Introducing Women to the Internet: Digital Discourse in Women's Magazines

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The purpose of this analysis is to identify discourses in the major women's magazines that contributed to early attitudes regarding women's roles with Internet technology. An understanding of how women were introduced to the Internet via women's media is necessary to gain an historical perspective on gendered usage of technology that will help us better understand the ways that women may engage the technology in the future. This study identified early discourses in the magazines Better Homes and Gardens, Ms. Magazine and Working Woman and compared and contrasted the ways they were used to describe women's relationship with the technology. Using a qualitative analysis based on Foucault's definition of discourse, relationships between language and social institutions were found that contributed to the social reality of early interactions with and ongoing usage of Internet and related technologies.

This analysis identifies and discusses the relevance of discourses in the major women's magazines that contributed to early attitudes regarding women's roles with Internet technology. As the World Wide Web becomes a social space for communication, it is important to understand the ways that roles have been established for using the technology and how those roles are influenced by demographics. In his book, *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide,* Henry Jenkins spoke of concerns regarding a participation gap, moving the discussion away from conventional ideas about a digital divide that is merely focused on access. Jenkins said, "Now, we need to confront the cultural factors that diminish the likelihood that different groups will participate." (Jenkins, 2007, p. 258). An understanding of early discourses targeting women's use of Internet technology provides a foundation for future research that addresses a participation gap driven by gender. Using a qualitative analysis based on Foucault's definition of discourse, relationships between language and social institutions were found that contributed to the social reality of early interactions with and ongoing usage of Internet and related technologies.

Over the past decade, the number of women using the Internet has increased from a quiet minority to an equally represented demographic. By the end of 2001, women were as likely to access the Internet as men. In 2007, 76% of men and 74% of women were online, with more women online than men in total due to their increased numbers in American society ("Demographics of Internet Users," 2007). It is no coincidence that the increase of female Internet users has come at a time when the Internet and related communication technologies, such as e-mail and Web, were gaining mainstream acceptance. Now, with the introduction of social networking sites and Web logs, women have

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an equal voice in creating Web content. But before the mid- 1990s, the Internet was characterized as a primarily white, male domain, used by those in privileged positions in academia, government, and the military. Arguably, these origins have shaped the way Internet technology has been viewed and accepted by society.

Gender differences have emerged over time in terms of the ways one uses the technology, agency associated with such usage, and the representations created within technology. Women and men often use the Internet for very different reasons. A comScore Media Metrix report in September 2003 studied the Internet content preferences of males and females aged 18-24. The study found that men were more likely to visit gaming, adult, sports, and entertainment sites, while women's interests were in a variety of retail categories (comScore Networks, November 2003). Another comScore report showed that the highest growth sites were those in the retail category, also highlighting the growth of women Internet users (comScore Networks, Inc. November 2004). A 2005 study by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, revealed that women were more likely to seek health information, get religious and spiritual information, and use support-group Web sites, while men were more likely to use the Web to get news, buy travel services, check sports scores, seek financial information and do online stock trading, participate in online auctions, create content for the Internet, and download music files ("Internet: The Mainstreaming of Online Life," January 2005).

Before mainstream usage of the Internet, women's magazines began covering the topic of general computing as early as the 1980s, when computers became common in the workplace and started to make an appearance in the home. For example, in the February 1983 issue of *Ms. Magazine*, an article was published entitled, "Falling in Love With Your Computer." It included a personal testimonial on one woman's relationship with her computer, as well as glossaries, how-tos, and buying guides. The *Ms.* article defined ways that women could integrate the computer in their lives in a holistic approach. "Well, it's not a machine. More and more, it's – dare I say it in a national magazine? – an extension of *me*" (Van Gelder, 1983, p.37). A sense of urgency was also evident. "It's not a machine, damn it. It's the future" (Van Gelder, 1983, p.38).

In September 1983, *Ladies' Home Journal,* in what was likely a response to the *Ms.* issue, published a special content feature entitled "How to Get Smart About Computing." This eight-page spread included an introduction by notable technology futurist Isaac Asimov, a review of high-tech jobs, an explanation of how computers worked, and a glossary of hardware and software terms. The final article was entitled "How I Learned to Love My Computer," a testimonial from one woman about the evolution of her family's relationship with the computer.

