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Posting in a Different Voice: Gender and Ethics in Computer-Mediated Communication

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In this article Susan Herring probes moral and political dimensions of norms governing on-line behaviour, as well as the mechanism by which these are established. Herring's analysis of postings to electronic fora leads her to conclude that women and men appeal to different, partially incompatible systems of values with respect to their own behaviour on-line and their understanding of the on-line behaviour of others. Herring's investigation is based on observation, survey, and content analysis of 'netiquette' statements. Her analysis leads her to conclude that there are gender differences in public discourse on the Internet. Herring's detailed analysis of gendered media underscores the pervasive normative nature of language-use as behaviour, and that CMC includes, despite the rhetoric of equalization, heavily gendered discourses.

Introduction[1]

MUCH OF THE discussion of ethical issues associated with computer-mediated communication (CMC) has been concerned with the use (or abuse) of CMC in the service of other, essentially CMC-external goals—for example, using computer networks to advertise one's commercial services or products, striking up electronic contact with women (and, in some cases, children) for the purpose of establishing sexual liaisons, or making improper use of computer-mediated information by violating copyright or the privacy of the sender (Dunlop and Kling 1991; Johnson and Snapper 1985; Shea 1994). As yet, however, little work has addressed the ethics of computer-mediated interaction itself, by which I mean the conflicts of interest and potential harm to others which can result from the manner and the extent to which computer-mediated messages are

From Charles Ess (ed.), *Philosophical Perspectives on Computer-Mediated Communication* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1996), 115–45.

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posted in public places. Although posting behavior falls partially under the rubric of netiquette (as network etiquette is called), more than manners is involved. Netiquette norms have both a moral and a political dimension, in that they are founded on systems of values and judgments which may vary according to different groups of users. Yet it is typically the most powerful or dominant group whose values take on a normative status.

Such is the case with regard to gender and computer-mediated communication. In this essay, I claim that women and men appeal to different—and partially incompatible—systems of values both as the rational foundation of their posting behavior and in interpreting and evaluating the behavior of others online. These values correspond to differences in posting style, and are evident as well in official netiquette guidelines, where the general bias in favor of values preferred by men has practical consequences for how comfortable women feel in mainstream electronic forums.

These claims run counter to two popular beliefs, one about gender and the other about CMC. First, any claim that women and men are different in other than a relatively trivial physiological sense is considered politically incorrect by many feminists, regardless of its intent. Consider, for example, the response generated by the work of psychologist Carol Gilligan.[2] Gilligan (1977, 1982; Gilligan and Attanucci 1988) interviewed adolescents and adults about their responses to moral dilemmas and observed that her female subjects regularly evoked different ethical priorities than did male subjects. Gilligan's concern was that women's 'different voice' is traditionally assessed as deviant or defective relative to a male norm; she presents evidence instead for a mature and internally coherent female moral orientation which she terms an 'ethic of care,' as compared with the 'ethic of justice' preferentially evoked by men. Feminist critics such as Martha Mednick (1989), Katha Pollitt (1992), and Linda Steiner (1989), however, consider such claims dangerous, in that they resemble traditional stereotypes and thus are all too readily embraced by conservative and antifeminist elements as proof that gender inequality—especially the division of labor between highly rewarded male activity in the public domain and devalued female domestic activity—is part of the preordained natural order and should not be changed.[3] Indeed, it is wrong, according to some critics, even to *describe* the differences: 'Descriptions/prescriptions of a female ethic wrongly imply that women are locked into a female experience which is self-authenticating and self-validating' (Grimshaw 1986, 17, cited in Steiner 1989, 161).

The claim that there are gender differences in CMC is also problematic from the perspective of the dominant discourse about computer-mediated communications technology. Part of the idealism surrounding the technology in the early decades of its development, and which still persists in many circles, was the belief that computer networks would neutralize gender and other status-related differences and empower traditionally underrepresented groups (Hiltz and Turoff 1993; Kiesler, Siegal, and McGuire

2 The work of other 'difference feminists' (Pollitt 1992) has provoked similar popular response and similar criticism; notable in this category are Chodorow 1978; Ruddick 1989; and Tannen 1990 (criticized by Troemel-Ploetz 1991).

3 In the case of CMC, the danger is presumably that gender differences could be cited to justify excluding women from influential computer-mediated forums or from policy decisions regarding CMC.

