

# Digital Literacy: Different Cultures Different Understandings

Ellen J. Helsper – Oxford Internet Institute

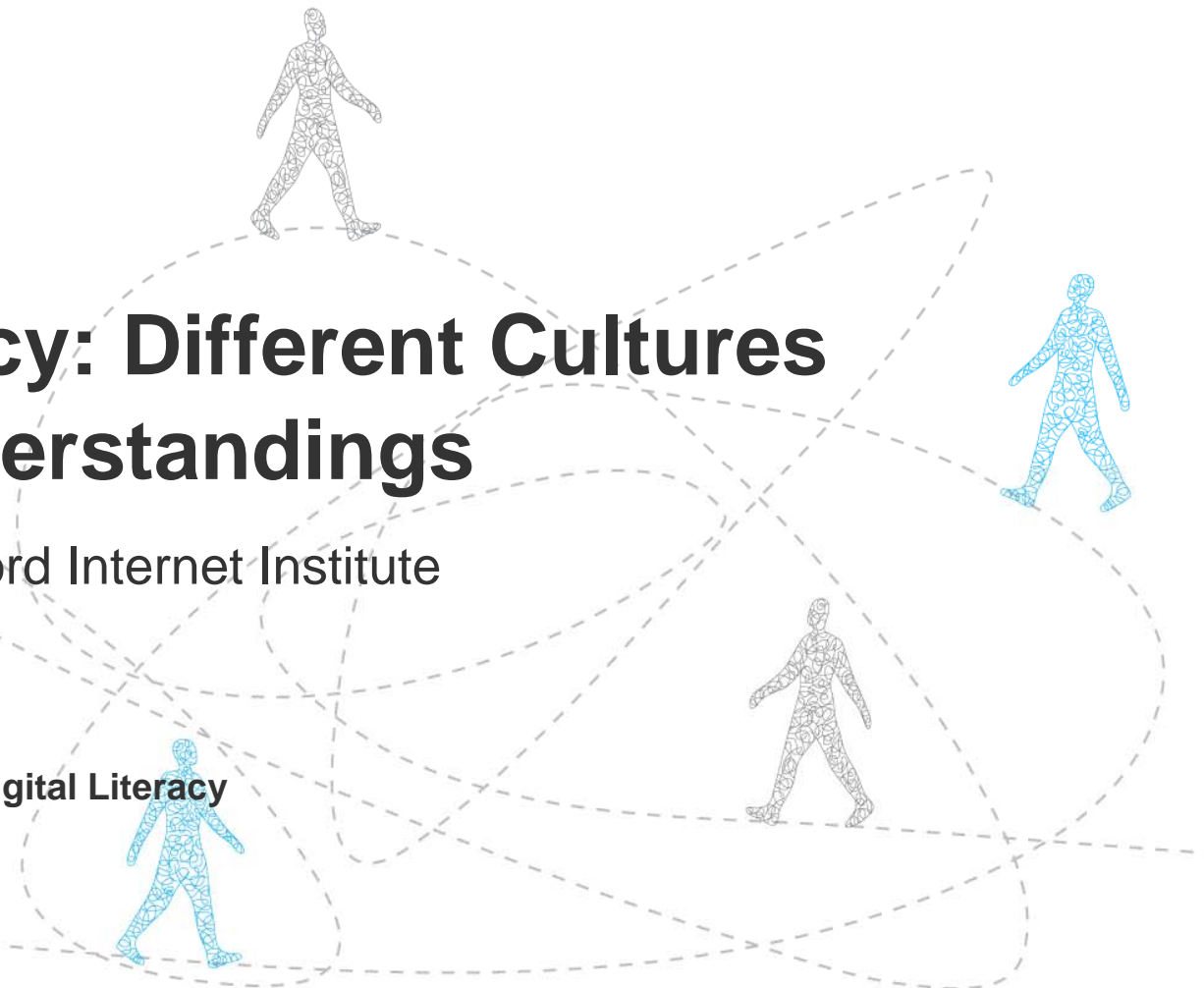
Monday, 17 November 2008

International Conference on Digital Literacy

Brunel University



Oxford Internet Institute  
University of Oxford



# Digital Exclusion & Digital Literacy

## How to deal with digital cultures

Three statements:

British educational system represents wider society with a variety of cultures and generational diversity.

