



THE MEDIA SCHOOL

INDIANA UNIVERSITY

October 3, 2016

National Telecommunications and Information Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce
1401 Constitution Avenue NW, Rm. 4887
Attn: National Broadband Research Agenda
Washington DC, 20230.

To Whom It May Concern:

For the past five years I have been investigating digital disruption, or *technology maintenance*. As the divide in access to and use of ICT closes, the poor are having a more difficult time maintaining access. Low-income citizens often use devices that are broken, borrowed, or *dependably unstable*, chronically cycling through periods of intermittent disrupted access. Though exact numbers on these phenomena are unknown, my qualitative work finds that disrupted ICT access disrupts access to healthcare, part-time and shift employment, social services and social support (Gonzales, 2014; Gonzales, 2016; Gonzales et al., 2016).

To better understand and then reduce the cost of dependable instability, researchers and government agencies must collect longitudinal measures of 'under-connectedness' and technology maintenance practices (**Notice Section C.10**). This includes asking questions like: *how frequently are people who own and use computers, cellphones, and in-home Internet disconnected due to the inability to pay monthly fees or replace broken systems? How many of those same people no longer have landline phones* (59% of those in poverty, Blumberg & Luke, 2015), *exacerbating the consequences of disconnection problems? What are the consequences of disconnection for access to healthcare, employment, interpersonal support, social services, etc.? How do people make due when access is down?* These questions are essential to understand the scope of this problem and then formulate governmental and private solutions.

A small handful of sources have begun to address these issue (e.g. Rideout & Katz, 2016; Smith, 2015), but more work is needed. This can be accomplished both by funding academic and private studies to collect new data on digital use and access, and also expanding or collaborating on current federal data collection efforts, including those conducted at the CDC or Health and Human Services. Collaborations between health entities and NTIA/NSF could help to deepen questions of access quality and stability, and broaden assessment of well-being outcomes to include data on employment, emotional support systems, and other non-health related resources that are essential for health and quality of life (**Notice Section D.13&14**). Finally, pressing private entities

to provide existing data on the frequency of disconnection, particularly those that are already providing subsidized Internet and cellphone service (*Notice Section D.17*), would give researchers and policy makers essential information on the stability of access and the 'hot spots' where instability is most prevalent. Going forward, anonymized data on the stability of Lifeline access for could be made available in a manner that serves to improve access and serve the interest of cooperating private companies.

Thank you very much for your attention. Over the next 50 years, I expect that the stability of access will become a central issue in determining socio-economic inequalities within this country, as well as a factor determining the status of the US in a global market and society. Now is the time to act to ensure these factors are not overlooked.

Sincerely,

Amy Gonzales, PhD (Cornell, 2010)
Assistant Professor
Media School
Indiana University, Bloomington

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