In the mid- to late- 1990s, women's magazines slowly began to cover the phenomenon of emerging Internet and related technologies. For many women, this was the first introduction to Internet technology. While other media, such as television advertising, film, and technology publications addressed the Internet, those in women's magazines were the first discourses that were primarily targeted at women. But in so doing, these publications often stayed true to their existing tenets of hearth and home, rather than exhibiting the potential of the new technology beyond feminine stereotypes. Women were often cast as consumers of technology, as opposed to innovators and pioneers. Alternatives were presented by feminist and business publications, although these discourses were not as prominent as those presented by the women's service publications. This project compares discourses in the women's service magazine with the highest circulation,

Better Homes and Gardens, the most prominent feminist publication, *Ms. Magazine,* and a popular, yet now defunct women's business publication, *Working Woman*.

    Better Homes and Gardens was founded in 1922 as *Fruit, Garden, and Home*, but changed to its current name two years later. For over 80 years, it has been the primary service magazine targeted at women, providing advice on domestic issues such as cooking and homemaking. *Better Homes and Gardens* has the highest paid circulation for women's magazines, with 7.6 million subscribers ("Meredith.com Web site" 2007). Owned by Meredith Corporation, the *BHG* brand is associated with cookbooks and other home publications, a television network, and a Web site. Meredith itself is a conglomerate of home and living publications and interactive media.

    Ms. Magazine was first published in 1971 and was the first commercial magazine to clearly embody a feminist perspective. Started by Gloria Steinem, Elizabeth Forsling Harris, and Patricia Carbine, *Ms.* began as a special issue of *New York Magazine*. It quickly became a forum for the unique vision of feminist ideas and political coverage. Over the years, *Ms.* has experienced several ownership changes and a retooling as a subscription-based, ad-free publication. It continues in publication today, but with 1/5 the 550,000 circulation that it enjoyed at its height in 1989. The magazine is currently owned by the Feminist Majority Foundation. *Ms.* began operating MsMagazine.com in 1999.

    Working Woman, started in 1976, provided a compromise between the stereotypical discourses found in women's service magazines and the feminist approach of *Ms*. But in 2001, and after 25 years in print, *Working Woman* folded, and its remaining property *Working Mother* was sold to Working Woman Media to continue in publication. The decision to focus on *Working Mother* was made due to the slow economy and the tech downturn (Lombardi, December 2001).

Review of Literature

    Feminist researchers have studied the presence and impact of representations in women's media. This study extends the current body of research by applying feminist media concepts to content having to do with Internet technology, thus merging the communications field with cyberfeminism.

    The concept of cyberfeminism is a general area in which theories of feminism are applied to women's usage of technology. Cyberfeminism borrows qualities from other feminist theories, like socialist feminism's focus on the social and economic exercise of power in society, and postfeminism's representation of marginalized groups, and applies those theories to digital discourse. In 1992, van Zoonen studied the relationship of feminist theory and information technology (van Zoonen, 1992). "Common sense has led many of us to believe that women and men relate differently to technology" (van Zoonen, 1992, p. 9). She cited that several publications have identified the absence of women from the invention, creation, and design of new technologies, but that their role as consumers of certain technologies is equally well documented.

    According to van Zoonen, "gender and power… form the constituents of feminist thought" (van Zoonen, 1994, p. 4). Gender is analyzed as one mechanism for structuring our symbolic and social worlds. Power is relevant in regard to understanding subordination and oppression in society.

    Recognizing the reduced presence of women and women's issues in media, Tuchman forged the construct of "symbolic annihilation," theorizing that there was meaning

in absence, thus trivializing women's issues and silencing women's voices (Tuchman, 1978). Tuchman found that women were rarely portrayed on television in roles outside of homemaker, mother, and sex object with working women were usually condemned. When Tuchman looked at research on women's magazines, she found that representations of women centered on middle-class married women whose existence was defined by the men in their lives. "The women's magazines continue to assume that every woman will marry, bear children, and make a home" (Tuchman, 1978, p. 24).

MacDonald found that women's discourses and the stereotypes identified in media were relevant to the dichotomy of public and private spheres.

