we would expect individuals growing up in a home that included grandparents, other adult relatives or boarders, or who have such persons in their adult home, to be less constrained about developing intimate interage relations and as a consequence feel less age-related social distance. Similarly, people who are successful in developing close ties with people in other age categories at work, in the neighborhood, or with relatives not in the home are less likely to develop feelings of social distance with respect to individuals different from themselves in age. Thus, our second hypothesis is that individuals who have more extensive histories of close interage relations feel less social distance with people in age categories different from their own than do people with more limited histories.

We tested these hypotheses by developing a social distance scale. The scale was incorporated into a questionnaire that included questions that elicited the history of the respondent’s contact with people in different age categories. The questionnaire was administered to a sample of adults ranging in age from 18 to 85 years. Thus, we were able to examine the extent of social distance between all adult age categories.

Scale Construction and Sample

Construction of the Social Distance Scale

A variation of the Thurstone technique was used to derive the social distance scale. Thirty-seven judges (see Endnote 1) rated 28 randomly arranged items gleaned from a review of the literature on attitudes toward age. The judges were given the following instructions:

Here are 28 statements that reflect different ways people feel about each other. Some will require that you feel closer or know more about that person than others. I would like for you to rank them according to how close you would have to feel to that person, or how much you would have to know about that person, in order to make these statements about him or her. Place the statements in seven piles as marked by the cards numbers “1” through “7.” For example, if you feel that you would have to be extremely close to a person to make that statement about him or her, place it in the pile numbered “1” or, if you feel that you could make that statement without knowing that person at all, place it in the pile numbered “7.” Place the card in the pile numbered “4” if you think it requires that you know the person fairly
well. There need not be equal numbers of cards in each pile, but please make sure that each pile has at least one card in it at the end of the task.

Before computing the medians and Q values we eliminated those statements for which the judges show little agreement. The statement medians were not evenly enough spaced to justify an equal interval scale. Because of this, the semi-interquartile range (Q) scores were used to select 12 statements: 4 in each category of high, medium, and low social distance. In computing the social distance scores, each statement was weighted according to the degree of closeness it indicates. High, medium, and low statements were weighted 1, 2, and 3, respectively. The values for each item checked were added together and the sum subtracted from 36 (the maximum score) so that a high score signifies high social distance.

The text and level of social distance of each item chosen for the scale is shown below.

- Would like to have her/him as a coworker: medium
- Would acknowledge him/her when passing: high
- Would confide in her/him about trouble members of family are in: low
- Would sit next to him/her on a bus if I didn't know him/her: high
- Would initiate a conversation with him/her: high
- Would respond to a conversation initiated by him/her: high
- Would enjoy spending a week's vacation with her/him: low
- Would consider him/her as a lover: low
- Would enjoy spending an afternoon with him/her: medium
- Would consider as a close, intimate friend: low
- Would invite her/him to my home for a small dinner party: medium
- Would call him/her by his/her first name: medium

People in the study sample received the following instructions:

Below are 12 statements that reflect different ways people feel about each other. Check those statements that reflect the way you feel about people in each different age category. Think of the members of each age group on the whole, not the best you have known, nor the worst. For example, for the first statement check those age categories you would like to have as coworker. Then, do the same for the other eleven statements.

The age categories considered by respondents were 19-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74, 75-plus.

Independent Variables

The independent variables involved in the history of contact hypothesis are the composition of the respondent's past and present households and the ages of the individuals he or she comes into contact with whom he or she feels close. The first two were operationalized by asking information about the people the respondents presently live with and those they have lived with in the past. Nuclear family members were excluded from the analysis. The contact variable was operationalized by asking the respondent to list the age and initials of neighbors, coworkers, relatives, and other people whom they felt “close to” and had talked with during the previous week.

Control Variables

There are a number of variables that could possibly influence social distance. They are sex, education, and occupation. Race was not examined because Lincoln, Nebraska, is such a racially homogeneous city that we could not possibly obtain enough nonwhites for the sample.

