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Exploring Gendered Notions: Gender, Job Hunting and Web Searches

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Summary Based on analysis of a series of interviews, this chapter suggests that in looking for jobs online, women confront gendered notions of the Internet as well as gendered notions of the jobs themselves. It argues that the social and cultural contexts of both the search tools and the search tasks should be considered in exploring how Web-based technologies serve women in a job search. For these women, the opportunities and limitations of online job-search tools were intimately related to their personal and social needs, especially needs for part-time work, maternity benefits, and career advancement. Although job-seeking services such as Monster.com were used frequently by most of these women, search services did not completely fulfill all their informational needs, and became an – often frustrating – initial starting point for a job search rather than an end-point.

4.1 Introduction

As a resource, the Internet has risen in importance in women's search for a job. The Pew Project on the Internet and American Life reports that about 42% of US women users look for jobs online, and about 48% use the Internet to look for job-related information (Fallows 2005). Women make up about half the Internet user population, and the specific issues they confront in various types of use deserve attention. The use of online job-seeking resources is influenced both by general search skills and comfort with Internet technologies, as well as by notions of gender proscriptions about those technologies and about jobs. While crucial to search experiences, skills with the Internet and with search engines are only part of the online job-seeking process. Investigations of online job seeking are enhanced by a contextualized perspective that takes into account understandings of the technology, of the specific search interface, and of the job being sought. For women job-seekers, these understandings include notions about gender proscriptions on technology use and on search options and techniques, as well as about gender divisions in the labor market.

In her decades of research on information-seeking behaviour and outcomes, Carol Kuhlthau has emphasized that the relationships among search contexts,

outcomes and tools should be understood from a process-oriented perspective that takes into account the perceptions users have of their goals, the search tools, and themselves. While these perceptions are surely as varied as individuals themselves, scholars have identified patterns in the use of Internet tools that differentiate some groups from others, including along racial, class, and gender lines. In particular, differences between men's and women's perceptions of the Internet have received considerable attention from scholars for the past several decades. Scholars such as Susan Herring, Sherrie Turkle, and Leslie Regen Shade have noted that women have been largely shut out of the culture, use and development of the Internet, in spite of recent increases in the proportion of women users world-wide.

From this perspective, this chapter asks, what are women's main considerations and perceptions of using the Internet as part of a job search? How do commercial online job-search services like Monster.com, CareerBuilder.com, or Hotjobs.com perform for women looking for jobs? To begin exploring these questions, this chapter approaches an online job search from two perspectives: 1) as an information-seeking activity, examining women's notions of search activities and tools; and 2) as a socio-economic activity, examining women's notions of the jobs they seek. These analyses are grounded in the literature on gendered associations with the Internet.

This investigation analyzes the results of twenty interviews with women using the Internet to look for jobs. Conducted in the major United States city of Philadelphia, PA, during the spring of 2005 with women job seekers over the age of 30, these guided interviews pursue women's specific thoughts, feelings, and perceptions of the Internet, online job-seeking, and jobs in general, in the context of being a woman. Especially because there is almost no literature on gender and online job-seeking, these interviews contribute important insights into the considerations, perceptions, and feelings women have about this process. The words of participants in the study provide evidence that gender can influence looking for a job online.

Importantly, this chapter does not assume that access to – or expert use of – new technologies is in any way a cause of socioeconomic opportunity. Rather, technology can be a resource in the pursuit of opportunity, along with a range of other resources, including educational achievement, social networks, monetary resources, marketable skills, psychological and cognitive abilities, etc. From that perspective, understanding the influence of gender on Web searches can contribute to assessments of new technologies as resources for women.

This research is part of a larger project that examines both gendered notions of the job-search process as well as a quantitative analysis of specific search behaviour. Although the present chapter does not include an exploration of the impact of specific search behaviour (e.g., patterns in search style, search moves, number of jobs found, satisfaction with a search, etc.), it is important to note that considerations of the Internet as a job-search tool are enhanced by considerations about the specific skills, experiences, and activities in which seekers engage, and are explored elsewhere by the author.

