Online and Enabled: Ways the Internet Benefits and Empowers Women

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Rights

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By Valerie Horres

This piece is by one of our Berglund Student Fellow Valerie Horres, who has brought a strong feminist voice to the Berglund Center for this year. We regret that she is resigning to give more attention to other endeavors and will not be back for next year.

In December 2009, I wrote about how the Internet degrades women. I concluded that it is normally not the Internet itself, but rather the content of media available online which can be debasing toward women. The Internet serves as a convenient tool for accessing material, but, of course, does not create itself demeaning content. [1]

And, while a large majority of the material available on the web and relative to sex or gender does degrade women, the Internet also benefits and empowers women in several ways.

The first way in which the Internet benefits women is that it is an extremely easy and efficient tool to use. The Internet is not limited to one single area of life; it can be used for both business and pleasure, for communication purposes, consumption of media, research, and so much more. There is potential in all these online fields to affect society both negatively and positively.

A huge positive regarding the Internet is that not only is it highly accessible, but it can be—for research in particular—much more effective and time-saving than traveling to a library and wading through multiple books or magazines. In a society that values saving time to the degree that the United States' culture does, the ability of online databases to scan an endless amount of data in nanoseconds and reveal the most relevant information is nearly priceless. The Internet then frees online-searchers to find more information than they could otherwise, or enables them to move onto another project.

Along with efficiency and time-saving, another benefit to women is that there "is a huge amount

of information available on the Internet for just about every subject known to man, ranging from government law and services, trade fairs and conferences, market information, new ideas and technical support"—the list is endless. [2] A woman can use the Internet to educate herself on any number of these topics: she can learn how best to treat a child's illness using WebMD [3], how to contact a state senator through the U.S. Senate website [4], or engage in self-exploratory research, such as researching religion online.

The potential for acquisition of knowledge, then, is the empowering factor when it comes to research and education online. A woman has the ability to learn practically anything through the Internet, and that power provides her with the opportunity to effect positive change in her life and the lives of others.

In addition to research, the Internet also allows women to seek further schooling to empower themselves. From busy mothers to those fiscally challenged, the Internet provides a way for many women to expand their education. Women can acquire their G.E.Ds through online programs, as well as online Bachelor, Master, and even Doctoral degrees from places such as ITT Tech, Walden University, The Art Institute, and hundreds of other universities [5]. Education empowers women by allowing social mobility. Higher education is correlated with "higher earnings for all racial/ethnic groups," as well as "lower smoking rates, more positive perceptions of personal health, and lower incarceration rates," and "higher levels of civic participation, including volunteer work, voting, and blood donation" [6]. Increased wealth, health, and social participation all improve the quality of living, allowing women the opportunity to achieve more of their potentials.

The Internet also empowers women by allowing them to work from home, just as it allows them to study from there. For example, many women delay or completely sacrifice motherhood because they wish to succeed in their careers. The Internet enables many women to work from almost any location easily, and thus makes it easier for them to have families. The Internet also makes business simpler for women by providing a very cheap space for their work to exist. To promote business offline "takes much money and time," but websites and e-mail may be created "and seen by anyone from anywhere" without any cost or an overwhelming time requirement [7]. Companies reach a much larger number of people online—both associates and customers—than offline. In addition, they can choose which websites to advertise on, so the Internet is a perfect avenue for advertising any sort of business, since it allows the most desired cliental to be targeted. As women have often been relegated to low-paying jobs, and highly discriminated against in the workplace, any advantage the Internet provides to overcome obstacles empowers women.

Whether for work, entertainment, or other activities, the Internet provides a way for people to connect with others. Online communication gives women the opportunity to converse without fear of judgment or persecution that can occur in face-to-face meetings. E-mail, online messaging systems, and social networking sites remove barriers—whether physical distance or prejudice based on external appearance or mannerisms—which provide the opportunity to

communicate with people who cannot be reached through any other means. People can have little effect on others, none at all, or they can completely change another's life; again, the source of empowerment for women is in the potential the Internet provides.

Another way to empower women is through the "communication technology of the Internet. In the midst of the current economic crisis it can be costly to construct environments [in public spaces] that are free of physical barriers and ensure the independent personal mobility of women,"[8] but the Internet provides an uninhibited location free of almost all boundaries. On message boards, women can ask questions anonymously or with a nickname, thus freeing them to remark on anything and question everything. The Internet is the "only open platform where women can express their own views and post their own material without a gatekeeper" [9]. It is the one place for women to completely express themselves without restriction.