> *As men moved out of the home to work, the (male) bourgeoisie acquired increasing power in the course of the nineteenth century, the public world became identified with influence and power, the private with moral value and support. In bourgeoisie discourse, the split developed gendered attitudes, with men thought "naturally" to occupy the public arena, women the domestic and private (MacDonald, 1998, p. 48).*

MacDonald identified that women's role as the primary consumer of household goods drove the advertising themes in the 20th century, with discourses evolving around being the capable household manager, guilty mother, and the flapper woman, or "unmarried modern miss." As the century wore on and feminist stances of the 1970s were challenged, discourses continued to encourage women to be independent, yet feminine (MacDonald, 1998, pp. 76-90). The competing discourses that resulted from this period included the role of nurturer, woman as sex object, and the ways in which women's body image is created by media. Other researchers have uncovered similar discourses in the analysis of the content of women's magazines (Ferguson, 1983; McCracken, 1993).

Consalvo looked at the ways women and technology were represented in media from 1990-1998. She found that during that time, "the Internet was sometimes depicted as a place hostile to women, where few women were welcomed and indeed few women spent their time" (Consalvo, 2002, p. 113). White and Kinnick, in an analysis of television commercials, found that women were equally as likely to be represented using computers as men, but were more likely to be shown in non-professional roles, such as secretary or telemarketer (White & Kinnick, 2000). Their results indicated that a lack of women role models shown as computer experts could undermine women's confidence in their ability to enter a professional computing career.

Warnick performed a rhetorical analysis on print media and Web site discourses urging women to go online, during the period 1995-1997. Warnick considered "how ideology is embedded in this invitational discourse, how the presence and promise of new technologies can affect how women think about themselves and their relation to them, and how elitist discourse excludes and marginalizes women even while it attempts to invite them online" (Warnick, 1999, p. 2).

Exploring the gendered discourse in *Wired* magazine, arguably the most influential publication dealing with techno-culture, Millar explored "how digital technological change is being packaged and sold to the public through cultural messages that support a particular view of how the future should be organized" (Millar, 1998, p. 25). Millar applied feminist theory to the cultural symbols exemplified in *Wired*. She found that *Wired* used specific discourses of the future, innovation, and the hypermacho man that served to eliminate difference and excluded those it considered Other - women, minori-

ties, poor, technologically challenged. "The construction of women and minorities that are found form a separate discursive stream in *Wired* and are relegated to subordinate status" (Millar, 1998, pp. 96-97).

The main method employed in this study was a qualitative analysis of discourse. Foucault used "discourse" to refer to the relationship between language and social institutions. "Discourses, in Foucault's work, are ways of constituting knowledge, together with social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledge and the relations between them" (Weedon, 1996, p. 108). More simply, discourses are "the kinds of framing, inclusion, or exclusion of certain points of view" (Altheide, p. 69). The most powerful discourses are based in institutions, such as the law, medicine, education, or the organization of the family or work. According to Phillips & Hardy (2002, p. 3), "social reality is produced and made real through discourses, and social interactions cannot be fully understood without reference to the discourses that give them meaning."

Method and Research Question

The main research question of this analysis is "How did women's magazines targeted at different segments compare in the ways they represented women's usage of the Internet during its introduction?" The publications that were selected, *Better Homes and Gardens, Ms. and Working Woman,* were done so for their popularity during the time period under study in reaching the general women's service, feminist and business audiences. The articles identified for this analysis spanned 1996-2000. All articles dealt with Internet and Web technology. Discourses were identified and compared in the areas of home, work, and relationships, as well as the ways that gender and gender issues were identified in regard to technology.

Discussion of Results

The first comparisons deal with the ways that each magazine compares structurally in introducing Internet and Web concepts. Two of the three publications, *BHG* and *Ms.,* introduced regular technology columns during the 1990s. Most interesting was the selection of the names of the departments in their respective publications. Each seamlessly integrated common technology metaphors with the publication's notions about the role of women. In *BHG*, the name "Tech@Home" utilized the common @ symbol used in all e-mail addresses and has come to be associated with communication technologies. The symbol cleverly linked the association with technology as a communications medium and the idea that it can and should be used in the home, very specific to the mission of *BHG*. In contrast, the *Ms.* column's "Techno.fem" title employed the "dot" or period in its name, which was reminiscent of its usage in Web addresses. The phenomenon of "dotcom" became the moniker that described the entire industry of computer technology during the 1990s. By using the "dot" as the anchor, *Ms.* was able to integrate the abbreviated versions of the words "technology" and "feminism" to clearly identify the focus of the section.