4.2 The Gendered Context of the Internet

In recent decades, theories of information-seeking have embraced process-oriented models (Detlor 2003; Kuhlthau 1993). These approaches emphasize the ways that seekers make sense of information as it is assimilated into their mental models and knowledge structures. For example, cognitive models of information-seeking argue that “any processing of information, whether perceptual or symbolic, is mediated by a system of categories or concepts that, for the information-processing device, are a model of his world.” (de Mey 1977: xvi–xvii). Processes-oriented models are fundamentally concerned with achieving deeper insight into information behavior by understanding an individual’s knowledge structures and personality characteristics and the effects these have on information seeking and processing (Belkin 1990). From this perspective, gendered associations of the tools individuals use in information-seeking influence the search process from its initiation throughout the tasks pursued and perceptions of the information retrieved and used. As a job-seeking tool, the Internet can be understood in the context of its gendered associations.

Feminist scholars point to the Internet as a technology strongly influenced by gender associations – a ‘gendered’ technology (Herring 2003; Scott et al. 2001; Shade 2004). In this view, ‘gendered’ things are such because their design, structure, control, and use are influenced by culture, whether intentionally or unintentionally. Since the 1980s, feminist scholars have been empirically examining the influence of gender on the culture, use, and development of Internet technologies, concluding that women were largely shut out of this domain (Herring 1994; Morhan-Martin 2000; Shade 2004; Turkle 1988; Wilder et al. 1985).

Studies have found that women have been practically and symbolically marginalized in the use and development of computer and Internet technologies. Over time, these gender messages accumulate to encourage men and women to view computing tasks as masculine in nature (Wilder et al. 1985; Williams et al. 1993). Overall, research on computing tasks has repeatedly shown that boys and men have more favorable attitudes toward computers (Durndell and Haag 2002; Ogletree and Williams 1990; Sherman et al. 2000), view computers as a career asset (Nickell et al. 1987; Venkatesh et al. 2004), and demonstrate greater interest (Krendel et al. 1989) and participation (Clark and Chambers 1989; Morhan-Martin 2000; Venkatesh and Morris 2000) than women. The current environment of the Internet also has associations with men: fears about “cyber stalking” of women and girls (Adam 2001); women’s marginalization in social forums like chat rooms and bulletin boards (Herring 2003); and the predominance, importance and concerns over male-oriented pornography in content and revenue generation (Onyejekwe 2005).

Some of the concerns about gender associations with the Internet have been assuaged by a steady increase in the number of women online. With the advancement of the Web, the proportion of women Internet users rose steadily, until about half were female at the end of 2000. Chiriac et al. (2001) identified changes in gender-based perceptions toward the Internet as related technologies become more

essential to the workplace, businesses, and daily life. Recent data from the Pew Internet and American Life survey (Fallows 2005) suggest that women continue to increase their involvement in a range of Internet activities, especially community-building ones like email and family-oriented services. It found that women are more likely to use the Internet for email than men are, but that men have higher overall levels of expertise and a wider breadth of knowledge of the available tools and services online (Fallows 2004).

These findings suggest gendered patterns in use and interest, even as women's access to and experience in Internet technologies become equal with men's. Howard (2004) explains that this is because, "[c]ommunication technologies became deeply embedded in personal lives very quickly, mediating our interactions with other people and the way in which we learn about our world" (2001: 2). Dervin (1998) emphasizes the importance of context in perceptions of information generally and in information-seeking tasks in specific. She notes that, "structure, culture, community, organization are created, maintained, reified, challenged, changed, resisted, and destroyed in communication and can only be understood by focusing on the individual-in-context, including social context" (Dervin 1998: 7). The intersection of women's lives and their job-seeking activities is also a deeply personal one. Understanding the constructions women have of the available tools, processes, and options in a job search is crucial to understanding relationships among gender, search technologies, and women's search processes.

4.3 Online Job Seeking as an Information-Seeking Activity

Job seeking can be viewed as an information-seeking activity, where as Kuhlthau (1993) suggests, user thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and cognition about themselves and about the search task are crucial to the process. In women's online job-search, social, cultural, psychological, and personal factors are crucial influences on the search process.