Physical appearance can be just as restricting to women as the actual physical distance between people. In real life, "body language, voice, and attitude form the first impression which may last as a like or dislike of the other person" [10]. When the physical presence is stripped away, such as it is online, and then people feel free to act completely different than they do in reality because they do not fear the perceptions they create in other people. Dr. Petra Boynton, sex editor of Men's Health, explains this in relation to online dating: "'People who feel uncomfortable can actually be much more up front [dating online], and ask direct questions. A lot of women say they find it quite empowering because they can ask things, demand things and flirt. For instance, many women find it hard to say "I don't want to see you again" but online they can. So it can be used just to improve your confidence outside of the Internet'" [11].

One more way that the Internet empowers women is by boosting their confidence and connecting them to other people is through support groups. There are hundreds of support groups online aimed solely at women. Some sites, such as http://www.dmoz.org/ [12], can be utilized to locate many of these online support groups. There are discussion boards for—just to name a few—divorce, menopause, birthing, smoking, losing weight, breast cancer, disabilities, and eating disorders. Researchers have found that these online support groups can be key in producing and maintaining a healthy physical, mental, and emotional state for females. For instance, a study funded by the National Institute of Mental Health, published in 2006, found that "Internet-based intervention program may prevent some high risk, college-age women from developing an eating disorder."[13]

While women are more likely to make use of these online support groups and programs [14], the comment must be made that they are available for men to use as well. Likewise, women generally utilize social networking sites, such as Facebook, more than men [15], but men still engage and benefit from all forms of online communication. Also, the advantages of online business apply to males as well as females. Therefore, it seems that the Internet does not explicitly empower women, but rather humanity in general. The Internet does seem to direct women toward online discussion and self-exploration, and men to business and entertainment, as shown by which sites the sexes visit [16], but the Internet does not necessarily impart

empowerment to one sex over the other. Both men and women have access to the same material online, so ultimately it depends on how individuals utilize these resources to empower themselves.

Endnotes

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[2] Jayashree Pakhare , "Advantages and Disadvantages of the Internet," accessed 23 Mar. 2010, http://www.buzzle.com/articles/advantages-disadvantages-internet.html.

[3] WebMD, http/:www.webmd.com.

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[5] Online Degree Today.com, http://www.online-degrees-today.com/.

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[11] Tom Geoghegan, "Internet Dating 'Empowers Women'," BBC News Online, accessed 23 Mar. 2010, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/2486815.stm.

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[14] "Different People Use the Internet in Different Ways," Infoplease, accessed 28 Oct. 2009, http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0931238.html.

[15] Justin Smith, "Fastest Growing Demographic on Facebook: Women Over 55," Inside Facebook, accessed 14 Apr. 2010, http://www.insidefacebook.com/2009/02/02/fastest- growing-demographic-on- facebook-women-over-55/.

[16] "Different People Use the Internet in Different Ways," Infoplease, accessed 28 Oct. 2009, http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0931238.html.

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19 THOUGHTS ON "ONLINE AND ENABLED: WAYS THE INTERNET BENEFITS AND EMPOWERS WOMEN"

best vacuum sealer
on **February 1, 2014 at 11:01 AM** said:

Terrific article! That is the kind of info that should
be shared around the internet. Shame on Google for no longer positioning
this publish upper! Come on over and discuss with my website
. Thanks =)

best robot vacuum
on **February 2, 2014 at 7:16 AM** said:

I'm extremely impressed with your writing skills as well as with the layout on your
weblog.

Is this a paid theme or did you customize it yourself?

Anyway keep up the excellent quality writing, it is rare to see a great blog like this one
these days.

best electric tea kettle
on **February 3, 2014 at 8:48 PM** said:

Great blog! Do you have any helpful hints for aspiring writers?
I'm hoping to start my own site soon but I'm a little lost on everything.
Would you advise starting with a free platform like
Wordpress or go for a paid option? There are so many choices out there
that I'm completely confused .. Any suggestions?

Bless you!

best garment steamer
on **February 3, 2014 at 10:07 PM** said:

Your style is really unique in comparison to other people I've read stuff from.

