For Better or for Worse: How the Internet Benefits and Harms Men and Women

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As an increasingly integral and influential part of international culture, the Internet largely affects men and women. It both influences how each gender is perceived through online portrayals, and the Internet can also benefit and harm men and women through its content and functions.

The Internet has three basic operations: communication, information gathering, and entertainment. All three have negative or positive potential for both genders, but ultimately how men and women are affected depends on how they utilize the Internet. The two genders typically use the Internet differently, guided somewhat by traditional gender roles. Women generally utilize the Internet “in facilitating new interpersonal interactions, providing access to information from the domestic sphere, and facilitating the purchase of goods.”[1] For example, women are more likely to research an illness online, which follows with the traditional notion of women being healthcare providers. They are also more likely to shop online, which is convenient as it can be done at home. The Internet also allows people to locate items that are not available locally or for a cheaper price than offline. Additionally, women are more likely than men to search for spiritual and religious information, and to participate in support groups.[2] There are hundreds of support groups online aimed singly at women. Some sites, such as http://www.dmoz.org/ [3], can be utilized to locate many of these online support groups. These groups specialize in topics like health, divorce, religion, pregnancy, motherhood, menopause, and many others.[4]

Likewise, men generally use the Net in “providing employment or assisting career development,”[5] which also makes sense with the traditional gender role of men being more involved in the business world. Men also employ the Internet to read news, add content to the web, deal in finances, and find entertainment at a higher rate than females.[6] Instead of the stereotypic patriarch reading the newspaper at the breakfast table, or trading stocks and bonds from his study, men are now doing these acts online.
However, it is the area of online entertainment that tends to be potentially the most detrimental. Online materials can damage men and women by distracting them. Watching YouTube videos of old Star Trek episodes, looking at Løcals,[7] or any other form of online entertainment, takes time away from more “productive processes that would aid development, such as education [or] work.”[8] In addition, the Internet also affects people through portrayals. Online entertainment—listening to and downloading music, streaming television shows, viewing online pornography—tends to propagate a degradation of men and women. For instance, many examples of entertainment media lean toward depicting women as bitches or sexual objects. Business women on streamed television shows are often characterized with a Hillary Clinton-esque stigma of trying to do a “man’s job” or being emotionless bitches.[9] Media sources also show scantily clad cheerleaders,—such as those found on http://twitter.com/twiCheerleaders[10]—dancers, singers, and actors, and contain offensive characterizations and lyrics. A prime example of a song degrading women is “Bitches Ain’t Shit” by Dr. Dre.[11]

These media also portray men in a negative light, often characterizing them as airheaded He- men, violence driven, and extremely misogynistic. Many sports games or matches, which are often streamed online, inspire and condone violence and aggression. Society places athletes on a pedestal, which in turn implies that the hostility provoked by them on the field is desirable.[12]

Likewise, music lyrics and singers promote violence towards others, and again, their fame suggests this attitude of aggression and cruelty is positive and even manly. An excellent illustration of this is Ice T’s song “Cop Killer,” which endorses killing police and states “F**ck the police, don’t be a pussy.”[13]

Another sort of entertainment that more male online users engage in than females is video games. Analysis of these games reveals there are “no female characters in 41% of the games with characters. In 28% of these, women were portrayed as sex objects […] and 21% depicted violence directed at women.”[14] The virtual gaming world at large contains few female characters, often depicts females as sex toys, and/or females as a target for abuse. One such game over 2.5 million people play is Castle Age, a role playing game on Facebook, where many of the characters are nearly naked females.[15] Further, many video games premises revolve around killing. For example, the basis of World of Warcraft, an especially popular online role playing game, is quests and raiding, both of which rely heavily on slaughtering opponents.[16] Men are normally the ones who play these games, and the Internet harms them by promoting violence. However, “women who played video games or violent video games also tended to engage in more drinking behaviors, had more sexual partners, had lower self-worth and perceptions of social acceptance, and had lower quality relationships with friends and parents.”[17]

These risk behaviors are also associated with women who view pornography, both online and off. [18] Men are more likely to entertain themselves with pornography more than women,[19] and they too are affected by pornography. Whether videos, pictures, cartoons, or text, a great deal of pornography presents females negatively. Women often appear as mere sex toys, normally willing
to engage in any act, suffer many abuses, all for the purpose of arousing the viewer. Further, if
the pornography depicts a female refusing to participate in a sexual act, she is called names, or
even forced into participating against her will, which again, the viewer is supposed to get off on
and enjoy. This portrayal of women not only degrades them, but it sends the message to both
genders that women are supposed to act submissively to men and accept whatever abuse. It
also suggests that men are to violently dominate women during sexual acts and even that this is
the only way that they act.