1984; Graddol and Swann 1989; Rheingold 1993). The reasoning was deductive: Because of the 'mediated' nature of the medium, messages posted to others are decontextualized and potentially anonymous, free from physical cues to the sender's sex, age, race, able-bodiedness, attractiveness, and so forth. Never mind that users overwhelmingly choose to forgo the anonymity option by signing their messages. Never mind that similar claims could be made about letter writing, which is hardly gender-neutral. People wanted to believe in the potential of the new technology for equalizing social relations, and thus the assumption of gender neutrality initially was not questioned.

In principle, however, the accuracy of claims of gender differences—in CMC or elsewhere—is independent of their 'naturalness,' their political consequences, or the idealism that accompanies the introduction of a new technology. Moreover, describing gender differences need not be incompatible with feminist or egalitarian ideals. Quite to the contrary, differences that reproduce patterns of dominance must be named and understood, lest inequality be perpetuated and recreated through the uncritical acting out of familiar scripts. It is in this spirit that the present essay was written—with the goal of revealing gender differences (and gender inequalities) in cyberspace that some readers may well find disconcerting, but hopefully will no longer be able to ignore.

The Investigation

The claims advanced in this paper are based on an empirical investigation of gender, ethics, and etiquette on the Internet carried out (with the exception of the first part) during the spring of 1994. The investigation is comprised of three parts:

Behavior: I conducted ethnographic observation ranging from periods of two weeks to three years of daily exchanges in nine computer-mediated discussion lists with varying concentrations of female subscribers (from 11% to 88%),[4] and analyzed the discourse of selected discussions from the lists in terms of amount and style of participation, controlling for gender.

Values: I prepared an anonymous survey that was distributed on eight computer-mediated discussion lists;[5] the survey included three open-ended questions about what Net users most appreciate, dislike, and would like to change about the behavior of others online. I also analyzed the content of metadiscourse about what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate behavior in the nine lists from the 'behavior' part of the investigation.

Netiquette guidelines: A content analysis was performed of explicit netiquette statements from the introductory messages sent out to new subscribers on seven discussion lists and from two general collections of

4 The nine lists are, in order of increasing percentage of female subscribers: PHILOSOP (11%), POLITICS (17%), PAGLIA (discussion of the writings of antifeminist feminist Camille Paglia; 34%), LINGUIST (36%), MBU (discussion of computers and writing, 42%), TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language; 56%), SWIP (Society for Women in Philosophy; 80%), WMSPRT (Women's Spirituality and Feminist-Oriented Religions; 81%), and WMST (Women's Studies; 88%). At the time they were sampled, all were active lists generating 20–100 messages per week.

5 The eight lists surveyed are CuD (Computer Underground Digest, a weekly electronic newsletter whose readership includes many computing professionals), PHILCOMM (Philosophy of Communication), PHILOSOP, LINGUIST, SWIP, TESL, WMSPRT, and WMST.

recommended network etiquette.[6] The content of the netiquette guidelines was then compared with the behaviors and values identified in the first two parts of the investigation.

The results of the investigation reveal that not only do many women and men use recognizably gendered posting styles, but they also appeal to different systems of values in rationalizing their posting behavior and in interpreting and judging the behavior of others. Women preferentially evoke an ethic of politeness and consideration for the wants of others, especially their desire to be ratified and liked, while men evoke an ethic of agonistic debate and freedom from rules or imposition. The male ethic predominates in official netiquette guidelines and in discourse about the Internet in general, with the result that women with a politeness ethic must create and defend women-centered spaces online in order to carry out the kind of discourse they value. Although the observed differences do not describe all male and female net users, they are important in that they affect norms of interpretation and evaluation in cyberspace more generally.

The Evidence for Difference

Contrary to the claim that CMC neutralizes gender distinctions, recent empirical studies of computer-mediated interaction suggest that gender differences online reproduce and even exaggerate gender differences found in face-to-face interaction (Hall, forthcoming; Herring 1992, 1993a; Herring, Johnson, and DiBenedetto 1992; Herring and Lombard 1995; Kramarae and Taylor 1993; Selfe and Meyer 1991; Sutton 1994). In what ways do men and women differ in their computer-mediated communication?

