Chapter 7
Marginalization at Cyberspace:
A New Dimension of Violence Against Women and Girls

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ABSTRACT

Cyberspace has been acknowledged as a free space, opening opportunities regardless of caste or gender. But this notion that this technology liberates users into a more democratic genderless world with equality still remains a fallacy. Neither has gender been erased nor has everyone been welcomed into this cyberspace. Not only are girls and women targeted more in this space; they also suffer serious consequences resulting in permanent psychological suffering. Male perpetrators not only dominate the mixed-sex electronic conversation; they have also been identified as frequent instigators of on-line sexual harassment-observations difficult to reconcile with the notion of a gender-neutral utopia. While women enter into this space in hope of a common genderless language, they soon end up unsubscribing from this digital space and also withdraw themselves into silence and isolation thereon.

INTRODUCTION

The virtual world, 'Internet', often described as 'Cyberspace', has entered our homes, schools and workplace and is said to have opened opportunities to people, regardless of caste, creed or gender. It has a self-governing capacity and has changed our lives in all dimensions and also kept us updated on world news and events. This internet access has been established as a new fundamental human right and is celebrated as equal opportunities for public expression regardless of a person's identity or status. It is celebrated as an utopian world that is '(n)either male (physically) nor female (genetically) nor their simple reversal, but something else: a virtual sex. floating in an elliptical orbit around the planet that it has left behind, finally free of the powerful gravitational pull of the binary signs of the male/female antinomies in the crowded earth scene of gender. (Kroker & Kroker 1993). Moreover, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has added to the impetus on the increased reliance on digital technologies in everyday activities.

Gender Diversity in Cyberspace

The Cambridge Dictionary defines Cyberspace as 'the internet considered as an imaginary area without limits where you can meet people and discover information about any subject.' IGI Global Dictionary describes it as a 'Digital space navigable in virtual mode by people from different realities communicating with each other within a computerised world of digital networks.' For institutions it is a terrain that design hardware and software to meet the needs for entrance into a high-end techno world. But this terrain is not in the neutral zone as largely perceived rather, an immersion into the internet, virtuality and cyberspace have a price.

In this chapter, I would like to highlight how the notion that this futuristic technology will liberate the users from the physical world with limitations into a more democratic genderless world with equality still remains a fallacy. Investigative unfolding in this service provides insight to the embodied differences that are ingrained and a systematic pattern of activities and representation. Though many social groups have embraced the internet as an iconic representation, perceiving it as a utopian medium which neutralizes physical distinctions of gender, race, and sexual orientation, what is suppressed or rather, less addressed are the ways how these utopian theories correspond to the reality of gender in cyberspace. Despite it being a field that is rapidly changing and expanding, it has rendered people other than the dominant forces invisible or submissive, in other words, a world that is still primarily male dominated. Neither has gender been erased nor has everyone been openly welcomed into this cyberspace. It has been found that any education or socialization in this technological world are male gendered domains. 'When females manipulate complex technology in a productive or creative manner, it is often viewed and treated as a deviant act that deserves punishment.' (Daniels, 2009) While women do use this complex technology, it is generally in a passive manner. Women are invited to help out mostly with the mundane work that men do not want to be bothered with. Daniels compares it to a situation where husbands bought their wives a car to facilitate their domestic chores. In the same way, access to technology assists women to become better bureaucrats because it is a 'structural economic necessity' (Daniels, 2009).

History seems to repeat itself in cyberspace, twining its way again into the phallogocentric hegemony that prevailed over the years. It has been referred to as the 'Virtual Wild West' by Jeffery Look, where the area of law has been dramatically affected. He compares it to the old wild west 125 years ago, when the western states in the US were seen by men to have free use over to run their cattle or space for their crop. They did not seek permission and trampled down those who got into their way. They wanted control on those who came on their property and violently terrorised those who came to share their space. (Look, 1999) Statistics have shown how women are considered as intruders and face violent virtual assault when they refuse to comply. 'The digital arena has become a breeding ground for a range of exclusionary and violent discourses and beliefs, expressed and disseminated in a context of anonymity and impunity. Both women and men can be victims of cyber violence. However, evidence shows that women and girls are highly exposed to it.' (EIGE, 2022). According to Lenhart, 95% of 12–17-year-olds are online and 80% use social media… and more girls report being the victim of cyberbullying more often than boys.

Transgression of Boundaries

New technologies enable fluid spaces where there is a transgression of the boundaries. '...users leave their bodies behind when entering virtual spaces and become free to explore new forms of identity and textual interaction.' (Paasonen, 2011). 'Real' or 'designed' identities forge new relationships and networks,

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