Yet, a recent study has shown that “as pornography has increased in availability, sex crimes
have either decreased or not increased.”[20] This fact can mean either that the viewing of
pornography does not encourage sex crimes, or it affects the perception of what exactly a sex
crime is, so fewer people report them. Likewise, “a correlation between pornography and rape
may indicate nothing more than a common cause for both. Namely, that we live in a sexually
repressed society. To further repress sex by restricting pornography might well increase the
incidence of rape. Opening up the area of pornography might well diffuse sexual violence by
making sexuality more understandable.”[21]

Pornography may have benefits then, in allowing violent sexual tendencies to be relieved through
the viewing of pornography. Also, many sexual fetishes are displayed in online pornography,
which can also be a release for some people who cannot find such outlets in their real life.
Similarly, it establishes particular acts to be normative for sexual arousal, which can be good in
reassuring someone that his or her particular turn-ons are not strange or abnormal.

Online pornography is perhaps more widespread than some might think, which means its affects
are likewise pervasive. Wordtracker.com supplies reports on the top 200 long-term search
phrases—those that reappear through the weeks, months, and years—and the top 200 short-
term search phrases—phrases that appear within a one-day period—that are put into its
database. 42% of both long and short-term search phrases are direct searches on porn sites,
searches for women celebrities known for their sexual appeal, and phrases whose top hits are
pornography, such as “girls showering,” or relate to women in a sexual fashion, such as
“boobs.”[22] An article in the Psychology of Women Quarterly reported that in the 1980s all “X-
rated materials in the U.S. represented ‘… an estimated $8 billion industry of misogyny per year’
(Cowan, Lee, Levy, & Synder, 1988, pp. 309-310) and the U.S. Attorney General’s Commission
reported that violent pornography was “[…] the most prevalent form’ of sexually explicit
material.”[23] 30 years later the numbers have risen. In 2006, the Internet pornography industry
made over $2.84 billion, and total the porn industry made $13.33 billion. [24] More Internet
pornography increases the amount of online materials which affect both men and women.

It is not only online entertainment that can affect people. In fact, it is not only the content of the
Internet which can have an effect. Internet also benefits men and women in 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 this nature of efficiency and time-saving, another benefit to people 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. Everyone can use the Internet to educate him—or herself on any number of these topics: he or she can learn how best to treat a child’s illness using WebMD, how to contact a state senator through the U.S. Senate website, or engage in self-exploratory research, such researching religion online.

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

In addition to research, the Internet also allows people to seek further schooling to empower themselves. From busy parents to teenagers who dropped out of high school to those fiscally challenged, the Internet provides a way for many people to expand their knowledge. Anyone with Internet access 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. Education empowers people 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.” Increased wealth, health, and social participation all improve the quality of living, allowing people the opportunity to achieve more of their potentials.

The Internet also empowers people 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 people 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 and men 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 inputting a lot of time. Companies reach a much larger number of people online—both associates and customers—
than offline. In addition, they can choose which websites to advertise to, so the Internet is a perfect avenue for advertising any sort of business, since it allows the most desired clientele to be targeted. As women especially 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 and benefits the business world through their inclusion.

Whether for work, entertainment, or other activities, the Internet provides a way for people to connect with others. Online communication gives people 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 people is in the potential the Internet provides.