According to Booth (1972), females have affectively richer friendships than males. This might indicate that there would be a difference between social distance scores for men and women, assuming social distance reflects the same kinds of qualities which allow one to have more affectively rich friendships.

Since education has been shown to influence racial attitudes, it seems worthwhile to see if education might have some influence on attitudes between age groups. Education is divided into two categories, those who have never attended college and those who have.

Finally, since occupation is indicative of so much of an individual's socioeconomic standing, we felt it was necessary to look at the effect of occupation on social distance. Duncan's Occupational Rating was used; respondents were divided into either high or low occupational status.
Sample
The questionnaire was administered to members of church groups in Lincoln, Nebraska. To make the sample as representative as possible, churches were selected from a variety of denominations and areas of the city. Sixteen churches (including 15 denominations) in the Lincoln area are represented in the total sample of 440 respondents. Churches were selected by calling a representative of the first church listed under each denomination in the telephone book and proceeding alphabetically through the denominations until a sufficient number of respondent groups were obtained. Of the 20 churches contacted, 2 had no appropriate church groups, 1 refused to participate, and in the other the pastor was out of town for an extended period. The vast majority of denominations in Lincoln are represented in the sample. Generally, the groups to whom the questionnaire was administered were Bible study groups ranging from 4 to about 125 participants. Among the consenting groups only 8 of the potential 448 respondents refused to complete the questionnaire for a refusal rate of less than 2%.

Clearly, from a sample such as this one, we can only generalize to active, white church participants who identify with Judaeo-Christian practice. However, a comparison of the age, sex, and education composition of the sample with census information for the city indicates that the sample reflects the general characteristics of Lincoln's population (see Endnote 2). Thus, it is possible our findings may indicate general patterns among segments of the population not represented in the sample. Further research is needed to clarify this matter.

The questionnaire, including the social distance scale, the independent variables, and demographic items, was pretested on a group of 29 respondents representing the three major age categories of young, middle-aged, and old.

Social Distance Over the Life-Span

Social Distance
The mean social distance score between respondents of different ages for people of various ages (target age groups) are shown in Table 1. One way-analysis of variance was used throughout our analysis to test whether the differences between the means were statistically significant. Inspection of Table 1 suggests a number of interesting patterns.

Our hypothesis that social distance exists between different age groups is supported. Scores range from a low of 1.9 to a high of 15.8. Moreover, respondents differentiated between target age categories much narrower than young, middle-aged, and old. This suggests that subsequent research should define age categories more narrowly than has heretofore been the practice.

One trend that is apparent from the data in Table 1 is that respondents tend to feel least socially distant with people of their own age. The greater the age difference between the respondent and another age group, the greater the social distance. For example, re-

| Table 1. Mean Social Distance Scores Between Respondents and Target Age Groups. |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondents’ Ages</th>
<th>19-24*</th>
<th>25-34*</th>
<th>35-44*</th>
<th>45-54*</th>
<th>55-64*</th>
<th>65-74</th>
<th>75 &amp; Older</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19-24</td>
<td>(110-116)*</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>(78-80)</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>3.6</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
<td>(69-75)</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>14.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
<td>(66-70)</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>8.2</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>13.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55 &amp; older</td>
<td>(71-74)*</td>
<td>14.9</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>13.3</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>9.2</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The difference in the means for the age category is significant at the .001 level. One-way analysis of variance was used to test whether the difference was statistically significant.
*The number in the parentheses is the number of respondents upon which the means are based. Rather than report the N for such mean, the range of Ns for the entire row is indicated. The Ns are variable because of missing cases for each item is slightly different.
*The respondent age categories 55-64, 65-74, and 75 and older had to be collapsed into the single 55 and older age category because there were too few cases in the latter two categories.
spondents 45 to 54 years of age feel the lowest social distance (5.3) with people their own age. The social distance scores climb to 8.2 for those a decade younger and to 9.9 for those a decade older. They feel most socially distant from those 19 to 24 (13.3) and those 75 and older (15.0).

Another pattern of interest is that older respondents score their own age group as more socially distant than do younger respondents. Those 19 to 24 have mean social distance score of 1.9 for people of their own age while those 45 to 54 score those in their own category 5.3.