In this section, I discuss differences in two domains: public posting to Internet discussion groups and values associated with posting behavior. Since I have already presented considerable evidence for the former in other publications (see especially Herring 1993a), after summarizing this evidence, I will devote most of my attention to making a case for the latter. The third part of this section presents evidence for gender bias in netiquette guidelines.

Different Posting Styles

There is a recognizable style of posting found in most, if not all, public forums on the Internet which, in its most extreme form, manifests itself as 'flaming,' or personal put-downs, and which is generally characterized by a challenging, adversarial, or superior stance vis à vis the intended addressee(s). This style is often, although not always, accompanied by a tendency to post lengthy and/or frequent messages and to participate disproportionately more than others in a given discussion. In forum after electronic forum, the overwhelming majority of participants exhibiting this style are male. Examples of the Adversarial style are given below.[7]

6 Netiquette statements were analyzed from the introductory messages of CuD, PHILOSOP, POLITICS, LINGUIST, SWIP, TESL, WMST; the general collections analyzed are 'Rules for Posting to Usenet' (Horton and Spafford 1993), 'What is Usenet?' (Salzenberg and Spafford 1993), and *Toward an Ethics and Etiquette for Electronic Mail* (Shapiro and Anderson 1985).

7 All examples given in this section are from messages posted to public-accessible discussion groups on the Internet. To protect the anonymity of individual participants, names and electronic addresses that appear in the messages have been changed.

1. [PHILOSOP] While I do not especially care how this gets settled, I am surprised by the continuing absurdity of the discussion. [distancing stance, presupposed put-down ('this discussion is absurd')]
2. [LINGUIST] [Jean Linguiste's] proposals towards a more transparent morphology in French are exactly what he calls them: a farce. Nobody could ever take them seriously—unless we want to look as well at pairs such as *père-mère*, *coq-poule* and defigure the French language in the process. [strong assertions, put-down ('JL's proposals are a farce'; implied: 'JL wants to defigure the French language')]
3. [POLITICS] In article <[message number]> [address (Ed [Lastname]) writes:
   >No, but I shall emphasize that should the news admins take it upon
   >themselves to decide the truth of your claim—a remote possibility
   >indeed—we surely would not weight most highly your word on the

   Who the hell are 'we,' 'edo boy'. I was unaware that a net-clown was required to agree on the US Constitution. Well anyway, enough entertainment for a self-exposed 'wieneramus'. The criminal acts of the x-Soviet Armenian Government come directly under the scope of the Convention on Genocide adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 8, 1948, containing the following provisions: [continues another 8 screens] [name-calling ('edo boy,' 'net-clown,' 'wieneramus'), profanity ('who the hell')]

There exists an equally distinct style, although less widespread in its distribution, that is characterized by expressions of support and appreciation, and in which views are presented in a hedged fashion, often with appeals for ratification from the group. This style is exhibited almost exclusively by women and is the discursive norm in many women-only and women-centered lists. The following examples illustrate the Supportive/ Attenuated style.

4. [WOMEN]
   >Aileen,
   >I just wanted to let you know that I have really enjoyed all your posts about
   >Women's herstory. They have been extremely informative and I've learned alot
   >about the women's movement. Thank you!
   >-Erika

   DITTO!!!! They are wonderful! Did anyone else catch the first part of a Century of Women? I really enjoyed it. Of course, I didn't agree with everything they said. . . . but it was really informative. Roberta
   ~~~~~~~ [appreciates, thanks, agrees, appeals to group]
5. [WMST] Well, enough of my ranting. I am very interested in this subject. My area is experimental social psychology. I am also very excited about the book you mentioned. It is a very worthwhile project. If I can help in any way, typing, whatever, I would love to help. Please let
   ~~~~~~~

me know if there is anything I can do. [apologizes, appreciates, offers help]

6. [TESL] [. . .] I hope this makes sense. This is kind of what I had in mind when I realized I couldn't give a real definitive answer. Of course, maybe I'm just getting into the nuances of the language when it would be easier to just give the simple answer. Any response? [hedges, expresses doubt (supplies counterargument to own position), appeals to group]

In what sense can these two styles be generalized to represent gender differences in posting behavior? Certainly, not all men who post on the Internet are adversarial; indeed, discourse in mixed-sex lists is typically dominated by a small male minority which posts a lot (Selfe and Meyer 1991; Herring 1993a) and accounts for the majority of adversarial behaviors (Herring 1993a, 1993b), while many men are relatively neutral and informative and others are supportive or attenuated in their posting style, especially on women-centered lists. Similarly, not all women are supportive and attenuated; many also adopt a neutral, informative style, and some can be adversarial, especially on male-dominated lists where adversariality is the discursive norm. Nevertheless, the two styles are gendered in that the extremes of each are manifested almost exclusively by one gender and not the other. Moreover, men tend toward adversariality and women toward support/attenuation even in the area of overlap between the two extremes. The distribution of the styles in relation to gender can be represented schematically as two bell-shaped curves that overlap but are out of phase, as shown in Figure 1.