Our understanding of digital literacy needs to adapt to this environment.

Digital engagement at school cannot be seen as separate from the world outside school.

# Digital Literacy: Definitions

awareness                          attitude                          ability  
 digital tools                          facilities                          digital resources  
**identify**   **access**   **manage**   **integrate**   **evaluate**   **analyse**   **synthesize**  
 construct new knowledge                          create media expressions  
 communicate with others   **enable constructive social action**   **reflect**  
 (DigEuLit project, 2006)

**understand and use**  
**information in multiple formats**                          range of sources  
**computers**  
 (Gilster, 1997)

**perform tasks effectively**                          **read and interpret media**  
**to reproduce data and images**                          digital manipulation  
**digital environment**                          **evaluate and apply new knowledge**  
 (Jones-Kavalier & Flannigan, 2006)

# Digital Literacy according to regulators

... ‘*the ability to **access, understand and create communications in a variety of contexts***’.

(Ofcom, 2006)

... ‘*the ability to **use digital technology, communication tools or networks to locate, evaluate, use and create information***’.

(New Zealand Digital Strategy, 2008).

# Two Digital Literacy Definition Problems

- Digital literacy definitions keep changing because the digital and cultural environment keeps changing.

Advanced literacy three years ago is now basic and advanced literacy now is likely to seem pre-historic in ten years time.

- No one dares say what young people are actually supposed to do online to be considered literate ....

Is emailing enough? Is gaming sufficient? Is social networking part of digital literacy training at school? Does it matter what young people do online or does any type of engagement lead to other activities?

# Why are skills and engagement important

## ➤ Educational parallel

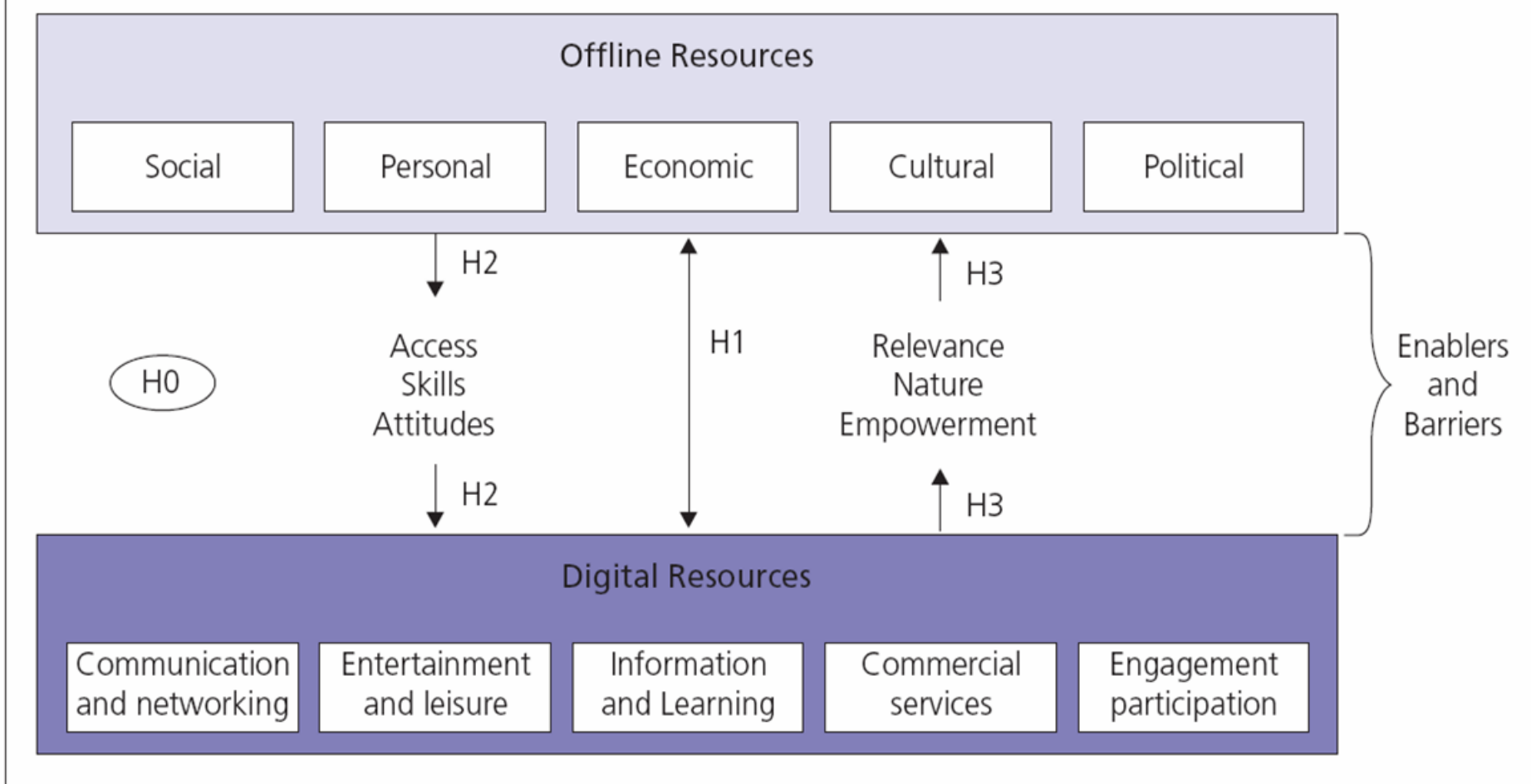
If young people have access to school but do not go to school no one seriously thinks there is equality.