4.3.1 Gender and Information-Seeking

Although a considerable body of work is developing in the exploration of the relationships between psychological and cognitive factors and information seeking, only recently have studies exploring the relationships between gender and information-seeking styles emerged in the literature. Most of the research examines students from elementary school through college, however, and very little addresses adult populations. Some studies address gender differences from a gender/sex classification perspective (Ford et al. 2001), or from a broad Internet use perspective (Herring 1994; Kennedy et al. 2003; Shade 2004), while others examine gender roles and cognitive factors (Fan and Macredie 2006; Roy and Chi 2003).

The research on gender and information-seeking has generally found that males and females demonstrate somewhat different navigation patterns and different learning outcomes, as well as different preferences for specific interfaces (Fan and Macredie 2006; Large et al. 2002). These differences have been related to gendered associations with the medium (Ford et al. 2001) or with the software (Bhargava 2002). Reed and Oughton (1997) examined the navigation patterns of male and female graduate students at three distinct stages of search. They found that women were more linear at initial stages than men, but less linear than men overall. Roy and Chi (2003) examined search patterns among eighth-graders and found that boys tended to search more horizontally, sifting through larger number of pages, while girls searched more vertically, examining a given page or site more thoroughly. Large et al. (1999) similarly found that boys spent less time viewing individual pages and preferred a broader search strategy than girls. Large et al. (2002) later confirmed that boys were more actively engaged in browsing, jumped to more pages, and entered more searches at search engines than girls.

Although gender differences in information-seeking are not the focus of this analysis, the literature suggests that gender contextualizes the perceptions and activities of women job-seekers, especially in their search style. Borgman et al. (1996) note that “we need to understand more about which aspects of searching behaviour are universal and that are situation-specific, if we are to design information systems to serve an increasingly heterogeneous user population with increasingly diverse sets of information needs” (1996: 581).

4.3.2 Information-Seeking Online: Job-Search Tools

For the women interviewed, the Internet was an important resource in their job search. These women employed a range of techniques to use the Internet; for some, it was the focus of their search, while for others it supplemented other methods. Almost all the women in this study had used the Internet at some time to look for jobs, although their experiences with and assessment of the Internet as a job-search tool varied greatly. For some, the Internet was their primary access to job listings, while for others it was a dead end. Using a combination of newspapers, the Internet, and “pounding the pavement” with direct company inquiries was most common. A few women also used recruiters or job placement services. Two of the respondents had never used the Internet to look for jobs, even though they were comfortable online. They both explained that it was simply not their preferred way to look for jobs and that the newspaper felt more comfortable.

The themes that emerged from their descriptions of search techniques suggest that the Internet is perceived by these women in very different ways. Several women described the way the Internet opened up new worlds and provided opportunities and information they wouldn’t have found otherwise. Some women explained that an important aspect of searching for jobs online was how well the

Internet fit their particular search style. Others described the ways that using the Internet made them more productive.

Many women felt the Internet opened up new possibilities in a job search, as suggested by Salaff et al. (2005), as well as Kleit (2002). Serena used the Internet to cast her resume into the waters in the hopes that someone would bite, because, "you've got to put a lot of lines out there, working on the law of averages." Freda used automatic agents to send her new job listings in specified categories, and she found new possibilities for herself and even for job-seeking friends. She found Websites dedicated to her field, Reiki healing, that helped her explore a range of possibilities and "just gave me such great hope, like wow, there's a place right here in the city, and I wouldn't have known about it". Anna explained that she was frustrated with the large commercial job-search sites, but that she could use them as starting points to explore the homepages of the organizations that interested her. Kara described the Internet as helping her find a range of possibilities, and making "the world seem so much bigger". Mary felt the Internet was the most comprehensive way to search for jobs because, "I think better companies don't advertise in the paper anymore; those are kind of low-level jobs...I really don't think there's a better way."