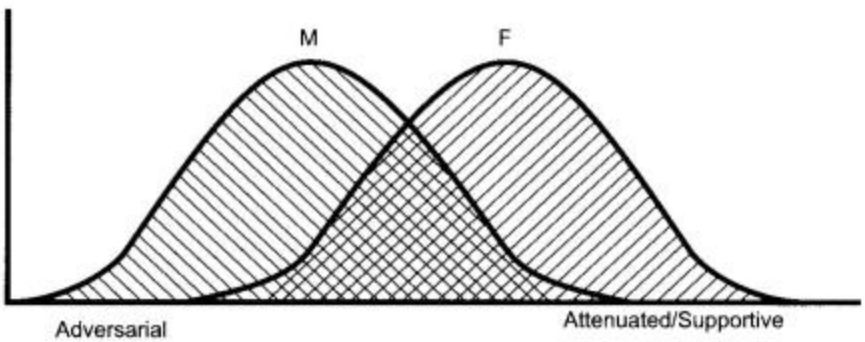

Fig. 1. Distribution of adversarial and attenuated/supportive posting styles by gender

Figure 1 illustrates two points. First, male and female behaviors are not disjunctive; that is, men and women online are not separate species (cf. Holmstrom 1982). Many posts fall into a middle category that includes mixing male-and female-gendered features or the absence of either.[8] Second,

8 This distributional model generalizes across variation based on local list-serve norms and topics of discussion. All other things being equal, normative posting style for both genders tends to shift in the adversarial direction in male-predominant lists such as PAGLIA and LINGUIST and in the attenuated/supportive direction in female-predominant lists such as WMST and TESL, although differences in degree still characterize prototypical 'male' and 'female' contributions. The effect of dominant list usage on gender style is documented in Herring (1996) and Herring and Lombard (1995).

despite the large area of overlap, two distinct populations are involved—in other words, behaviors at the extremes are not randomly distributed between males and females, but are virtually male exclusive (for extreme forms of adversariality) and female exclusive (for extreme forms of appreciation and support). It is this distribution that I seek to explain.

Why focus on the extremes, rather than on the area of overlap where women and men exhibit similar kinds of variation? The existence of gendered styles must be explicitly demonstrated in order to put to rest the myth that gender is invisible on computer networks. This myth not only misrepresents the reality of gender on-line, but further perpetuates the uncritical tolerance of practices (such as flaming) which discourage women from using computer networks (Herring 1992, 1993a). Such practices affect large numbers of users even when only a minority of men are responsible, and thus it behooves those concerned with gender equality in cyberspace to understand them well.

Further, there is evidence that the extreme gendered posting styles illustrated above are psychologically and socially real for net users; that is, they have a *symbolic* status over and above their actual distribution. Thus participants in electronic discussions regularly infer the gender of message posters on the basis of the presence of features of one or the other of these styles. Cases where the self-identified gender of the poster is in question are especially revealing in this regard. Consider the following situations, the first involving a male posing as a female, and the second, a (suspected) female posing as a male.

(i) A male subscriber on SWIP-L posted a message disagreeing with the general consensus that discourse on SWIP should be nonagonistic, commenting, 'There's nothing like a healthy denunciation by one's colleagues every once in a while to get one's blood flowing, and spur one to greater subtlety and exactness of thought.' He signed his message with a female pseudonym, however, causing another (female) subscriber to comment later, 'I must confess to looking for the name of the male who wrote the posting that [Suzi] sent originally and was surprised to find a female name at the end of it.' The female subscriber had (accurately) inferred that anyone actively advocating 'denunciation by one's colleagues' was probably male.