If young people have the skills needed to learn (and go to school) but they do not actually go to any of the classes there is no equality.

If young people go to school, have the skills to learn but some only go to arts classes and others only go to maths classes this should not be called equality.

**Only if young people have access, have the skills to learn and engage with material in a meaningful way, and only if they have experienced various subject matters can we speak of equality in education or - its parallel - digital equality.**

# Links between social and digital engagement



Source: 'Digital Inclusion: An Analysis of Social Disadvantage and the Information Society' (Helsper, 2008)

# Whose and what kind of 'literacy'?

## Educational cultures:

- Generations
- Ethnicity
- Disability
- Language
- Nationality

## Digital 'Literacy':

- Access
  - Media Richness
  - Quality
  - Location
- Skills
  - Self-efficacy
  - Multitasking
- Engagement
  - Breadth of engagement



# Sample and design OxIS

## Oxford Internet Surveys and the World Internet Project

- Fieldwork: 2003, 2005, 2007 and 2009
- Respondents: 14 year olds and older
- Face-to-face interviews
- In Britain: probability sample of England, Scotland & Wales



TALISMA



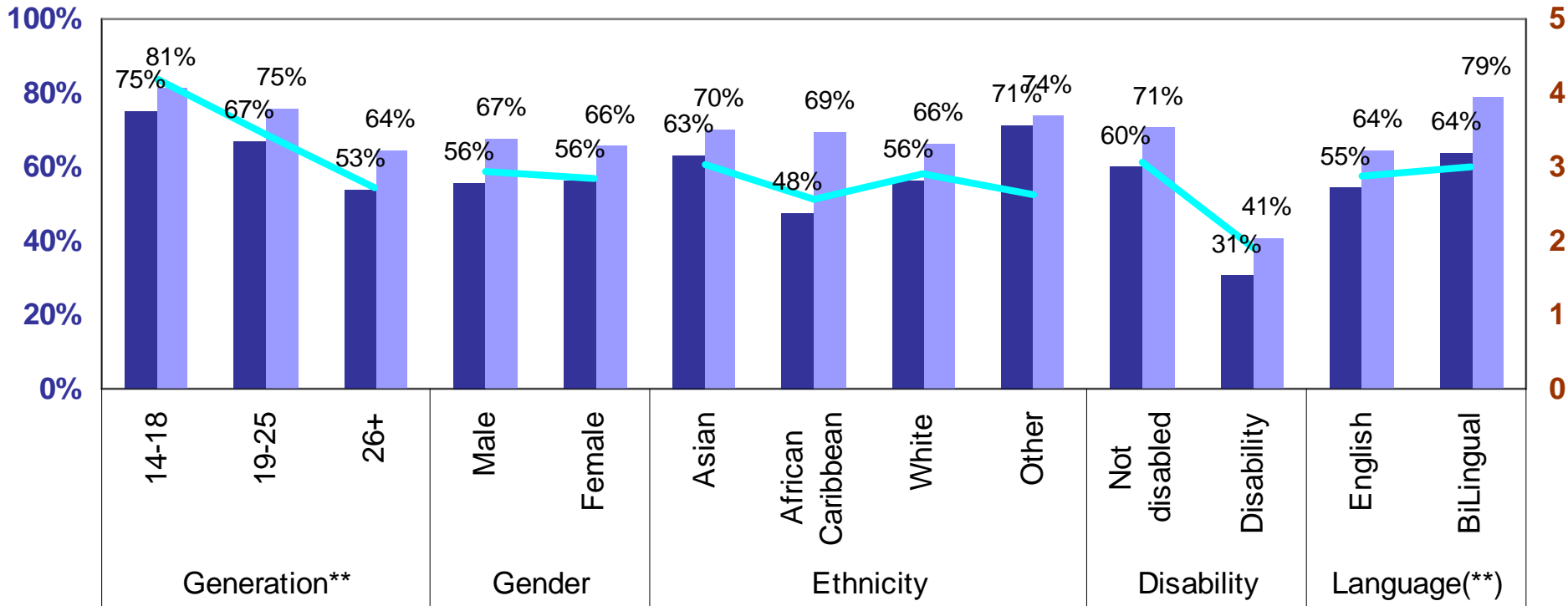
**OxIS**  
Oxford Internet Surveys



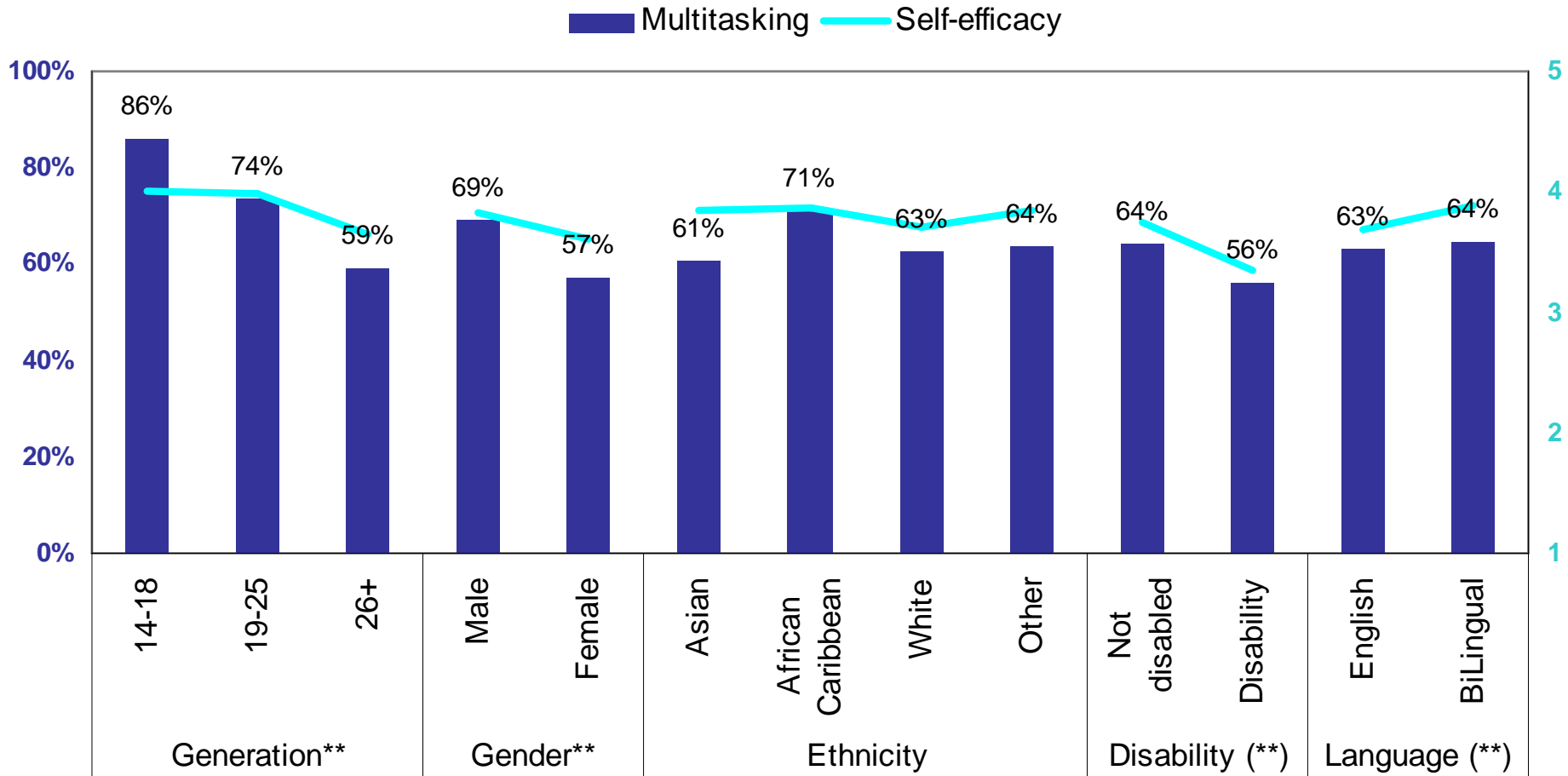
Oxford Internet Institute  
University of Oxford