Another difference was in the usage of images. For *BHG*, when photographs were used, they positioned the computer in a home environment, and did not include images of women interacting with them. One photo showed a computer, stylized specifically for women, the Audrey by 3Com, atop a desk that was integrated into a bar in clear view of the kitchen table. By naturalizing the computer in the home, specifically in the kitchen

as the hub of family activity, *BHG* reinforced the idea that women's natural place was in the private sphere, even in regard to their use of technology. Often, information boxes were provided to show prices, company names, or where to buy products mentioned in the column, thus integrating the consumerist nature of the service publications. A computer purchase was positioned much like that of buying any other home appliance.

In contrast, the *Ms.* articles in "Techno.fem" were more feature-oriented, included actual photography, and focused on the accomplishments of women in technology. This is typical of the general layout and design of all *Ms. Magazine* articles during the time period. Often women were photographed using computers or positioned with technology in a manner that expressed power and authority with the technology. When graphics were used, they typically depicted women using computers for the specific purposes in the articles, like a woman sitting on the end of her bed using the computer to gain online advice about morning-after birth control measures or depicting images of girls as anime in an article about online gaming.

While *Working Woman* did not include a specific technology column or section, it employed a "special issue" strategy to introduce Internet and Web topics. The June 1, 1996 issue was entitled "Wired Women: Making Technology Work For Us." The title of the issue gave a nod to work, consistent with the mission of the publication, and referenced the collective "us," in a manner that reflects that unique strategies are required for women to integrate technology into their lives. The issue consisted of seven feature articles that introduced the Internet and Web in primarily business applications. Topics broadly addressed the usage of technology to women in a business setting. From using technology to increase productivity to recommending online resources for stock trading, banking and real estate purchases to profiles and interviews with technology experts, both male and female, these articles reflected a hybrid of those that catered specifically to women's issues in the workplace and those that did not address gender at all.

The articles had distinct emphases in covering Internet technology. The *BHG* articles held the discourses of online shopping or making technology purchases, usage of technology in the home, identifying the Web as a "dangerous place," family uses of the Web for photos and communicating with family, and emphasizing its simplicity of use with "how tos" and instructional tips, often using cooking or household metaphors to naturalize the discourses. For example, one article in *BHG* started, "Active families mean active kitchens. What better place to serve up a home's computer?" (Weeks, October 2001) Another equated the ease of computer use with other household items. "With their 'instant-on' feature and one-touch buttons, new Internet appliances are easier to use than the microwave ovens and bread machines they sit next to on the kitchen counter" (Hicks, July 2001).

In *Ms.* there was an expected bias toward feminism and activism topics, but there was also a continued focus on identification of gender stereotypes, power and control within technology, and the discussion of gender equity in computing. *Ms.* most commonly used the profile strategy in its articles, identifying women entrepreneurs and discussing their interests and backgrounds with technology. Articles in this category included women computer pioneers (Bayard, May/June 1998), Janese Swanson creator of Girl Tech (Mahoney, January/February 1997), Stacy Horn founder of echonyc.com a women's online community (Burgher, July/August 1997), women using hacking for activism or hacktivism (Muhammad, December 2000/January 2001), and Buffy Sainte-Marie, singer, composer, and activist, and how she utilized computers in her work (Edut,

August/September 1999). The majority of these profiles focused on the ways that women were empowering themselves by using technology for activism and political causes.

Working Woman leaned heavily toward business applications of technology, often without addressing gender implications, and rarely used discourses related to home and family. The most prominent strategy employed by *Working Woman* was the informational article. A step beyond the simple "how-to" articles offered in *BHG*, *Working Woman* succinctly dealt with a broad range of useful topics without engaging gender. In "Net Profits," the author offered basic advice that would be applicable to any business professional, describing the importance of online presence, the costs and effort associated with establishing a Web address and developing and maintaining a site, dealing with credit card transactions, soft benefits of Web presence and online relationship management (Brame, June 1996). "The Well-Wired Manager" stated, "It's axiomatic among managers that technology increases productivity. But that article of faith could stand a slight revision: Technology properly used increases productivity" (Fryer, June 1996). Without specifically mentioning women, the article described software applications that assisted in managing e-mail, writing reports, and managing projects. At the same time, it emphasized that technology should be used responsibly and productively. The message here is that women are busy and don't have time to play with technology for technology's sake. But the underlying significance was that women were not generally encouraged to explore and play with technology in innovative or creative ways.

