Eszter Hargittai (Ed.), **Handbook of Digital Inequality**, Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar, 2021, 400 pp., $251.10 (hardcover).

Reviewed by
Christopher Ali
Penn State University

"Equity" is a term that has only recently entered the lexicon of lawmakers when it comes to broadband policy and the digital divide. Indeed, as many scholars, researchers, and activists have known for a while, the "digital divide" is multiple and dynamic. "Access" is but one aspect of this divide and is joined by attention to affordability, adoption, hardware access, skills, literacy, technical support, learning opportunities, and externalities (van Dijk, 2020). For many, questions and issues of digital divides are in fact, questions and issues of digital equity and digital inclusion (National Digital Inclusion Alliance, 2017).

In 2021, amid the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. congress seemed to have finally heard these calls. The Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) included multiple commitments to digital equity including the $42-billion Broadband Equity Access and Deployment Program, the $14-billion Affordable Connectivity Program, and the $2.75-billion Digital Equity Programs. In the government's *Notice of Funding Opportunity*, digital equity is defined as "the condition in which individuals and communities have the information technology capacity that is needed for full participation in the society and economy of the United States" (National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 2022, p. 11).

To speak of digital equity as a normative goal in policy and practice is also to invite a soul-searching inquiry into who is *excluded* from the digital ecosystem and policies. In other words, before we can work toward achieving digital equity, through digital inclusion practices, we need to understand digital *inequality*. Eszter Hargittai's 2021 edited **Handbook of Digital Inequality** gives us the tools, vocabulary, background, and data to do exactly that.

Amid the myriad of possible terms (e.g., "digital divide," "digital equity," "digital inclusion") Hargittai and colleagues prefer the term "digital inequality" defined as "how people of different backgrounds incorporate the Internet into their lives; how their digital and social contexts, their skills and their uses differ, and how the life outcomes associated with these differences vary" (p. 1; see also DiMaggio & Hargittai, 2001). Hargittai contrasts this, as we did above, with the term "digital divide," which simply captures the reductive binary "between those who are connected and those who are not" (p. 1).
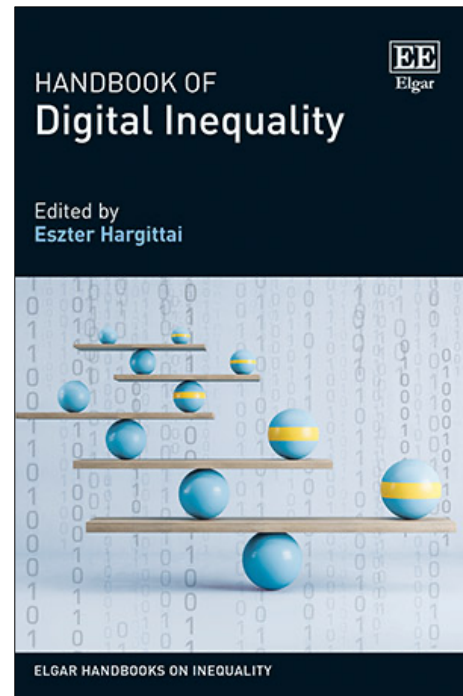
This critical, nuanced, and importantly human-centered definition of digital inequality permeates the entire volume. The collection brings together chapters and themes that cover the gambit of digital inequality issues. The approach of each chapter differs, with some offering literature reviews and meta-analyses, others offering contemporary empirical research, and a third revisiting previous research and reframing it within contemporary contexts.