# Differences within the UK: Access

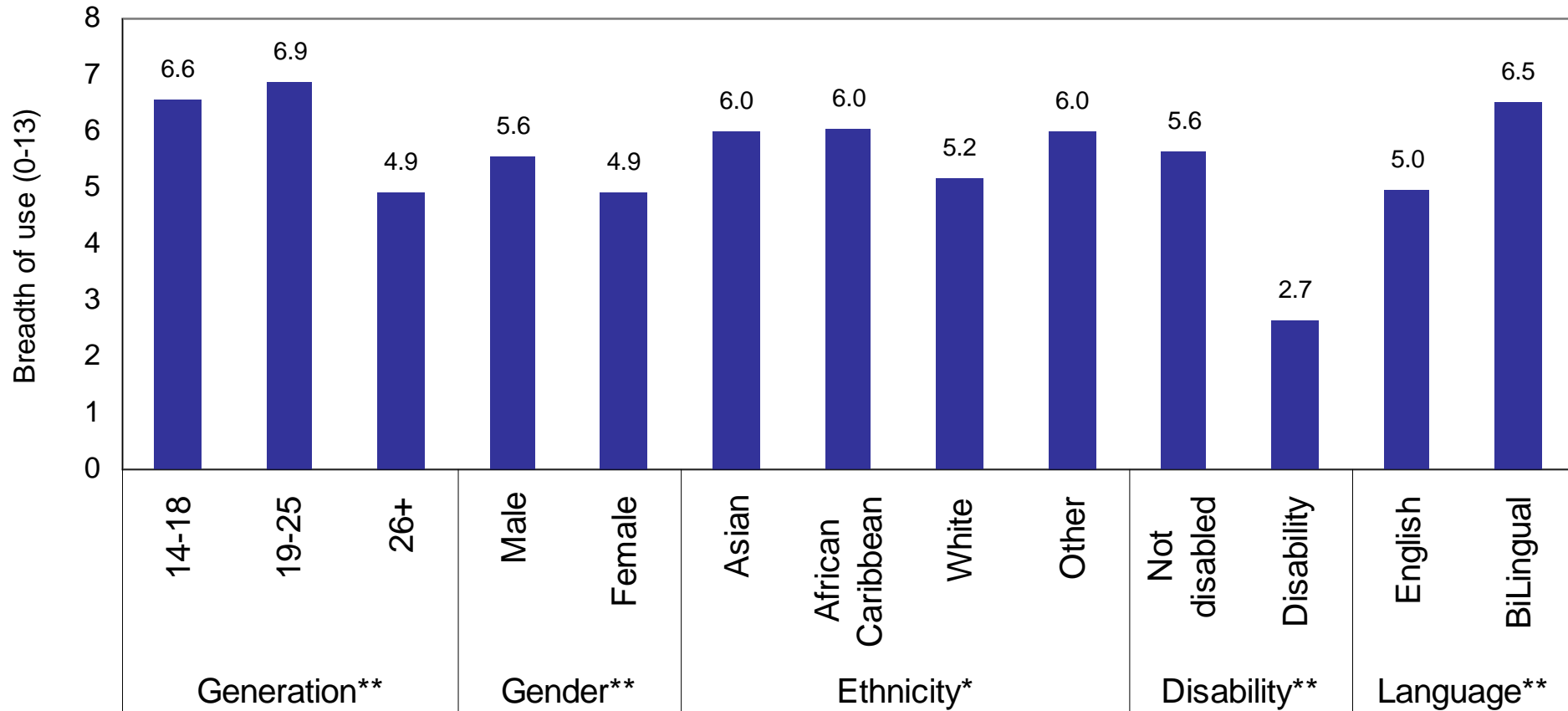
■ Broadband ■ Home access — Media Richness