Another way to empower men and 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,”[31] but the Internet provides an uninhibited location free of almost all boundaries. On message boards, people 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 [Internet users] can express their own views and post their own material without a gatekeeper.”[32] It is the one place for people to completely express themselves without restriction. However, this lack of any constraining feature means that “people can say whatever they want without suffering the consequences. Therefore, you don’t need to be politically correct online. Because of this, many are allured to the Internet to express their hate and anger towards specific groups; as a result, many racist, sexist and just plain hate websites exist.”[33] These comments are more harmful than they are beneficial: while the Internet allows people to express their feelings and emotions in a physically nonviolent manner, it puts these negative messages out there to be read and absorbed by others. Often when people protest against these negative messages, they are ridiculed or bullied. A woman online who “speaks out steadfastly and strongly against […] pornography, prostitution, who writes as a feminist or as a human rights advocate, can expect to be harassed and attacked […] not only for her specific views and perspective, but in ways that are distinctly sexist.”[34] It is not the ideas that are assaulted, but rather an attack on the female writer’s appearance, or “she will be described as a man-hater, her writings, activism and life’s work will be dismissed and trivialized, she will be called shrill and strident, or she will be threatened in ways that are sexual.”[35] Therefore the discussions of a topic often become one-sided, with the rest of the comments spiraling into attacks. There is also the problem that most of the content of the Internet is presented from a Western perspective. Most of the material online “presents western cultures and language as dominant over all others,”[36] which is common viewpoint in America. However, the United States, or even all of North America, is the center of the world. Other countries are more powerful in certain fields, and the Internet does not present that.
The Internet also affords anyone the opportunity to metaphorically stand on a soapbox and express opinions in any way they desire. In the United States, these reactions, even if they are violent ad homonym harassments of a writer, the responses (recall that men are the ones that are more likely to add content to the web [6]) are “understood to be matters of someone’s ‘freedom of speech,’ while [female writers’] objections and our outcries [against the debasement of women], are called ‘censorship’ by some. And yet it is this ‘freedom of speech’ of some that ultimately silences us and robs us of our own freedom of speech.”[37]

Further, the freedom of the Internet permits people to be whoever they want. While this means most can be themselves without fear of judgment, it also means that people can pretend to be someone else. For example, many sexual predators use the anonymity of the Internet to lure young children or teenagers by posing as individuals of the same age. When chatting or posting online, it is never definite whether the person who says that she is a forty-year-old businesswoman who works as an engineer is forty years old, a businesswoman, an engineer, or a woman at all. It might be a thirteen-year-old girl, or a twenty-year-old boy, or a seventy-year-old man. There are no certainties when it comes to online identities. Thus, the freedom afforded by the Internet can be dangerous, as well as advantageous in many ways.

Another valuable function of anonymity of the Internet, however, is that physical appearance can be highly restricting to men and women. In real life, “body language, voice, and attitude form the first impression which may last as a like or dislike of the other person.”[38] When the physical presence is stripped away, such as it is online, then people feel free to act completely different than they do in reality because they do not fear the perceptions they create in others. 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’.”[39]

One more way that the Internet empowers people is by boosting confidence and connecting to other people is through support groups. There are hundreds of support groups online aimed singly at women. Some websites, such as http://www.dmoz.org/,[40] 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.”[41]

While women are more likely to make use of these online support groups and programs, [42] 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, [43] but men still
engage and benefit from all forms of online communication. Therefore, it seems that the communication function of the Internet does not explicitly empower women, but rather humanity in general.

There are also other inherent dangers to the Internet. Practically every aspect of life can now be done online: shopping for food and clothes, research, education, communication, playing games, listening to music and watching movies, business, banking—almost all necessary activities can be completed without leaving the living room. Life can literally be lived online since “the Internet cuts out the social interactions of our lives. With the Internet doing so many jobs for us, we have become lazy and non-social.”[44] The Internet allows for complete solitary living without any contact from outside forces. This can lead to loneliness and depression. A recent study found that “Adolescents who reported regular Internet use for web surfing, instant messaging, emailing and online games had a significantly higher mean score of loneliness than those who did not. The results, also, indicated that the frequency of Internet use is a significant predictor of loneliness.”[45]

Overall, there are both advantages and disadvantages to almost every aspect of the Internet; nothing is completely good or bad, but rather has characteristics which can both harm and help. Online material does not seem to portray one sex as better or worse than the other, nor do the applications and resources there give power to or hinder one sex more than the other. Furthermore, the Internet itself does not seem to be the source generating the content, but rather the material comes from the various outside media, such as television shows off network channels, or songs downloaded through iTunes. The Internet simply acts as a convenient source to access a large amount of data, and it provides this material to the large audiences that use the Internet. Ultimately, how men and women are affected by the Internet depends on what they use it for, and men and women typically utilize it for different purposes: women usually for online discussion and self-exploration, and men for business and entertainment. [46] However, this does not mean that one sex is affected more so than the other by the Internet. It simply means that men and women are affected in different ways because they use the Internet differently.

Endnotes


[4] Online women support groups, Google search, accessed 28


2010, http://www.springerlink.com/content/w487673k5415k142/.

[18] Ibid.


[35] Ibid.


