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The CPSR Newsletter

Introduction: Gender in the Internet Age

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There is a widespread, but false, belief that time and technology necessarily improve people's lives. CPSR members know that we have to work to make sure that technological advances reflect our values. Society does not improve automatically. The situation for women in computing has both improved and worsened many times in computing's short history. Less quantifiable is the effect of computers on girls and women who are not computer professionals. With the rise of the Internet, the influence of computers has broadened. The purpose of this newsletter is to explore how the Internet and other computing advances subvert or reinforce gender roles. Will current trends in computing lead to greater opportunities for both women and men, or will it cement them in their current roles? Will women be creators of software and virtual communities, or will they be disempowered users? How will men's and women's interactions online be different from their interactions in "real life"? What changes will propagate from the online to the real world?

In this issue, linguist Susan Herring (../herring.html) presents a survey of research on gender in computer-mediated communication on mailing lists and in discussion groups. Lisa King (../king.html) , the president of DC Web Women, discusses gender in online communities, which she distinguishes from public or semi-public discussion groups. Virginia Eubanks (../eubanks.html) , editor of the cyberfeminist 'zine Brillo, begins with the claim that the Internet is "actively and aggressively hostile to women" and discusses her successes challenging the "paradigms that actively exclude white women and people of color". Information scientist Elizabeth Buchanan (../buchanan.html) examines the representations of women in video games, finding that they are "victims, vixens, or invisible".

The importance of women's being involved in the creation of both technology and the rules governing technology is argued by Alison Adam and Karen Coyle. Alison Adam (../adam.html) , a computer scientist and author, contends that "bringing feminist ethics to bear on computer ethics offers a novel and fruitful alternative to current directions in computer ethics." In the raciest piece in this issue, librarian and author Karen Coyle (../coyle.html) discusses technology that has been hidden because of its relation to female sexuality. continued... (../index2.html)

What's inside...

This newsletter is also available (../winter2000.pdf) in the Adobe Portable Document Format (PDF), which requires the free Adobe Acrobat Reader (http://www.adobe.com/products/acrobat/readermain.html) .