For Pam, the Internet was a great way to actually perform her job and "open up a lot more possibilities" for finding clients and jobs. She said, "the Internet was terrific, I couldn't have done the job [without it]." Miranda felt that because the Internet gave her access to more information about a company or a job, it gave her advantages as a woman, as well. From one company's Website, for example, she found that, "the staff is all women, so I figure my chances are probably better of working there, because they have all women, and maybe that type of place is more geared towards women."

The extent to which the Internet fit respondents' search style was important to many of them. Renata described her use of the Internet for a job search as a "love-hate relationship". She felt "kind of dependent on those Websites, like a security blanket" but also found the Internet frustrating because of the size of sites like Monster.com. She explained that, "I didn't like the fact that you have to specify categories, and that there was no other way to search it...then you have to go through it page by page." Anna, the art teacher, felt job-search sites were too general and too often outdated, and Serena, looking for a job that did not require a commute, found it difficult to specify jobs in the right location because "none of their search systems are really very good." She did note, however, that "A really big advantage of searching the Internet [with sites like Monster.com] is they do have very long ads, so instead of those four-line ads, they have [links to the companies], which is a much easier way to figure out what's going on." As a writer just starting out with a new career, Pam didn't view the major job-search sites online as good resources for someone of her experience level because, "things like Monster.com...weren't specialized enough, so they weren't really helping me out." Mary used the Internet and sites like Monster.com nearly every week because "there could be some great marketing job I didn't even know about", but she still considered large job sites a poor resource because, "there's really no filter for searching out better jobs versus almost entry level jobs."

Looking for jobs online, even with its drawbacks, helped some women feel more productive in their searches. Danielle explained that the convenience and variety of online searches Internet helped her, “Even if [I’m] not fully focused on doing the search every day, [I] can at least feel like [I’m] doing something every day when [I] check [my] e-mail.” Alice described how the Internet helped her feel more accomplished in her search because it was so convenient, and, “just the fact that I’m sending out my resume, and getting it out that day, gives me a feeling of accomplishment; I got it out, and maybe I’ll hear something good.” Kara noted that the Internet saved her time in her search by helping her eliminate jobs she wouldn’t be interested in. The downside for her, however, was that it was too large and, “it isn’t personal; so they don’t know who’s really contacting them, they can’t see you, hear you, or whatever the case may be. Sometimes there’s just no response, so you don’t know if it’s lost out there in no man’s land, if they got it, or didn’t get it.” Rachel felt as though the Internet could have helped her job search, but that she needed more training to be truly effective and that “my searches are hit and miss; like I try a bunch of things, and if one works, then I go for it, but I don’t know what I did that made it work.”

Women’s considerations of the Internet as a job-search tool were varied. Some felt it increased opportunities, while others found the interface did not sufficiently accommodate their search needs. For these women, individual constructions of the Internet as a job-search resources resulted in different types of use. In particular, some women felt that services like Monster.com did not provide sufficient information for their needs, and thus use a diversity of online tools in their job search. The specific search tasks these women undertook were thus strongly related to their perceptions of how well the available tools served their needs.

4.3.3 Gender and Online Search Tools

As a job-search resource, the Internet was both a great tool and a source of frustration. When asked to consider how the Internet might or might not help women in particular with a job search, most of these respondents expressed a sense that the Internet played a special role for women. In particular, finding the right information for women’s needs in a job search was a concern among respondents.

Many of the respondents described the Internet as less effective for women because of the kinds of information that was emphasized. For example, Danielle felt that the Internet did not tend to offer women as much of what they were looking for in terms of job information because of its culture. She explained,

Just looking at stereotypes, I would say that [job-search Websites] are probably designed more for men, because when you’re looking at job listings as a woman, you want to know more information about benefits. You also want to know the qualifications for the job and the background of the company up front, but it’s really important, I think, for women to look at benefits; we need the health insurance. We need to know that the company is offering decent benefits there. We might need maternity benefits, or have some idea of a more comprehensive benefits package as we’re looking at jobs and looking at companies.

Similarly, Miranda was frustrated with the lack of part-time positions listed online – a kind of job, she explained that was particularly important for her as a new mother. She only found a few sites that had options for her. She explained that she had to go to a range of job-search Websites just to find a few job options that would fit her needs. Monster.com in particular, she noted, was not a good place to look, because “I never expect to see anything part-time on there that’s professional.”