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18 THOUGHTS ON “FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE: HOW THE INTERNET BENEFITS AND HARMS MEN AND WOMEN”

**carrie prejean sex tape**

on January 29, 2014 at 11:57 PM said:

Why viewers still use to read news papers when in this technological globe all is available on web?

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**affiliate blogger pro**

on January 30, 2014 at 1:11 AM said:

Hi there, this weekend is pleasant designed for me, because this occasion i am reading this fantastic educational paragraph here at my house.

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**internet marketing education**

on January 30, 2014 at 9:11 AM said:

I like it whenever people get together and share thoughts. Great site, continue the good work!
mobile anime
on January 30, 2014 at 5:15 PM said:

Hi there Dear, are you in fact visiting this web page on a regular basis, if so after that you will absolutely get fastidious know-how.

Kathrine Tevada
on January 30, 2014 at 6:14 PM said:

excellent points altogether, you just won a emblem new reader. What might you suggest about your put up that you just made a few days ago? Any certain?

stock market during the great depression
on January 31, 2014 at 1:22 AM said:

Thankfulness to my father who informed me concerning this webpage, this weblog is actually amazing.

affiliate zalora
on January 31, 2014 at 5:37 AM said:

Appreciate this post. Will try it out.

Julius Emmett
on February 1, 2014 at 4:06 PM said:

Sé que soy un poco tarde para contribuir mis pensamientos, pero este artículo en particular creé me siento. Era un puesto weblog absorbente. He convertirse en un lector habitual de un sitio web dado que me encontré con su sitio hace un tiempo nuevo. No
puedo decir que estoy de acuerdo con todo lo que usted dijo, pero fue enfático esclarecedor! Volveré de nuevo más rápidamente.

Dora  
on February 2, 2014 at 10:17 AM said:

Howdy! I understand this is somewhat off-topic but I needed to ask. Does managing a well-established website like yours require a large amount of work? I’m completely new to writing a blog however I do write in my journal every day. I’d like to start a blog so I will be able to share my personal experience and feelings online. Please let me know if you have any suggestions or tips for new aspiring bloggers. Appreciate it!

Charla  
on February 3, 2014 at 2:30 AM said:

Wow that was unusual. I just wrote an very long comment but after I clicked submit my comment didn’t show up. Grrrr… well I’m not writing all that over again. Anyhow, just wanted to say wonderful blog!

unblock facebook  
on February 3, 2014 at 9:27 AM said:

Hey I know this is off topic but I was wondering if you knew of any widgets I could add to my blog that automatically tweet my newest twitter updates. I’ve been looking for a plug-in like this for quite some time and was hoping maybe you would have some experience with something like this. Please let me know if you run into anything.

I truly enjoy reading your blog and I look forward to your new updates.
signs of pregnancy
on February 3, 2014 at 3:51 PM said:

obviously like your website however you need to check the spelling on quite a few of your posts. Many of them are rife with spelling issues and I in finding it very troublesome to tell the truth however I’ll definitely come back again.

Foster Noller
on February 4, 2014 at 5:21 AM said:

Bel tentativo su un argomento così complesso. Si prega di continuare distacco.

dating
on February 4, 2014 at 7:50 AM said:

Hi Shane, I’ve really appreciated these articles as well as the helpful summaries that they provide. You say each “the Son is God” and suggest we shouldn’t say “God died on the cross.” Can you explain? Thanks!

dating
on February 4, 2014 at 10:15 AM said:

Hi there! I know this really is kinda off topic on the other hand I’d figured I’d ask. Would you be interested in trading links or perhaps guest writing a blog article or vice-versa? My web site addresses plenty of the same subjects as yours and I think we could greatly benefit from each other. Should you happen to become interested feel free to send me an e-mail. I seem forward to hearing from you! Terrific blog by the way!
nigeria entertainment news

on February 4, 2014 at 10:26 AM said:

I haven’t observed the movie but, given the focus of this site, I discovered this quote from an Indiewire article interesting:

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nigeria entertainment news

on February 4, 2014 at 10:34 AM said:

Hi there, Sorry for the lengthy comment Thanks for sharing your article, next time can you write about wart removal products. Also is there any proven household cure for skin warts? Can you suggest me some? I live in Canada. Please dont forget that some stuff may possibly not be available in my area. That is why suggest me general elements which could be discovered everywhere. Also would you recommend buying wartrol online? is it not dangerous?

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Esperanza

on February 5, 2014 at 5:15 AM said:

Hi to all, it’s in fact a nice for me to visit this website, it includes helpful Information.