

Our readers write

Internet doesn't fail women

Dear editor:

I am sorry, Betsy Cornwell, but your piece regarding women and the Internet (Internet doesn't respond to the needs of women, Sunday, April 2) is a mess. The Internet has grown, willy-nilly, and without any clear guidance (that is definitely one of its assets, as you would know if you were familiar with it) but as to it being the haunt of chest-thumping spear-carrying warrior wannabee's — I don't buy it.

You base your entire discussion on a statistic that you yourself acknowledge is unverifiable (and wrong, by my experience) and then you launch into a tirade on how the Internet fails women. Your comparison of how the "hunter-gatherer" persona is more suited to newsgroup/bulletin board browsing is laughable. "Surfing the 'net'" is much more akin to the gentle act of gathering berries and nuts; if you had ever explored the Internet yourself you would find that any similarity to the aggressive, testosterone-driven, kill-or-be-killed stereotypical male role is purely a fantasy (propagated, I dare say, by a few hackers troubled by a bad case of transference).

As for your suggestion that to be truly user-friendly a computer should "generate the appropriate set of aural and visual stimuli to soothe said baby" — you have totally missed the boat. Feminist issues have nothing to do with replacing the nurturing mother with a machine! This, the most important role of any human being, is only one aspect of being a woman in Canada — and yet you base your entire concept of the usefulness of the

Internet upon primitive agriculture, family and nurturing. The majority of science students at the university level are female in Canada today; why do you say women are not keeping up? The majority of the people I know on the Internet are women. I did not seek them out especially; they are on staff at universities, or in industry or private research. Some own small, home-based businesses that dovetail well with mothering and homemaking. The Internet serves them very well, thank you.

Betsy, the Internet is loaded with newsgroups on children's and parenting issues; there are also self help groups, and courses on almost every subject imaginable. If what you want isn't there then it is child's play to create your own newsgroup. The whole point is that no one knows who is at your computer; there are no gender, race or geographical barriers. I know one woman who talks from the Australian Outback, has three children and runs a research business with two employees who live over a thousand miles from her farm.

The best way to learn about the Internet is to get on and explore.

Is there a problem for women on the Internet? You have not convinced me. All of your suggestions for change (keyboard design, voice activation etc) would benefit men equally. Or do you feel that women are so delicate physically that they cannot navigate the 'net'? I trust if I read your name on a newspaper commentary in the future it will be better thought out than this one was.

R. Drotos

Column bitter tirade against men

Dear editor:

I was somewhat disappointed to see Betsy Cornwell's guest column entitled, Internet doesn't respond to the needs of women, included on your editorial page on Sunday.

When I read the title of the article, I hoped that it would present a rational discussion of her concerns and valid facts about the Internet's failing her needs. Instead it was a bitter tirade aimed at the male gender, and how men have sculpted the Internet in their likeness. Ms Cornwell's ranting lay bare a brand of rabid feminism which does not help her cause (whatever it may be). I'm insulted, as I'm sure most males would be, by her declaration that women do all the work managing the households and "gathering" while men merely "stalk and hunt".

She is quite incorrect as to the origin of the Internet. The Internet was developed by academia for

their use, much of it with voluntary student labor. It is not some dark sinister military tool as she has decided.

Certainly the U.S. military machine has made use of it, but the Internet is far too open to hacking for handling anything more serious than booking golf games (another male dominated pursuit, I suppose she'll quip).

Perhaps Ms Cornwell's paranoia stems from a very real concern that growing universal access to the Internet will render much of her life's work of cataloging paper knowledge obsolete and irrelevant.

If Ms Cornwell wishes to make a difference, then she should start in her own house. The value of the Halton Hills Library's own BBS, (which I assume she has influence over as chief librarian), leaves much to be desired regardless of sex.

Don R. Dagenais

Lots of women-related info on Internet

Dear editor:

I just finished reading Betsy (Cornwell)'s article and found the whole thing to be a comment related to her own insecurity to getting with the program of hi-tech information services.

There are a lot of women using the Internet. Most of the Gopher servers are located at universities which are operated by expert technical men and women, and they are doing a great job of it.

I also belong to a fine BBS in Toronto that has approximately 5,000 users and approximately 20

per cent of those are women. Also there are certain areas in this BBS that are dedicated to women's issues. That pretty well shoots down the idea that it's a man's world, doesn't it?

As far as the Internet goes, there are plenty of woman related info services if you really want to call it that i.e. plants, cooking, early childhood education etc. Just do that Gopher things, find the WWW home page and away you go.

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