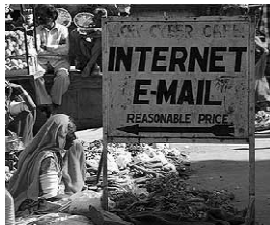


What are the Consequences of Unequal Internet Usage?

Roderick Graham
SOC 350 – Internet and Society

- What is the digital divide?
- On which side of the divide are you?
- Why should we care about the divide?
- How can we address it?



- Sociologists often focus on inequalities (economic, symbolic, educational) between classes, races, genders, and nations
- The Internet can *increase* the degree of inequality between these groups, or it can *decrease* them
- Sociologists are currently working out the Internet's relationship to inequality

The Internet and Inequality

- In the late 1990's, as usage of the Internet exploded, society's leaders began to worry that there was a gap between the "haves" and the "have nots"
- Groups of people did not have access to computers and internet subscriptions
- This gap was deemed the Digital Divide

Digital Divide

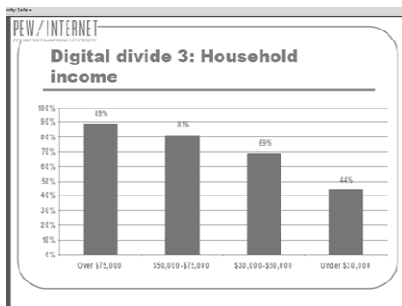
"Haves"

- Whites
- Males
- Young
- Urban
- Middle and Upper Class

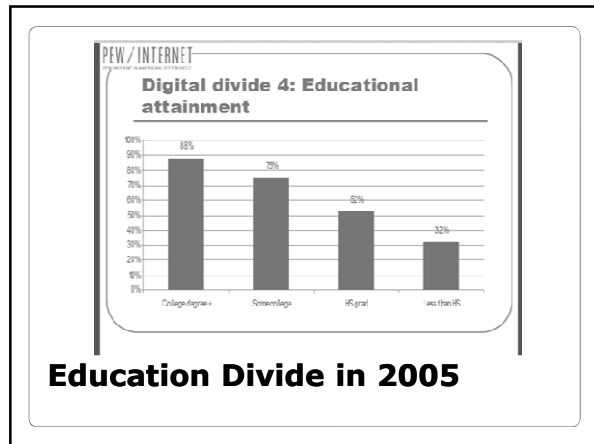
"Have Nots"

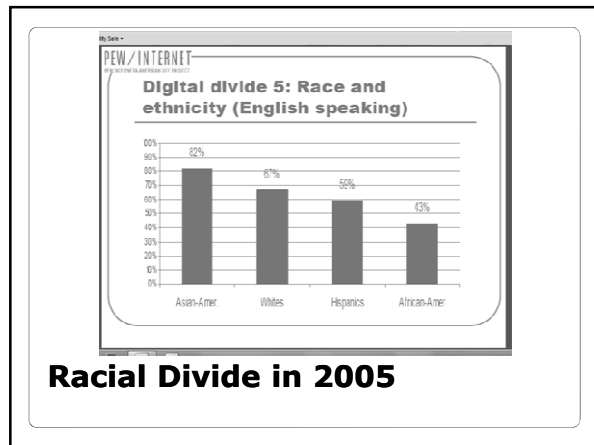
- Minorities
- Women
- Older
- Rural
- Working and Lower Classes

Digital Divide



Income Divide in 2005





- But scholars learned that simply providing access to computers is not enough
- How we use technology is just as important as owning it

- In the U.S., policy makers still focus on the material divide
- Scholars see the divide in skills and usage as the *main* way in which inequality is reproduced
- Scholars label this digital inequality

Digital Inequality

Divide	Explanation
Motivational Divide	Differences in the degree to which a group is motivated to acquire and learn how to use technology
Material Divide	Differences in the access that a group has to the Internet and computers
Skills Divide	Differences in the ability to operate and use the Internet
Usage Divide	Differences in the benefits extracted from using the Internet

The Many Divides (Van Dijk 2005)

"Haves"

1. Graduation from College – Political Science
2. Use Facebook, YouTube
3. Uses website that posts Internships
4. Gains better employment through Internship

"Have Nots"

1. Graduation from College – Political Science
2. Use Facebook and YouTube
3. Uses traditional means of finding employment
4. Finds lesser entry level employment

Digital Inequality

"Haves"

1. Use Flickr, Tumblr, and MySpace
2. Produces content (makes pictures, videos, and blogs)
3. Their views and ideas enter cyberspace

"Have Nots"

1. Use Flickr, Tumblr, and MySpace
2. Consumes content (views pictures and videos, reads bloggers)
3. They become invisible consumers

Digital Inequality

"Haves"

1. "Digital Native" who uses social media to try on new identities
2. Aware of potential harm done (security risks, damage to social identity)
3. Able to navigate cyberspace with minimal harm

"Have Nots"

1. "Digital Native" who uses social media to try on new identities
2. Assumes internet is anonymous and/or safe
3. More likely to have internet history hurt them, more likely for identity theft

Digital Inequality

- The "haves" and "have nots" are different for digital inequality than the digital divide
- For mobile devices, blacks and Hispanics are the *relative* haves
- For traditional internet usage, the main fault line is between those with college educations and those without

People who are able to use the Internet most effectively are better able to:

1. Improve social capital and social networks
2. Try out new identities (without harm)
3. Avoid cybercrime
4. Participate in civic life (local politics, government issues, etc.)

The Consequences to Inequality on the Net

- The benefits gained by the haves may not be serious in of themselves
- But they *add* to existing wealth, education, and social capital differences between groups in society

The Consequences to Inequality on the Net