Interviews and profiles in *Working Woman* were more likely to discuss issues specifically related to women than other types of articles in the magazine. "It's Not Just E-male" contained short profiles of successful women in the technology field, including Kim Polese, original product manager for the Java programming language at Sun Microsystems, Caitlin Curtain president and CEO of Luminaire Software, Michelle Dilorenzo, president of Viacom New Media, Esther Dyson, chair of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, Jane Metcalfe, Co-founder of Wired Magazine, and Nancy Rhine, director of women's programming at America Online. The article started:

> There's no old-boys network to outwit, no glass ceiling to crack. Multimedia--the Internet, CD-ROMs and interactive TV--has set off a boom in high-tech jobs for women. The work isn't about writing programming code that only computers and other programmers can understand; it's about creating content that appeals to experts and novices alike--inviting home pages and Web sites, compelling CD-ROM adventures and absorbing interactive television. The emphasis is on skills that women have in abundance: writing, design, marketing. Everyone in this field is a pioneer. Meet some of the women who are blazing the trail (Schuyler & Barad, June 1996).

In "Seismic Shifts: How Technology Will Change the Way You Work," several technology experts offered comments on the future of Internet technology in the workplace. An excerpt from Alvin and Heidi Toffler included,

> This is a moment of upheaval, a moment for people to increasingly recognize that the system they lived with didn't work. As competition for high level jobs intensifies, women will be locked out. This is the reason women are leaving the corporate world. If you ask, "Who has the title VP

> *or EVP?" it's largely men. But control of information is one of the keys to power in the organization. If you ask "Who has the information necessary to solve problems?" the power is gravitating toward women. Men may keep their jobs and paychecks--but they can't make decisions without good information from someone, and the source will be made up equally of men and women (Brame, June 1996).*

Another excerpt from the same article critiqued the ways that women's roles could be affected by the Internet. Pamela McCorduck, co-author of *The Futures of Women*, wrote of four potential scenarios: a tech backlash in which women are prevented from fully participating online, specifically in very closed and censored cultures; an age of equality in which women's skills at networking and community will be valued and embraced; new opportunities for women are created, but are then considered feminized and devalued in society; and, a separate but equal strategy in which all-women environments are explored.

Further critiquing gender roles in *Working Woman*, an interview with Sherry Turkle, sociologist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, discussed in her book *Life on the Screen: Identity in the Age of the Internet* and the effects of a decentralized and multiple-identitied computer culture. Of the potential for women in an online culture, Turkle said,

> *I think the area of interface design--the notion that you create an environment for the computer user that's beautiful, that's productive, that's friendly--is something that has drawn and will draw many more women into interaction with this technology. And it is women who are attentive to language, attentive to collaboration, attentive to community. The Internet and on-line communities need those skills. (Povich, June 1996)*

Outside of the special issue, though, only a few articles on Internet-related topics addressed women's issues specifically. Profiles and interviews continued to be the way in which gender discussions manifested.. A March 1997 piece focused on Java developer Kim Polese, referring to her as "the next Bill Gates." The article discussed her roles on the Sun Microsystems marketing team that launched Java and as the CEO of Marimba, maker of push-technology software. The gender references were veiled in describing Polese's leadership style in the comparisons with Bill Gates.

> *The Marimba partners might not have consciously chosen her because she presents such a sharp contrast to Microsoft chair Bill Gates. But the contrast is definitely there: She is a female marketer while Gates is the quintessential boy engineer, graceful where Gates embodies a sort of alpha geek anti-style (Fryer, "The Next Bill Gates," March 1997).*

The article concluded with a description of Polese's love of jazz dancing and the ways that she balanced work with her performing company Zohar. Polese said, "Part of dancing is expressing yourself and fully committing yourself, and I take that feeling and use it in my work." The article continued, "A Silicon Valley entrepreneur in a leotard? For so many reasons, a lot of people are glad that this time, the entrepreneur isn't Bill Gates" (Fryer, "The Next Bill Gates," March 1997).