# Differences within the UK: Skills



# Differences within the UK: Engagement

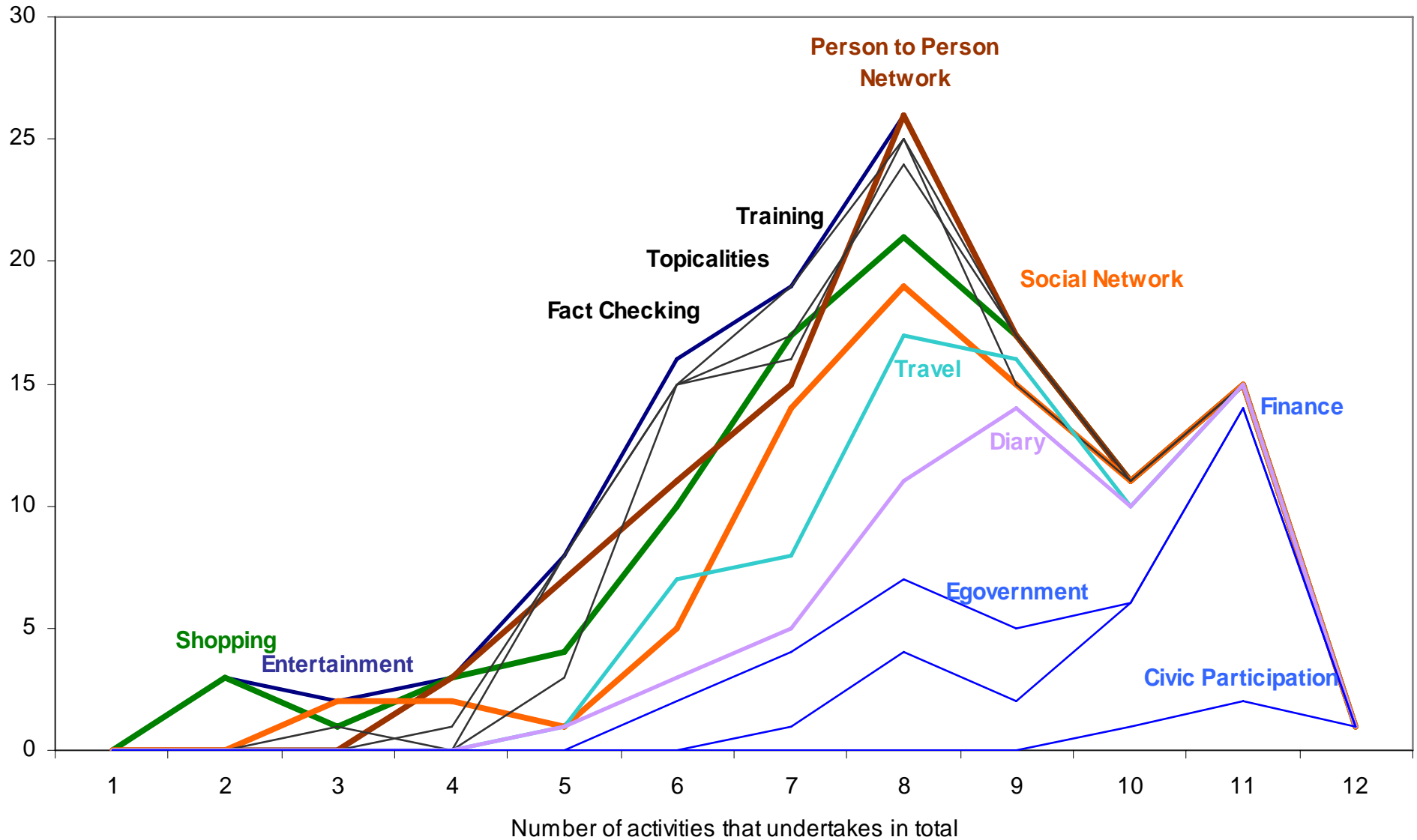


# Digital Inequality or Digital Cultures?

- That there are differences between the groups does not mean that there is inequality
- (Where) Should we draw a line between diversity and inequality?
- How can digital literacy be understood in different cultural groups?

# Generational cultures

# Teenagers









# Generational cultures

- Engagement for digital natives (<19 yrs old) includes:
  1. (Window) Shopping, Entertainment, Networking, Learning
  2. Travel and Diary second step
  3. Egovernment, Finance and Civic participation last
  
- Google generation's engagement (19-24) includes:
  1. Shopping, Entertainment, Learning and Personal Networking
  2. Social networking and Finance
  3. Egovernment, Finance and Civic participation last
  
- Engagement for digital immigrants (25 + yrs) includes:
  1. Shopping, Entertainment, Learning and personal networking
  2. Finance, Egovernment and Social Networking
  3. Diary and Civic Participation last