(ii) At a time when another male subscriber had been posting frequent messages to the WOMEN list, a subscriber professing to be a man posted a message inquiring what the list's policy was toward men participating on the list, admitting, 'I sometimes feel guilty for taking up bandwidth.' The message, in addition to showing consideration for the concerns of others on the list, was very attenuated in style and explicitly appreciative of the list: 'I really enjoy this list (actually, it's the best one I'm on).' This prompted another (female) subscriber to respond, 'now that you've posed the question . . . how's one to know you're not a woman posing this question as a man?' Her suspicion indicates that on some level she recognized that anyone posting a message expressing appreciation and consideration for the desires of others was likely to be female.

The existence of gendered prototypes is also supported by cases where males and females are miscast as members of the opposite gender because

they do not conform to the expected gender pattern. Hall (forthcoming) cites a case on a women-only list of a poster, 'J.,' suspected of being male on the basis of 'her' offensive, adversarial postings. Discussion ensued on the list of how to handle the case, until someone reported they had met 'J.' in real life in Southern California: 'While they had found her offensive too, they had met her and she was a woman' (155). This shows how probabilistic inferences (based on the empirical tendency for men to be more adversarial than women online) can take on symbolic and even political signification: In order not to be suspected of being male, women must express themselves on this women-only list in an appropriately 'female' style.[9]

These styles and their association with gender are of both practical and theoretical significance. They are of practical significance in that they determine how successfully one is able to 'pass' as a member of a different gender on the Net. They are of theoretical significance in that the existence of different styles and the forms they take are facts requiring further explanation.

Different Values

Why do many Net users post in ways that signal their gender? Why, specifically, do men specialize in flaming and women in supporting others? Flaming is generally considered hostile and rude. Yet the phenomenon is too widespread to be explained away as the crank behavior of a few sociopathic individuals. Indeed, many male-predominant groups, including stuffy academic ones, are adversarial in tone to a degree that, in my female-biased perception, borders on the uncivil. Could it be that men and women have different assessments of what is 'polite' and 'rude' in online communication?

In order to test this hypothesis, I prepared and disseminated an anonymous electronic questionnaire on netiquette. In addition to background questions about respondents' sex, age, ethnicity, professional status, and years of networking, the questionnaire included three open-ended questions asking respondents what online behaviors bother them most, what they most appreciate, and what changes they would like to see in Net interaction in an ideal world.

The questionnaire generated considerable interest: I received nearly 300 usable responses, 60% from men and 40% from women. Immediately I noticed a pattern relating to gender in the responses: Male respondents were more likely than female respondents to 'flame' me about the questionnaire itself.[10] Compare, for example, the following complaints about the length of the questionnaire sent to me by two individuals who elected not to answer it, the first female, the second male.[11]

> [F:] I hope this doesn't sound terribly rude, but a survey is one of the last things I want to see in my mailbox. And I suspect I'm not alone. This is not to say that you shouldn't have posted it. Rather,

9 Interestingly, even gay and lesbian lists are not free of traditionally gendered styles. Hall (forthcoming) reports that men on GAYNET often display an adversarial style, driving some women off the list, while women on SAPPHO display a supportive and attenuated style.

10 Two aspects of the survey generated criticism: its length (about two and a half printed pages), and the fact that respondents were asked to indicate their ethnicity.

11 In keeping with my promise to respondents, all comments quoted in response to the questionnaire are anonymous. For a more detailed description of the survey, see Herring 1994.

please treat your results with caution. They likely will not be representative.

[M:] What bothers me most are abuses of networking such as yours: unsolicited, lengthy and intrusive postings designed to further others' research by wasting my time.

The female frames her complaint about the survey as a concern for the validity of the investigator's results, while the male expresses concern about the way the survey imposes on him. The female message contains numerous attenuation features, including hedges ('not terribly,' 'I suspect,' 'likely'), an apology, and the use of the politeness marker 'please.' The male message contains no attenuation or politeness features but instead insults the sender of the survey by characterizing the survey in negatively loaded terms such as 'abuse' and 'intrusive' and by intimating that the motives for sending it were selfish and exploitative. While both messages are complaints and thus inherently face-threatening, their style is very different: The first attenuates the threat to the addressee's face, while the second emphasizes it.

Fortunately, many more individuals responded supportively than critically to the survey. However, there were gender differences in the expressions of support as well, as illustrated by the following two comments preceding the completed survey:

[F:] What an interesting survey! It looks like you've already done at least some informal research into people's 'net peeves'! I'd be very interested to receive a copy of your results at my email address: [address]. Thanks!