Thanks for posting when you have the opportunity, Guess I'll just bookmark this
web site.

recumbent exercise bike reviews
on **February 3, 2014 at 10:13 PM** said:

This is a topic which is near to my heart… Many thanks!
Exactly where are your contact details though?

best induction cooktop
on **February 4, 2014 at 1:17 AM** said:

Very rapidly this web page will be famous amid all blogging people,
due to it's pleasant articles

folding bike reviews
on **February 4, 2014 at 1:17 AM** said:

I read this paragraph completely concerning the comparison of
most up-to-date and earlier technologies, it's amazing article.

best pressure washer
on **February 4, 2014 at 2:27 AM** said:

When I originally commented I clicked the "Notify me when new comments are added"
checkbox and
now each time a comment is added I get several emails with the same comment.

Is there any way you can remove me from that service?
Thanks!

best home gym
on **February 4, 2014 at 3:20 AM** said:

Hi, I do believe this is a great web site. I stumbledupon it ;
) I am going to return yet again since i have bookmarked it.
Money and freedom is the best way to change,
may you be rich and continue to help others.

scroll saw reviews
on **February 4, 2014 at 5:08 AM** said:

I constantly emailed this website post page to all my contacts, since if like to read it after
that my friends will too.

best jig saw
on **February 4, 2014 at 5:19 AM** said:

I feel this is one of the most vital information for me.
And i'm satisfied reading your article. But wanna observation on some common things,
The site taste
is ideal, the articles is in point of fact nice
: D. Excellent job, cheers

naija
on **February 4, 2014 at 10:15 AM** said:

My husband and i ended up being fulfilled after Chris could conclude his look for in the ideas he was given inside your site. It's now and again perplexing to just probably be handing out secrets and techniques that numerous some other individuals may were selling. So we recognize we have got the writer to appreciate as a result of that. Those illustrations you have made, the uncomplicated site menu, the friendships you'll support to build it's everything about this content is good, that's surely specially essential. Thanks for your whole thing!

nigeria entertainment news
on **February 4, 2014 at 10:35 AM** said:

These days the net technologies offer us having a incredibly specific possibility to select what exactly a single requires

how to lose weight fast
on **February 4, 2014 at 4:18 PM** said:

Fantastic goods from you, man. I have understand your stuff
previous to and you are just extremely great. I
really like what you have acquired here, really like what you're saying and
the way in which you say it. You make it enjoyable and you still care for to keep

it wise. I cant wait to read much more from you.
This is actually a terrific site.

table saw reviews
on **February 4, 2014 at 8:11 PM** said:

I don't leave a bunch of remarks, but i did some searching and wound
up here Online and Enabled: Ways the Internet Benefits and Empowers Women |
Interface.

And I do have a couple of questions for you if it's allright.
Is it just me or does it look like a few of the remarks look as if they are written by brain
dead individuals?
😃 And, if you are writing on other social sites, I'd like
to keep up with everything new you have to post.

Could you make a list of all of all your social sites like your twitter feed, Facebook page or
linkedin profile?

band saw reviews
on **February 5, 2014 at 12:05 AM** said:

Hi there colleagues, good post and nice arguments commented
here, I am actually enjoying by these.

best garbage disposal
on **February 5, 2014 at 2:04 AM** said:

When I initially commented I clicked the "Notify me when new comments are added"
checkbox and
now each time a comment is added I get several emails with the same comment.
Is there any way you can remove people from that service?
Many thanks!

best shoes for crossfit
on **February 5, 2014 at 2:17 AM** said:

I like the helpful info you provide on your articles.
I'll bookmark your blog and take a look at once more here regularly.
I'm relatively sure I will be informed plenty of new stuff proper
right here! Good luck for the next!

**Business, Accounting, Accounting Payroll, Advertising, Agriculture, Architecture
and Interior Design, Branding, Business Travel, Career Advice, Careers
Employment, Change Management, Construction Industry, Consulting,
Continuity Disaster Recovery, Custome**
on **February 5, 2014 at 11:49 PM** said:

Thanks regarding spreading this wonderful you you probably identify that which you are
chatting somewhere around! Added. Be sure to likewise take a look at my website
Equates to). We're going to employ a hyperlink change plan among us all