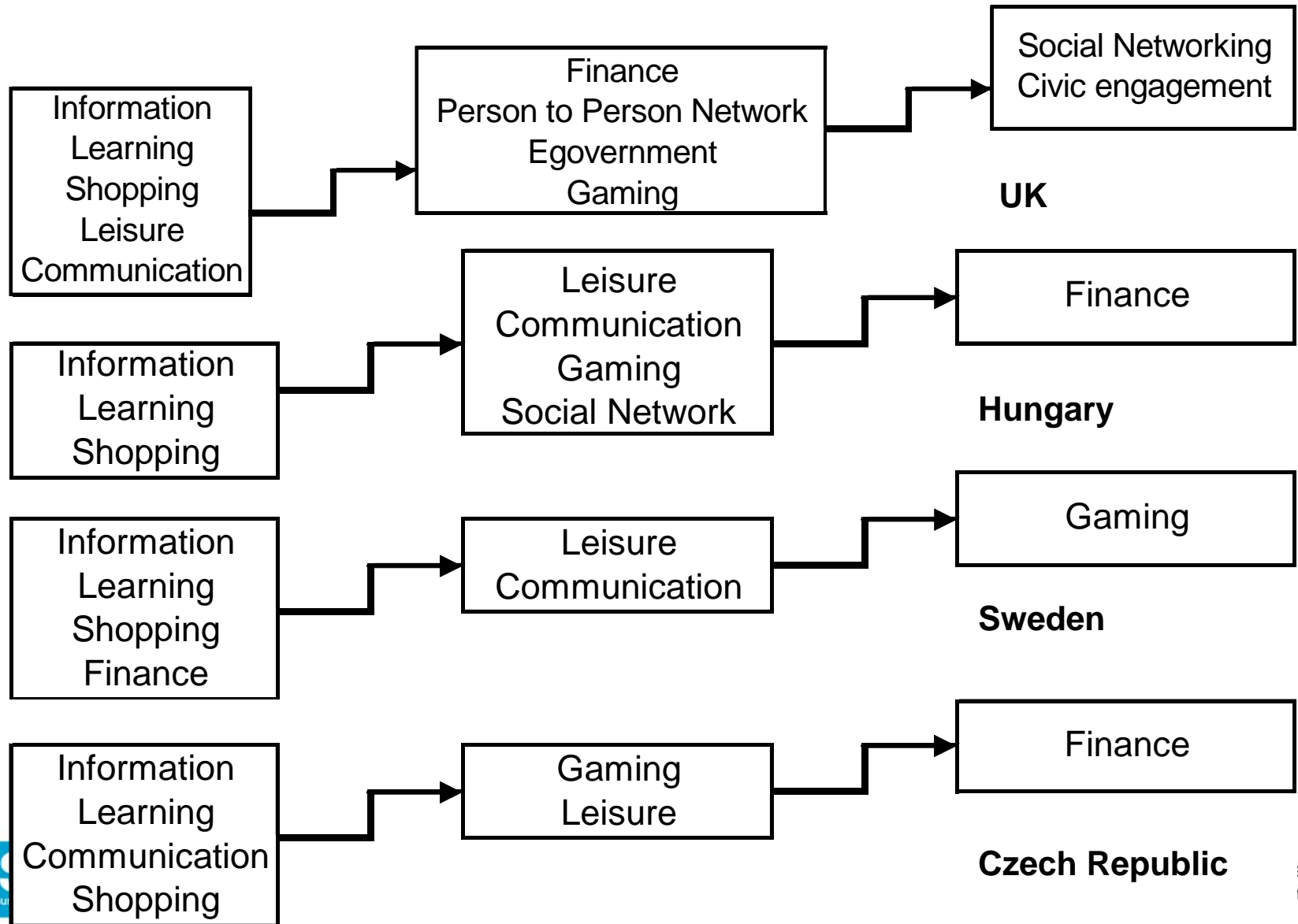
# Ethnicity and Engagement

# Cultural steps to full immersion

- **Asian** users engage first with learning and shopping, then with communication and web 2.0 uses and participation make up the last steps to full immersion.
- **African Caribbean** users engage first with learning and entertainment, followed by communication and shopping and finally web 2.0 and participation
- **White** user is less consistent with a group who just goes online for civic participation, and a spread of others who undertake activities about equally. Although shopping and information and learning seem the most basic.

# International Cultures

# International steps to complete emersion



# Cultural differences

- Practical Basic Engagement includes information and learning in most of Europe
- Social extras (often second step) include entertainment and networking > Sweden is exception
- Swedes and Brits engage most with practical applications (i.e. Finances) even when not emerging themselves completely while Eastern EU countries are more likely to engage in this fashion only when completely immersed

# We need to understand

- ... the different cultures represented in the classroom
  - ethnic, gender, ability and nationality diversity amongst students and generational differences between teachers and students.
- ... what baggage these different cultures bring with them from home
  - Access and freedom to play with ICTs at home will give some young people a head start
- ... that digital engagement goes beyond learning facts and figures
  - engagement with ICTs is embedded in everyday life and forms a toolkit for personal development and social, cultural, economic and civic participation



# Thank you.

Ellen Helsper

Ellen.Helsper@oii.ox.ac.uk