[M:] Here is the response to your survey. Under most circumstances, I would discard the survey due to its length. Kindly, I am replying. I wish you the best of luck in your research!

The female comment compliments the survey (it is interesting) and the sender of the survey (you have done your research), and demonstrates the sincerity of her interest by asking for a copy of the results; the message concludes with an expression of appreciation ('Thanks!'). The male comment criticizes the survey (it is too long) and compliments himself (I am kind for replying);[12] the expression of support comes in the last sentence when he wishes the investigator luck. Both of these messages are friendly and the respondents cooperative, but the first explicitly seeks to make the addressee feel positively valued, while the latter does not.

I reproduce these extraneous comments because they are consistent with the stylistic differences described in the previous section (although the context in which they were produced is quite different) and because they reveal much about the politeness norms of the individuals who wrote them. Politeness can be conceptualized as behavior that addresses two kinds of 'face': positive face, or a person's desire to be ratified and liked, and negative face, or the desire not to be constrained or imposed upon (Brown and Levinson 1987). The comments of the female questionnaire respondents are polite in that they attend to both kinds of face wants in the addressee. The first woman takes

12 I assume this was intended ironically, as an attempt at humor.

pains to lessen the imposition ('I hope this doesn't sound terribly rude') and the potential threat to the addressee's positive face ('This is not to say that you shouldn't have posted it') caused by her complaint, and the second woman actively bolsters the addressee's positive face in her appreciative message. In contrast, the men make virtually no concessions to the addressee's positive face (indeed the first man threatens it directly), but do display a concern with their own negative face wants, namely, the desire not to be imposed upon by long surveys. In addition to the apparent contrast between the other-and self-orientation of these concerns, the most striking difference is that only the women appear to be concerned with positive politeness.

Hypothesizing that the difference between the two types of politeness might therefore be significant, I coded each response to the three open-ended questions on the questionnaire in terms of positive and negative politeness. Some examples of common Net behaviors cited in response that illustrate observances (+) and violations (–) of positive (P) and negative (N) politeness are as follows:

Messages support or thank others	(+P; makes others feel valued)
Participants 'flame' or insult others	(–P; makes others feel bad)
Participants post concise messages	(+N; saves others' time)
Messages quote all of the message being responded to	(–N; wastes others' time)

The results of the analysis indicate that women supply politeness-related responses more often than men: 87% of female responses relate to some kind of politeness, as compared with 73% for men. Of politeness-related answers given, women supplied 53% of those related to negative politeness and 61% of those related to positive politeness. A pattern is also evident whereby women evoked *observances* of positive politeness (in response to the questions of what they most like and what changes they would like to see) more often than *violations* (in response to the question of what bothers them most), while for men this pattern is reversed. The distribution of politeness-related responses by gender is summarized for each question and for all questions combined in Table 1.[13]

TABLE 1. *Distribution of responses to open-ended questions by gender and politeness type*

	Bothers		*Like*		*Change*		*Combined*	
	–N	–P	+N	+P	+N	+P	+/–N	+/–P
Male	39	21	16	16	9	2	64	39
	49%	42%	47%	39%	39%	20%	47%	39%
Female	40	29	18	25	14	8	72	62
	51%	58%	53%	61%	61%	80%	53%	61%
Total	79	50	34	41	23	10	136	101
	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%

13 These calculations are based on a subset of survey respondents derived by sampling responses received over time: the first 23 received, then 100–110, 200–210 and all 23 received by nonelectronic means. This produced a sample of 68 respondents, 34 male and 34 female.

Some examples of responses relating to politeness are as follows. When asked what behaviors they most appreciate on the Net, female respondents cited 'thoughtfulness,' 'politeness,' 'short, to the point messages,' 'supportive behaviors,' and 'helpful advice,' and indicated they would like to see 'more please and thank yous,' 'more consideration of others,' and more 'conciseness' in Net interaction. Women report being most bothered by 'overlong, longwinded messages,' 'rude insensitive remarks,' 'unnecessary nastiness,' and 'angry responses or responses designed to provoke.' As one female respondent elaborated:

> The thing that absolutely bothers me the most is when people (in my experience it has always been men) disrupt the list by making provocative and inflammatory remarks designed simply to distress. This only happens on unmoderated lists—but it can be very upsetting.