Some women felt that the Internet did offer some of the information and services women needed. Freda explains that Websites designed especially for women can be helpful, and have the kind of information women need, like:

...things about how to address sexism in the workplace and in job hunting, questions that are legal to ask during the interviewing process, what to even ask for about different policies and procedures and benefits that are offered through companies to get a sense of how women-friendly they are, how family-friendly they are, and how updated the company is in their policies in regards to sexism and harassment, and things like that.

Freda added that by finding out “red flag” information online, women could also avoid making certain impressions like, as she put it, “uh-oh, here comes somebody who might be a potential troublemaker.”

Miranda felt that because the Internet gave her access to more information about a company or a job, it gave her advantages as a woman. She explained that figuring out how many women work at a specific company gives her a sense of her chances of getting hired. She described one experience, “[I] looked at the staff. The staff is all women, so I figure my chances are probably better of working there, because they have all women, and maybe that type of place is more geared towards women”

According to, Mary, women have slightly different needs as workers than men, and companies using the Internet to post job descriptions can address those needs better. She said that, “especially for women, half of it is [matching] the skill set, but half of it is the environment, and if in that [job] description, like when a company’s one of those best companies to work for, or if they talked about giving you your birthday off, or something, you would say, ‘gee, there’s a company that pays well, has a good job, but really cares about people.’”

Freda explained that the Internet could open up concerns that her gender would become part of the screening process in the search itself. She explained,

Sometimes I wonder when they ask for gender, if that’s going to affect the availability of listings. That’s the only impression I get sometimes, is like it’s not like it’s not an option, like some of the information is optional, but they want to know specifically what your gender is, or it won’t process the request to sign up for the search without it, so I kind of wonder.

The themes that emerged from these women’s discussions of the relationships between their gender and an online job search include both advantages and disadvantages. Although many expressed notions of the Internet as a masculine space, it remained an important tool in their job search. Feelings of frustration with the search interface or a masculinized culture were off-set in many cases by notions of increased opportunities and options available online. Concerns these respondents saw as specific to women played a role in their assessment of Internet job searches, including the need for more information about job benefits and work environment.

4.4 Job-Seeking as Socio-Economic Activity

Job-seeking can also be viewed as a socio-economic activity, in which considerations of market forces and self-assessments of labor market value are relevant. In a job search, women's considerations of their employment options, necessary information, market conditions, and employability are affected by gender associations with industries, positions, and firms.

4.4.1 *Gender in Jobs and Job Seeking*

Considerable research has concluded that gender stereotypes in occupations exist among both employers and job-seekers (Mintz and Krymkowski 2005; Shinar 1975). Field studies have shown that gender segregation is common, even for occupations that seem to be integrated across organizations or industries (Baron et al. 1991; Reskin and Hartmann 1986). Occupational stereotyping has been found to be related to assumptions about men's and women's personality traits, including gender roles (Cejka and Eagly 1999; Lippa and Connelly 1990). Certain jobs are thought to require feminine characteristics (e.g. nurse, teacher, secretary); others are thought to require masculine ones (e.g. engineer, construction worker, doctor, mechanic) (Beggs and Doolittle 1993; Shinar 1975). These associations have an important affect on women's views of their job opportunities. For example, Mintz and Krymkowski (2005) found that women are less likely to enter occupations that are stereotyped as male, and several scholars have found that women perceive male-dominated workplaces as likely to be more discriminatory towards them (Gatton et al. 1999; Moss 2004). These findings suggest that the gender coding of a job influences women's interest in and comfort with it.

Women's perceptions of the likelihood they will be offered a job may also play a role in perceptions of job-seeking, especially given the notion that employers have definite preferences for men in the higher paying, higher prestige (i.e., male dominated) occupations (Reskin and Roos 1990), or in male-dominated workplaces (Gatton et al. 1999). Additional factors such as the social construction of job categories by firms themselves, including gender-biased wording and images in want ads, can attract or discourage women applicants (Fernandez and Sosa 2005; Gatton et al. 1999). Even the method used in a job search has been found by some to influence women's chances on the job market and their likelihood of entering female-dominated jobs, where use of social networks reinforces occupational gender segregation (Saks and Ashforth 1999). These factors contextualize women's job-seeking activities, influencing their perceptions of options. As Kuhlthau (1993) suggests, understandings of the information retrieved in a job search have an iterative effect on the approaches and processes women engage while searching.