The general increase in scores for the respondent's own age group as age increases, coupled with the tendency for people to feel more socially distant from older people regardless of their own age, suggests that there is a subjective evaluation of age which is shared by all groups: that older people are less desirable as social objects.

To determine the effect of sex, education, and occupation on these patterns, the social distance scores were computed separately for males and females, those with and without college experience, and so on. There was no appreciable difference between the social distance scores for males and females. Although not supportive of Booth's (1972) findings that males interact with and confide in friends less often than females, the difference may be due to the fact that we are dealing with attitudes about relationships, while Booth studies behavior. Or, it may be that, although men interact with and confide in friends less than females, men interact with all of the same age groups that women interact with.

Education and occupation showed no consistent effect on social distance. Although there were more statistically significant differences than would be expected by chance, the directionality was mixed and may be attributed to random variation. This finding is in sharp contrast to the race relations research showing high status individuals to score lower on social distance measures pertaining to ethnic groups than people with low socio-economic status. The fact that we find social distance to increase uniformly with age, even with respect to the respondents own age group, suggests that age-related social distance may have cultural roots that are less subject to contextual variations than racial and ethnic attitudes.

Sources of Social Distance

We proposed the amount of contact respondents had with people in different age categories would vary inversely with their feeling of social distance from them. The indicator used tapped contact with different age groups over the life-span beginning with people (other than nuclear family members) who resided in the respondent's household when he or she was a child. Household residents (past and present) were also obtained. The mean social distance scores for those who had had target age people residing with them and those who had not are shown in Table 2.

The data suggest that those who had not had contact with people in certain age categories felt more socially distant from these

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Home Included (Includes) Target Age Individuals</th>
<th>19-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55-64</th>
<th>65-74</th>
<th>75 &amp; Older</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When respondent was a child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6.9(386)*</td>
<td>5.9(415)</td>
<td>6.7(405)</td>
<td>7.3(400)</td>
<td>8.3(396)</td>
<td>9.7(395)</td>
<td>11.0(396)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4.3(29)</td>
<td>1.0(4)</td>
<td>3.1(7)</td>
<td>4.0(11)</td>
<td>7.6(11)</td>
<td>9.6(7)</td>
<td>10.0(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When respondent was an adult</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Past homes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7.4(339)*</td>
<td>5.9(394)</td>
<td>6.6(402)</td>
<td>7.4(398)</td>
<td>8.3(400)</td>
<td>9.7(395)</td>
<td>11.0(393)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.9(76)</td>
<td>6.0(25)</td>
<td>9.9(10)</td>
<td>3.2(13)</td>
<td>5.1(7)</td>
<td>9.1(7)</td>
<td>12.9(7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Present home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6.9(216)</td>
<td>6.2(357)</td>
<td>7.1(357)</td>
<td>7.1(363)</td>
<td>8.5(379)</td>
<td>9.8(388)</td>
<td>11.1(376)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6.6(199)</td>
<td>4.2(62)</td>
<td>4.0(55)</td>
<td>8.2(48)</td>
<td>5.6(28)</td>
<td>5.9(14)</td>
<td>9.7(24)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at the .05 level of confidence.

Table 2. Mean Social Distance Scores for Respondents and Target Age Groups if Respondent Lived (Or Is Living) With Target Age Individuals Who Are Not Nuclear Family Members.

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same age groups than those who had had such experience. While only one of the differences with respect to childhood experience is statistically significant, all of the differences are in the direction supporting the notion that limited contact increases social distance. The data are only somewhat less uniform with respect to households the individual had lived in as an adult. Eleven of the 14 comparisons are consistent with our hypothesis, 3 were not. However, 6 of the 11 were significant at the .05 level of confidence. Thus, household composition has an impact on age-related social distance and in the predicted direction.

