

**A Woman's Place in Cyberspace:
a critical analysis of discourse, purpose and
practice with regard to women and new
communication technologies.**

by

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ABSTRACT

New information and communication technologies have excited considerable popular and expert attention over the last decades of the twentieth century. Predictions about their social effects range along a continuum from visions of heaven; where people slip the surly bonds of time and space, to glimpses of hell; where such slippage enables new manifestations of dominance and control. Along the continuum there is a basic determinist premise evident, that the technologies have developed in a marginal sphere, and will now bring a new way of life, or at least provide materials for a new way of life, whether this be for good or evil. The notion of cyberspace as a new communicative domain has in particular engaged this kind of attention.

This thesis is concerned with the ways in which the rhetoric of cyberspace sheds light on deeper social preoccupations and relations. It is an attempt to move beyond discussion of particular technologies and their possible effects to examine the ways in which habitual social intercourse is reconstructed in and around cyberspace. As a feminist scholar of communication I am particularly interested in the ways in which existing gender relations are maintained in discursive constructions of women in cyberspace, and the ways in which feminist theorists may respond to the new domain.

Because I seek to elude simple determinism, I have sought to contextualise the space by some focus on the known social needs, purposes and practices to which the development of cyberspace technologies has been central. Although I acknowledge the power of discourse to maintain extant social relations, I seek to elude discursive determinism by some focus on the ways in which women have creatively appropriated new technologies; on the disjunctions of discourse and practice.

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

AAUW	American Association of University Women
ARPA	Advanced Research Projects Agency
ARPANET	Advanced Research Projects Agency Network
CMC	Computer Mediated Communication
CSNET	Computer Science Network
DARPA	Defence Advanced Research Projects Agency
ENIAC	Electrical Numerical Integrator and Computer
HMD	Head Mounted Display
ICE	Intrusion Countermeasures Electronics
LADS	Lorel Advanced Distributed Simulation
MIT	Massachusetts Institute of Technology
NASA	National Aeronautics Space Administration
NSFNET	National Science Foundation Network
SF	Science Fiction
SIMNET	Distributed Simulation Networking Project
UCLA	University of California, Los Angeles
VCR	Video Cassette Recorder
VR	Virtual Reality

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