4.4.2 *Gendered Expectations in Jobs*

Many of the women interviewed expressed a sense that certain jobs were more associated with men, while others were associated with women. Participants noted that especially jobs concerning engineering, computers, and manual labor were surrounded by the assumption that men are better at them, more interested in them, and more likely to work in them. Jobs that had supportive or caring roles, on the other hand, were more associated with women for participants. Teachers, secretaries, and service organizations like non-profit community services were generally dominated by women, they noted.

Alice explained that as a computer software teacher, people probably expected her to be male. She described the typical image of a computer teacher as someone young and male, and that, “the students were expecting someone different when I went in there – they weren’t expecting me.” She went on to explain that she thought about her gender a lot when applying for jobs because, “if they’re going to hire a hardware teacher, they’re going to hire a male, and I’ve seen that, even depending on somebody’s credentials.” Being female was a limitation, she noted, to performing as an instructor in a technical school.

Even for participants working in more gender neutral occupations, gendered associations with technology divided the kinds of work women did. Pam, who was beginning a career in writing, described how certain kinds of writing were still subject to gender expectations. She felt that, “if women wanted to get into really technical kinds of writing like writing about computers, writing about financial things, things that are dominated by white males, in that respect it might be a little harder [for women].” For Pam, the gendered associations with computers and finance made looking for and finding a job in those areas more of a challenge than writing about more neutral subjects like healthcare. Similarly, Mary said that companies like her former employment – an electronics equipment manufacturer – simply did not have as many women because it was largely populated by engineers who, she said, “have tended to be men, and engineers who’ve really [risen] to a position of management tend to be men.” Mary felt that this resulted in prejudice about whether or not women would be good employees, and that even in her area of marketing, women were less likely to be hired than men.

For some participants, it was not the overall field or industry that was male dominated, but rather the level of the position. Danielle explained that there were many women at lower, but not management, positions in her field, human resources. She described human resources as highly female dominated at lower levels, but noted that in management, most positions were filled by men. She wondered, “if it’s so female dominated at this lower level, why isn’t it more female dominated at a higher level?” There was no question, she said, that, “the glass ceiling still exists...for not just women, but minorities, as well.”

Some women noted that assumptions about women made it easier to find a job in certain areas. Mary’s description of the female domination of human resources support staff was echoed by several women in other fields. Anna, the art teacher, explained that as a woman, her chances of getting a teaching job would be better

than for a man, because “a large percentage of the teachers are women, and I think that the idea they had was that the position would be filled by a woman.” Moreover, she commented, an art teacher is not taken very seriously. She said, “I would say that an art teacher, especially, probably brings a woman to mind...[and] somebody flaky, more laid-back, maybe spacier, not always taken as seriously.”

Renata, the proposal writer, explained her profession was largely made up of women. She felt that it might be easier for a woman to find work, but not as easy to get paid well, because “grant writing is obviously mostly for social service organizations and places like that, that tend to have a lot of women involved in them.” This was particularly true, she noted, because grant-writing was associated with administrative work in many organizations, and, “of course, everyone thinks of secretaries as women.”

June, who worked as a “virtual” secretary after retiring from being an executive assistant for 35 years, did not believe that most people would be interested in hiring a man to be an assistant. She explained that as an executive assistant, being female was part of the expectation of the job. She felt women have an easier time getting work in secretarial jobs than men because of the service role assistants play to the largely male bosses. She noted that,

... most of the [secretaries] are women anyway, it’s not like they’re looking for a man to fulfill the role. Which, of course, brings up the interesting point, is that they’re not looking for a man because they can’t quite boss a man around like they’ll [boss a woman].