The book is divided into four parts: infrastructures and geographies, digital inequality through the life course, health and disability, and privacy and trust. The first section gives us a lay of the land, with an indispensable chapter from Gonzales, Yan, Read, and Brown (ch. 2) examining "technology maintenance" ("the continuous work involved in staying digitally connected" [p. 9]) and another by Schrubbe and Strover (ch. 4) examining rural infrastructure and policy (or lack thereof). Reminding us that infrastructure is but one aspect of a multifaceted problem, Correa, Pavez, and Contreras (ch. 5) observe that "digital inequality is a complex process that is not solved when users are connected" (p. 63). This first section sets the tone for the book—this is not one to cover only the common topics of the digital divide: econometrics, legal studies, and deployment technology—and also focuses on roads less traveled, maintenance being one of them. The second section continues this trend, focusing on technological use within the life cycle, with a focus on both young people and older adults. Crucially, class is a major focus of these chapters. While digital inclusion work often discusses income as a variable, the notion of "class" is often absent from U.S. scholarship. In contrast, class arises in chapters by Gui and Gerosa (ch. 9), Micheli (ch. 10), and Brown and Ellison (ch. 11). All three note how class and income mitigate digital experiences such as smartphone use (Gui and Gerosa, ch. 9), Facebook avoidance by young people (Micheli, ch. 10), and how low-income high school students navigate social media to gain insight into the college experience (Brown and Ellison, ch. 11).

The third section focuses on health and disability, and here praise should be given to the number of pages devoted to the dynamics of digital inequality and disability. Little is written on this topic (with certain exceptions, (Alper, 2017; Ellcessor, 2016). Gerard Goggin's chapter (17) is representative, as he critiques how digital technologies often fail to incorporate accessibility into their original designs:

> When new digital technology is in its early phases of introduction and adoption, public attention often focuses on its "revolutionary" boons. However, there are very often new as well as old issues of inaccessibility, poor design and exclusion evident in what otherwise be very useful new technology for people with disabilities. (p. 262)

While we may bask in the light that is new digital technologies for health care (one must only watch a 5G commercial to see such hype in action), Goggin's sobering words remind us that so much needs to be done to make sure that everyone can take advantage of the digital tomorrow.

The fourth and final section brings up a topic often understated in digital inclusion literature: privacy. As Sawhney and Ekbia (2022) remind us, there is always a "dark side" to technologies that aim to be universal. With the digital, that includes potential violations of privacy. The chapters in the fourth section connect the dots between digital inequality and privacy, noting that those without digital literacy are often subject to privacy violations (Park, ch. 19) or fears of violations based on previous experiences (Redmiles and Buntain, ch. 21). As these chapters teach us, this is particularly true of marginalized populations (Park, ch. 19).

Returning to Goggin's chapter, we are reminded that to research digital inequality is to fundamentally articulate a desire to eliminate it. Indeed, I doubt any of these authors chose this subject area simply to describe digital inequality and exclusion. The desire to develop "change through critical understanding," as van Dijk (1993, p. 252) terms it, is at the heart of what critical political economists know as praxis—or the union of research and action (Ali & Herzog, 2018). In their own way, each chapter is devoted not only to describing and analyzing issues of digital inequality but also offering solutions and interventions to ameliorate the situation. Recommendations run from policy solutions to future research to public-facing initiatives. They offer roadmaps for scholars, policy makers, and activists alike.

Should a future edition be considered (and I certainly hope one is), chapters could branch out methodologically to include critical, participatory, and ethnographic approaches. To be sure, many of the present chapters draw on qualitative methods like interviews (Micheli, ch. 10) and focus groups (Walker and Hargittai, ch. 24). Moreover, Schrubbe and Strover (ch. 4) offer qualitative policy analysis, while Forman, Goldfarb, and Greenstein (ch. 3), Bonfadelli (ch. 15), and Goggin (ch. 17) offer literature meta-analyses. Ethnographic chapters would complement these chapters by helping us understand the lived experiences behind digital inequality and the hardships faced by individuals, families, and communities who find themselves digitally excluded. Equally, a critical approach would help us understand not only the present situation of digital inequality but also the reasons *why* inequality exists and the power dynamics that support the status quo.

This collection is deeply needed amid the hype of digital equity and inclusion. Not only does it focus attention on areas, topics, and communities that demand greater understanding (the elderly, hardware access, disability, and privacy) but it adds crucial nuance and context to the present public and political conversation on digital equity and inclusion, especially given the IIJA's digital equity programs. It reminds us that money will not solve these issues without deeper understanding and community-driven approaches. In addition to being a must-read for policy makers, this collection would be welcome in senior undergraduate or graduate courses on digital policy, broadband policy, the digital divide, digital media, health communication, media and disability, and research methods, among many others.

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