



Digital Inequalities as Class Inequalities?

A Comparison of Youth in Advanced Societies in- and Outside Europe

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Abstract: This dissertation merges two streams of research hitherto rarely mixed together: class analysis and digital inequality studies. It also focuses on the comparative research of adolescents from advanced societies – a social category relatively underrepresented in studies on digital inequality, partly because of ‘the myth of the cyberkid’ (Facer and Furlong 2001) that is prevalent in the field and that suggests the young people are naturally competent users of the Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs). Additionally, this dissertation deals with the influence of gender on the patterns of inequality in access to the ICTs among adolescents. The dissertation’s empirical basis is that of information on the ICTs possession, skills, and usage collected for 39 countries participating in the 2006 wave of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of fifteen year-olds.

The results of the analysis reported in chapter three of this dissertation allow concluding that the ‘old’ social class inequalities in the parents’ generation are not being reproduced with respect to the ‘new’ digital inequalities in the children’s generation. Among adolescents in 39 countries under investigation (Australia, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Jordan, South Korea, Latvia, Lithuania, Macao, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Qatar, the Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand, Turkey, and Uruguay), social class does not differentiate access to the new forms of cultural capital associated with possession, skills, and usage of ICTs. The differences between service class and working class children (the particular focus of the study undertaken in chapter three of this thesis) are not substantial as far as skills and usage access are concerned, and they depend on the availability of the technology among the general population as far as physical access is concerned. Thus, one may expect that as the Internet penetration rate among the general population increases in the countries in which in 2006 service class adolescents enjoyed substantially higher probability of having the Internet access at home, so the advantage of service class adolescents in these societies will decrease to unsubstantial levels already characteristic of technologically more advanced countries.

Chapter four of this dissertation investigates how gender exerts its influence on contemporary adolescents with respect to their access to the ICTs. The chapter’s focus is on the so-called usage access. Ordinal regression modeling is used as a method for data investigation. The analysis points to the persistence of gender inequality seemingly in favour of boys. In all countries under investigation, boys report using computers and the Internet for educational purposes more often than girls. Controlling for the 2006 value of the national GDP per capita, the level of a country’s gender inequality measured by the Gender Gap Index does not have any

statistically significant effect on gender gap in educational use of ICTs. A sign of the gender coefficient suggest, however, that the increase in society's gender-equality is associated with the increase in boys' advantage over girls as regards the frequency of ICT/Internet educational use. The possibility that this advantage of boys is in fact a sign of their educational underperformance is discussed. Another possibility is also discussed, namely, that girls' decreased (in comparison with boys) frequency of using computers and the Internet for playing computer games might, counterintuitively, be the source of girls' disadvantage in the future.

Chapter five of this dissertation investigates whether one's having the Internet access at home, one's gender, and social class membership of one's father differentiate the frequency of fifteen-year olds' advanced computer use. Multiple Correspondence Analysis, one of the specific methods of Geometric Data Analysis, is used as a method for data investigation. The analysis reveals that the father's social class – operationalized according to the Erikson-Goldthorpe seven-class scheme – does not differentiate adolescents' frequency of computer use. Neither gender nor having the Internet access at home turns out to be a source of substantial inequality in adolescents' computer use, too.

In terms of policy recommendations the conclusions prescribed by the analysis presented in this dissertation are as follows. Given the lack of any substantive digital inequality of any kind among adolescents in the countries under investigation neither the public authorities of any level (local/regional/national/supranational) nor the NGOs need to allot money for initiatives aimed at combating digital exclusion among this age category.



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Bio: Tomasz Piotr Drabowicz (b. 1981) obtained a Master's degree in Sociology from the University of Lodz, Poland (2005) and a Master's degree in Research in Political and Social Sciences from the European University Institute (2008). In the Spring Semester 2004 he was a SOCRATES/ERASMUS exchange student at the International School of Social Sciences, University of Tampere, Finland. Between July 2004 and April 2007 he worked as a research assistant in an interdisciplinary **PROFIT** project devoted to studying social inheritance of inequalities that was financed by the European Commission under the 6th Framework Programme. During his PhD research, he attended the ICPSR Summer Program in Quantitative Methods of Social Research at the University of Michigan. He presented papers at the international conferences in **Belgium, Spain, Sweden, and the United States**. From October 2012 he is going to work as a tenure-track assistant professor at the Department of General Sociology of the University of Lodz. He is a member of the Polish Sociological Association, the Association of Internet Researchers, the American Sociological Association, the European Sociological Association, the Australian Sociological Association, and the Research Committee 28 of the International Sociological Association. His research interests lie primarily in comparative research on social mobility and social stratification and in quantitative methods; he is also interested in gender studies, queer theory, and the possible use and implications of evolutionary theory for social sciences.