Serena also felt that her gender fit the expectation of her position in a bank. For her, the link was related to the lower salary her position paid. She explained that, “in both of my financial [jobs], where it was mostly female, I would actually say I do kind of think it was female, but only for one reason; because the salaries were not that great, to be honest.”

The conceptualizations of the jobs these women were exploring had an important influence on their job-seeking activities. Notions of gendered associations with certain jobs affected these women’s view of the landscape of occupational information. They considered some jobs more accessible, while others carried substantive barriers. These assumptions affected their feelings about their search, as well as about their chances for employment in a given area. For these women, gendered associations with certain jobs were powerful cultural forces that contextualized the use of the search tools and tasks with which they engaged.

4.5 Future Directions

This chapter explores the notion that in looking for jobs online, women confront gendered notions of the Internet as well as gendered notions of the jobs themselves. It suggests that the gendered context of both the search tools and the search tasks should be considered in understanding how Web-based technologies serve women in a job search. For these women, the opportunities and limitations of online job-search tools were intimately related to their personal and social needs, especially

needs for part-time work, maternity benefits, and career advancement. Although job-seeking services such as Monster.com were used frequently by most of these women, their search options and structure did not completely fulfill all their informational needs. These search services were an – often frustrating – initial starting point for a job-search rather than an end-point.

As Dervin (1998) argues, making sense of options, content, and encounters in an information search is fundamental to finding what women are seeking. Liu (1995) emphasizes the overall cultural experience of information seeking, and urges that “[information-seeking] behaviour must be viewed within the context of end-users’ cultural experience” (1995: 132). Gender is one of the most pervasive and powerful social and cultural contexts in which individuals view themselves and the world around them (Bem 1993), and upon which individuals draw to guide their behaviour (Deaux and Major 1987; Eagly 1987). It is, therefore, a crucial framework for investigations of contextualized information-seeking.

More generally, notions of gender are important in other information-seeking tasks, particularly where the task itself has cultural associations with one gender over the other. The tools women use to manage the world around them necessarily involve notions of the self and of gender, and include rejecting or embracing gendered expectations and roles. For women confronting gendered notions of the knowledge, activities, behaviour, and selves they should be manifesting, adaptations of gender roles and identity form the basis for resistance to gender proscriptions. Women who are interested in engineering, for example, must confront – and counter – assumptions and associations about women’s abilities in technological fields.

The findings of this project imply that we are only beginning to understand the relationships between gender and Internet technologies. Commercial services like Monster.com must continue to explore ways in which their services can encourage and enhance women’s online job searches. The implications of the present study suggest that Monster.com and its competitors would do well to examine the search interface from the perspective of women job-seekers, especially with regards to the kinds of information they are looking for. The interviews performed for this project revealed women’s frustration with the lack of part-time job listings, and a lack of information about benefits and other aspects of the corporate atmosphere including its opportunities for women. Less experienced women in particular might benefit from a search framework that includes search options like screening for maternity leave policies or flex-time options. Content and resources that counter women’s sense that the Internet and/or certain jobs are “not for them” could help these women expand their access to job opportunities.

For scholars, the implications of this research include the notion that gender can be an important lens through which women approach online interaction. Some women, certainly, are extremely comfortable with the Internet and a range of its resources, while others feel shut out of these technologies. As Internet use increases, especially among youth, the differences between use of common services like email or online chats and more complex activities like advanced information-seeking and use of Internet software becomes a crucial distinction in tracking

the benefits individuals gain. If, as the Pew study seems to suggest (Fallows 2005), women are relegating themselves to more communal activities while men take full advantage of more informational ones, social improvement via the Internet will continue to be divided in a new kind of ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’.

Finally, for women job-seekers themselves, this research suggests that far from being a gender-neutral process, online job-seeking is embedded in gendered perceptions. Training, search techniques, and resources that take gender considerations into account may be able to enhance women’s experiences using the Internet to improve their lot in life.

As online tools become an increasingly important part of today’s successful job search, scholars and practitioners must incorporate an understanding of the ways in which specific groups, cultures, and individuals interact with these technologies. Future research is needed to continue exploring the relatively new area of gender in online job searches, especially in regard to identity and culture.

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