Our second dimension of contact is the amount of day-to-day interaction people have with individuals with whom they have a close relationship. The measure consisted of whether or not the respondent had at least two contacts during the preceding week with neighbors, coworkers, relatives, and others in the target age categories whom he or she felt "close to." The mean social distance scores for those who had had contact and those who did not are shown in Table 3. The data are presented for each type of contact (neighbor, coworker, relative, other) and for all contacts.

The data suggest that recent contact with people with whom one feels "close" who are in a certain age category reduces feelings of social distance toward individuals in that category. And it doesn't seem to make any difference whether the contact is with neighbors, coworkers, or relatives. Of the 25 comparisons, 21 were in the predicted direction. Seven of the 21 were significant at the .05 level. Inspection of the summary of all contacts reveals that all of the comparisons are in the predicted direction and four of the seven at the .05 level of confidence.

Implications for Policy and Research
Social distance was found to exist between all age groups, even age groups defined in 10-year intervals. In addition, social distance was found to be a linear function of age difference. The greater the age difference (younger or older) the greater the social distance. Moreover, people appear to feel more socially distant from older people regardless of their own age. And respondents tend to feel more estranged from their age peers the older they are. It appears that all age people feel less close to and more estranged from older people—even when they are age peers.

One of the sources of estrangement appears to be the distant and recent history of contact with people in different age categories: the less the contact, the greater the social distance. The problem may be compounded among the elderly as contact diminishes due to structural factors (e.g., friends and relatives die) and, perhaps, social-psychological factors such as disengagement theory proposes (Cumming & Henry, 1961).

### Table 3. Mean Social Distance Scores for Respondents Who Have and Have Not Had Contact With Target Age Individual With Whom They Are Close During the Previous Week.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recent Contact with Close</th>
<th>19-24</th>
<th>25-34</th>
<th>35-44</th>
<th>45-54</th>
<th>55-64</th>
<th>65-74</th>
<th>75 or More</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neighbor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7.5*(346)</td>
<td>5.9(384)</td>
<td>6.9*(390)</td>
<td>7.3(390)</td>
<td>8.4(386)</td>
<td>9.7(392)</td>
<td>11.0(397)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>2.6(69)</td>
<td>5.1(35)</td>
<td>3.1(22)</td>
<td>5.2(21)</td>
<td>6.2(21)</td>
<td>11.2(10)</td>
<td>7.3(13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coworkers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7.0*(361)</td>
<td>5.9(363)</td>
<td>7.1(22)</td>
<td>7.2(21)</td>
<td>8.2(400)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4.3(54)</td>
<td>5.6(56)</td>
<td>2.5(34)</td>
<td>5.4(31)</td>
<td>10.3(7)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relatives</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6.9(355)</td>
<td>5.8(378)</td>
<td>6.6(399)</td>
<td>7.3(385)</td>
<td>8.5(366)</td>
<td>9.8(381)</td>
<td>11.0(385)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>5.8(60)</td>
<td>6.2(41)</td>
<td>8.5(13)</td>
<td>6.0(26)</td>
<td>6.2(41)</td>
<td>8.2(21)</td>
<td>10.7(15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>7.7*(326)</td>
<td>6.1*(365)</td>
<td>7.1(360)*</td>
<td>7.4(371)</td>
<td>8.3(392)</td>
<td>9.7(390)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>3.2(89)</td>
<td>4.1(54)</td>
<td>3.9(52)</td>
<td>5.3(40)</td>
<td>6.9(15)</td>
<td>8.5(12)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>All contacts</td>
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<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>9.0*(209)</td>
<td>6.5*(231)</td>
<td>7.7(282)*</td>
<td>8.0(267)*</td>
<td>8.5(301)</td>
<td>10.0(346)</td>
<td>11.2(367)</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
<td>4.4(206)</td>
<td>5.1(188)</td>
<td>4.3(130)</td>
<td>5.8(144)</td>
<td>7.7(106)</td>
<td>8.1(56)</td>
<td>8.7(33)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*Significant at the .05 level of confidence.