Most notable about these passages is the implied relevance of the female body to

leadership competence. Being described as "graceful" or humorously compared to Bill Gates in a leotard seems to undermine Polese's obvious experience and contributions in favor of more stereotypical male/female comparisons.

Just a year earlier, in January 1996, the magazine featured a cover story with the real Bill Gates, CEO of Microsoft (Povich, January 1996). Gates was asked specific questions regarding gender and women's roles as managers, business owners, and users in an information age. On the technology usage differences of men and women, Gates said:

> *Historically, men tended to be more comfortable with certain kinds of new technology than women were. Most early PC users were men, and even now men, somewhat more than women, tend to be pioneers on the Internet. I sometimes wonder about the cultural reasons for this (Povich, January 1996).*

Gates continued that gender was but one factor relevant to one's interest in technology:

> *Gender may be one of the factors that determine how a person is affected, but I don't believe it's a major factor. Individual characteristics, such as what a person is good at and what he or she wants to achieve matter much more (Povich, January 1996).*

In regard to Microsoft's hiring practices, Gates added:

> *Marketing and project-management positions are crucial to our success, and in these areas women are well represented. They remain underrepresented in our engineering ranks. Only about 20% of the people who actually computer-code are female. This is higher than the percentage of women in the college degree programs from which we recruit. The makeup of the applicant pool has made it difficult to meet our goals in hiring women (Povich, January 1996).*

An article in November 1996 addressed opportunities that new media opened for women, but stated that the primary advantage of such advancement was increased competition rather than gender equality, pay equity, or career opportunities.

> *Cable television, desk-top publishing, the Internet and the World Wide, CD-ROM, interactive video--they are changing the way we view media and offer unparalleled opportunities for women. New job titles have been born: Webmaster, content editor, Webzine publisher. In 1992, Nancy Rhine and Ellen Pack launched the first online women's service, Women's Wire, to immediate success. New media also begat traditional media: Jane Metcalfe was the first woman to start a must-read computer magazine, Wired. A friendlier reception for women in the expanding communications world means one thing for the media behemoths: competition ("The Media," November 1996).*

Most articles in *Working Woman* were written by women, but some of the most technical articles were contributed by male authors, i.e. "Networking Your Office: No Matter What Your Business's Size, There's a Computer That's Right For You" and "Getting To Know You: Quicker and More Personalized Than Search Engines, "Agents" Are Your New Electronic Servants by Jim Frederick, "10 Questions To Ask Before You Up-

grade" by Rich Jaroslovsky, and "Home Sweet Home Page," by Andrew Plesser and Peter Edmonston.

The articles in *Ms.* covered much more divisive and nontraditional topics than those in *BHG* and *Working Woman.* For example, the article on women computer pioneers, "Computer Pioneers – Visible at Last!" (Bayard, May/June 1998) highlighted the suppression of women from computing history. It described six women who became the world's first computer programmers during World War II, but were not recognized for their accomplishments until they were inducted into the Hall of Fame of Women in Technology in 1997.

A potentially controversial topic was found in a *Ms.* article in the April/May 1997 issue about using the Internet to obtain information about emergency contraception. "Public awareness about emergency contraception is downright poverty stricken, despite the wealth of information on the Web" (Stoller, April/May 1999, p. 91). The article identified the Internet as way to gain constant access to important health information, and identified several sites available to women needing contraceptive advice.

Empowerment in the *BHG* articles was limited to one article dealing with using technology to gain a college degree online. This article used a case study approach to describe a woman who was having trouble juggling career and home, and decided to gain her degree online to avoid time away from her family (Ehlers, 1999, p. 162). The article provided a balanced approach to the issue by reporting on another woman who did not enjoy her experience with online education, and it also provided several items of valid advice, resources, and questions to ask before embarking on an online degree.

The *BHG* articles were preoccupied with online safety. In "Keeping Kids Safe on the Internet," Gaines compared teaching children Internet safety to teaching them to safely cross the street or to avoid talking to strangers. The article catered to parents' fears by quickly identifying that "pedophiles, scam artists, bigots, and other unsavory characters wander cyberspace" (Gaines, 1999, p. 70). Warning parents that merely ignoring the issues was insufficient, the article continued to explore the topic of finding Internet filtering software, working together with children on the computer, and providing advice for using chatrooms and protecting online privacy. The article concluded with a list of resources on safe Web surfing. One of the major sources in the article was a group called PC Dads, thus identifying the paternal figure as the authority when it comes to online issues.

Another *BHG* article, "Web-Savvy Kids," opened with "danger lurks on the Internet. But by setting guidelines and staying involved, parents can provide needed protection" ("Web-Savvy Kids," May 2001, p. 120). The harms identified were detachment from friends and family, declining grades, and Internet predators. Such fear tactics indicated an environment in which technology is approached skeptically and cautiously, as opposed to openly and creatively. The discussion of filtering software did not discussion their limitations, with the exception of one comment, "keep in mind, though, that filters can make regular Web surfing clumsy and may also filter valuable sites" ("Web-Savvy Kids," May 2001, p. 122).

While *BHG* offered the topic of censorware, or filtering software that can protect children from evils online, *Ms.* offered a balanced article on the issues around censorship and the ways in which filtering software accomplished it. This *Ms.* article explained the legal landscape of online censorship and the pros and cons of filtering software, used to control children's access to pornography or other inappropriate online content. But

the article also pointed out the limitations and dangers of implementing such filtering software. "Filter software is often bigoted and misleading, with a potential to reshape the entire online information landscape" (Eisenberg, September/October 1998, p. 39). The article further pointed out that some of the filtering products mentioned in the article, when tested, blocked information about feminism and women's issues including Now. org and Planned Parenthood.

Additionally, the article in *Ms.* highlighted problems with the Internet School Filtering Act, a bill proposed by Senator John McCain to implement filtering software in public places, limiting funds in the highest need areas. Accompanying the article was a list of links on selected sites against censorship. The goal of this article was not to sell filtering software products or to tout their usage, but to present a balanced account of the benefits and limitations of such approaches.

Women's role as parent was further supported in *Ms.* articles dealing with issues of gender equity online versus positioning the Web as a dangerous place in which children must be protected. One of the entrepreneur profiles was of Janese Swanson who started the company Girl Tech, a company with a goal "to invent technology-based products that are 'cool,' easy to use, and fun for girls between the ages of six and twelve" (Mahoney, 1997, p. 37). Another article addressed the gendering of girls' computer games and the associated problems in attaching feminine stereotypes. "By focusing on popularity and fashion – even if this is what some girls want to focus on – the majority of them reinforce the very same stereotypes they purport to combat" (Eisenberg, January/February 1998, p. 84). Another article discussed the prominence of Web sites targeted at teen girls and analyzed differences in those that provide empowering content, like free space for home pages and Web design tutorials, and those that are simply interested in marketing to teens. "Most sites are being marketed to teens instead of being made for teens" (Johnston, 2000, p. 82). The article went on to state that sites designed by teen girls themselves provide much of the interesting content and bypass the need for ads or sponsorships. The article provided a list of many sites where the girls themselves designed and created the content.

Working Woman had very few articles that dealt with parenting or family issues regarding technology. *New York* Times columnist Denise Caruso was quoted,

> *The good news for women is that technology permits them to do more from home so they can spend more time with their children. But you may be expected to work a lot more than if you came to an office. Employers will feel they are doing women a big favor and expect more from them for the privilege of working from home (Brame, June 1996).*

But, the lack of family discourses about technology in the magazine showed a specific choice on the part of *Working Woman's* editors to not define women in regard to their roles in the family. In as much as men are husbands and fathers, they are rarely discussed as such in men's magazines, particularly in those that deal with technology topics. But the ultimate demise of *Working Woman* reflects a society that is uncomfortable with presenting women in the same separate fashion.