*Number of people upon which the mean is based.
Our findings have implications for a variety of research endeavors. We have devised a scale useful in assessing feelings of social distance and have discovered that interage social distance is a reality. The scale might be used in studies of discrimination based on age: not only as means for assessing the extent of discrimination but as a vehicle for understanding its origin. Studies of predicting the passage of legislation favorable to various age groups (the young as well as the elderly) may find feelings of social distance among legislators and their constituents a useful explanatory factor. Social distance might also be a useful concept in learning more about intergeneration relations within the family.

Our findings have a number of policy implications, as well. Clearly the magnitude of social distance between the aged and all other groups does not bode well for “grey power.” It would seem that elderly action groups would do well to try and recruit middle-aged people into their program. The lack of age related social distance between middle-aged people relative to policy makers may make them better advocates than the aged themselves.

The social distance scale may find use as a tool for evaluating programs designed to alleviate intergenerational problems such as the Bucknell University Cross Generational Living/Learning Experiment. Bucknell University has offered students free rent for living in otherwise unused dormitories with older people who cannot live by themselves. In return the students are expected to assist the older people. The scale might be used to evaluate the effect of the experiment on the attitudes of the young and the old toward each other. Moreover, the scale could be used as a screening device to select people to work with the aged, or with youth. It might also find use as an instrument for evaluating nursing and retirement home facilities. Staff who score high on feelings of social distance toward the elderly may not provide a suitable care environment for the elderly. However, additional work on the reliability and validity of the scale would need to be undertaken before adopting it for these purposes.

A cause of social distance that has not been discussed up to now is the cohort flow. The age structure of society is made up of a series of successive birth cohorts. Throughout the life-span, each cohort experiences the same life stages as experienced by all other cohorts, but each experiences them in a different historical context. Not only have some cohorts had historical experiences which occurred before others were born, but each cohort is a different age when they do have mutual experiences. For example, the Vietnam War affected people differently because of the life stage they were in at the time it occurred. Many draft age younger people viewed the war in more personal terms than people who were older. Karl Mannheim describes this juxtaposition of cohorts as “the non-contemporaneity of the contemporaneous.” And it is this arrangement of cohorts which leads Margaret Mead to refer to older people as “immigrants in time.”

The cohort flow has several implications which can affect the social distance between age groups. First, older cohorts have experienced all the life stages being experienced by the younger cohorts, but not vice versa. Second, older cohorts are in a position to “think” they know what younger people are experiencing (or “should” experience), but they are inferring from experiences that are only meaningful when seen in their own historical context. Finally, no consistent expectations can be established for any age group over time.

Riley, Johnson, and Foner (1972) have termed the phenomenon “cohort-centrism.” Just as individuals tend to view other ethnic groups in terms of their own culture, i.e., ethnocentrism, they also tend to view other age cohorts in terms of their own particular cohort, thus the term cohort-centrism. Such a perspective may be manifested in hostility toward and negative responses to people in age groups different from their own, and in the belief that the differences between age groups are due to some character flaw in the other cohorts rather than due to fortuitous or natural causes. The relation between the cohort flow with its attendant centrism and social distance is an avenue for further research.

References


Triandis, H. C., & Triandis, M. Race, social class, religion, and nationality as determinants of social distance. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology*, 1960, 61, 110-118.


Endnotes

1. Bogardus (1933) used 100 faculty members, graduate students, and undergraduates to judge his scale. In order for our scale to be appropriate for use with a general population, we felt that it was necessary to include judges not directly connected to the academic community. The following shows the age, sex, and academic status of the judges of the statements for use in the social distance scale.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>Academic</th>
<th>Nonacademic</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Young (19-34) (N = 16)</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle-aged (35-64) (N = 13)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old (65 and older) (N = 8)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

2. Comparison of Age, Sex, and Education Statistics for Sample and Lincoln, Nebraska.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Sample (%)</th>
<th>Lincoln (%)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Age*</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
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<td>18</td>
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<tr>
<td>35-44</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>45-54</td>
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<td>14</td>
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<td>65 and older</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sex*</td>
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<tr>
<td>College</td>
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<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These statistics include whites only.

*These statistics only include those 25 and older because the census statistics for those 19-24 were not presented in a form which would be comparable with our sample.