Conclusions

It is not surprising to find that when these publications discussed Internet technology, they did not create new discourses to describe this emerging phenomenon. They

relied heavily on the discourses that were common and comfortable with their audiences. *BHG* naturalized the Internet by catering to women's fears and insecurities about parenting and by providing easy "how-to" advice to navigate the difficult technological terrain. Gender was addressed solely in terms of women's roles as wives and mothers, even in regard to business and career applications. Technology was presented with the same consumerist discourses as household appliances. *Ms. Magazine*, on the other hand, used its feminist and activist approaches to provide alternative discourses around the Internet, showing women using computers in positions of power and exploring issues of technology in a more complex manner. This approach is consistent with socialist feminist theory (a hybrid of Marxist and radical feminist theories) in that women's oppression must be understood and questioned in terms of power and patriarchy within the social structures of society (Tong, 1988, p. 4). *Working Woman* flirted with gender issues, but only in business contexts, often ignoring overt gender implications. This is consistent with liberal feminist theory that addresses women's rights in terms of equality with men and without altering the structure of society (Tong, 1988, p. 2). The demise of *Working Woman* further highlights the lack of sources for alternative discourses for women's use of technology. With many more women being exposed to the content in women's service magazines than that of the feminist or business publications, it should not be surprising that the predominant discourses about technology that are influencing women's usage of the Internet are those regarding hearth and home and women's role as consumers.

It may be unwise, however, to jump to the conclusion that this approach is purely negative in its effects. Since women dominate the roles within the private sector of homemaker and caregiver, positioning technology for its connectedness and familiarity within the setting of the home might influence more women to explore its potential. How women negotiate within and through these spaces will determine whether these representations are confining or liberating. And as the Web becomes more about social networking and online community, these skills that are often presented as naturalized to females become the necessary attributes to participating online.

The primary implication of this study has to do the ways that these representations influence women's confidence and ability to engage with computer technology and integrate it into their lives. A significant difference exists in women entering technology education and careers. While women made up more than 50% of high school students in 2001, they accounted for only 17% of the students taking the Advanced Placement Computer Science Test. In 1999, women made up only 31% of the students majoring in computer science, and received only 16% of the PhDs awarded in the field (Cooper & Weaver, 2003, pp. 5). This under representation limits their ability to enter the growing, lucrative field. In the industry, women hold one out of five information technology professional positions. It is estimated that by 2010, 25% of all new jobs created will be "technology oriented" (Cooper & Weaver, 2003, p. 3).

In addition, technology as a driving social and cultural force needs women's voices in the roles of developers and innovators, particularly as the technology becomes more social and expressive. "It is important for women to use the Internet, but it is also vitally important for them to become innovators within it at every level of technological development," said Gillian Youngs of the Centre of Mass Communications Research at the University of Leicester in England. "As societies become increasingly dependent on technologies like the Internet, access to them, and influence over how they develop,

become central to questions of who has most power over how large-scale social change is taking place" (Pleticha, 2002).

Progress seems to be in the works. Recent studies show that women are becoming the primary users of social networks and media. While men seem more interested in information acquisition, women are interested in engaging technology for its communication power. "Women's behavior online, on the other hand, is less transactional and more relationship-driven. They spend more time on social networks building relationships, communicating with friends, and making new friends" (Hoffman, 2008). To cater to this demographic, social media companies will need to hire women and promote them to executive roles.

But, again, this view positions women as consumers and establishes their value as an advertising segment in regard to their usage of the technology. A *New York Times* article on August 13, 2008 reported that the growth of women's Web sites and blogs has garnered the attention of advertisers and venture capitalists, but only in regard to traditionally feminine content (Miller, 2008)."To the disappointment of some women who want sites that focus on serious issues like politics, advertisers are not interested in every kind of content. They gravitate to the tried-and-true topics of women's magazines: fashion, beauty, celebrities and love life." Rather than forging new, liberating discourses, the Internet seems to be propagating old stereotypes with little backlash.

This analysis tracks the general discourses that women were encountering when they were first learning about the Internet, and the ways that different women's publications were addressing these issues. By understanding the discourses used in print regarding the Internet, we can better appreciate why certain discourses are manifesting in women's spaces online and in regard to women's usage of Internet technology. These differences were expected, but this analysis highlights the lack of variation within publications while identifying the breadth of discourses that exist when looking across publications. There are alternative ways to conceive of women's relationship with Internet technology. Future research should continue analysis of discourses around women and technology as Web 2.0 technologies of social networks and blogs proliferate. How are these technologies being introduced to women and how are they being designed to accommodate female users? How will participation gaps and a consumerist marketplace affect an environment that is dominated by user-generated content? In addition, audience research will be necessary to understand the ways that women are making meaning of these discourses and how they are integrating Internet technology within their lives.

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