Rude, nasty, and inflammatory remarks are violations of positive politeness in that they may be taken by the addressee as insulting, and thus threaten her positive face.

Men, in contrast, preferentially mention politeness behaviors associated with the avoidance of imposition. Thus, male respondents complain about 'test messages,' 'cross-posting of messages,' 'advertising,' 'low content and off-topic posts,' 'sending listserv commands to the discussion group,' 'requests by others to do things for them,' 'idiocy and repetitions,' and 'stupid questions,' all of which impose on the receiver's time and resources and threaten negative face. Such abuses are commonly attributed to a lack of knowledge:

> I'd like to see more knowledge out there. Like any public activity, people go on and screw around when they have no idea what they are doing, which wastes a lot of time and energy. People should learn what the net is and how to use it before flooding sixteen groups with the umpteenth repetition [*sic*] of very simple questions.

While these results would appear to support my initial observations concerning different kinds of politeness, they still leave a basic question unanswered: Why do men violate positive politeness, for example, by engaging in bald criticism, to say nothing of flaming? There is nothing inherent in a desire for freedom from imposition that leads inevitably to an adversarial interactional style. Moreover, despite male concern with freedom from imposition, men are responsible for the majority of violations of negative politeness (my questionnaire notwithstanding) as well: It is men, not women, who post the longest messages, do the most cross-posting, copy the most text from previous messages (and respond, point by point), have the longest signature files, and generally take up the most bandwidth on the net. How can these behaviors be explained?

The questionnaire responses provide the key to this question. Three themes occur repeatedly in male responses to the open-ended questions—themes that are missing almost entirely from female responses. These themes are *freedom from censorship, candor,* and *debate.* Taken together, they make up a coherent and rationally motivated system of values that is separate from and, in some cases, in conflict with politeness values. This system of

values, which I call the 'anarchic/agonistic system,' can even be evoked to justify flaming.

Consider, for example, the value accorded *freedom from censorship.* According to this view, the Internet and cyberspace in general is a glorious anarchy, one of the few places in the world in which absolute freedom of speech is possible. Censorship in this view is equated with rules and any form of imposed regulation, with the ultimate threat being take-over and control of the Net by government and/or large corporations. Rather than having imposed rules on the Internet, individual users should self-regulate their behavior to show consideration (i.e., in terms of negative politeness) for others. One male respondent comments as follows in response to the question, In an ideal world, what changes would you like to see in the way people interact on the Net?

> None. Seriously. The net is monitored enough as it is (maybe too much). It should be a forum for free speech and should not be policed by anything but common sense. Though this may seem inconsistent with my answer to (1) above [where he said he was bothered by receiving posts totally unrelated to the topic of a list], just because something bothers me doesn't mean I believe it should be eliminated. In an ideal world people should exercise their rationality more.

Since we do not live in an ideal world, of course, behavior problems on the Net inevitably arise. In keeping with the value placed on individual autonomy, proponents of free speech may advocate harassing offenders until they desist rather than cutting off their access (considered to be 'heavy-handed censorship'). Hauben (1993), writing about the Usenet, expresses this in positive terms as follows:

> When people feel someone is abusing the nature of Usenet News, they let the offender know through e-mail. In this manner . . . people fight to keep it a resource that is helpful to society as a whole.

The ideal of 'fight[ing] to keep [the Net] a resource that is helpful to society as a whole' often translates into action as flaming. One man wrote the following in response to the question, What behaviors bother you most on the Net?

> As much as I am irritated by [incompetent posters], I don't want imposed rules. I would prefer to 'out' such a person and let some public minded citizen fire bomb his house to imposing rules on the net. Letter bombing a [*sic*] annoying individual's feed is usually preferable to building a formal heirarchy [*sic*] of net cops.

Underlying the violent imagery of 'bombing' is the ideal of the 'public minded citizen' who dispenses a rough and ready form of justice in a free and individualistic Net society. A similar ideal underlies the response to the same question by another 'Net vigilante':

> I'd have to say commercial shit. Whenever someone advertises some damn get-rich-quick scheme and plasters it all over the net by crossposting it to every newsgroup, I reach for my 'gatling gun mailer crasher' and fire away at the source address.

Thus an anarchistic value system is constructed: Within this system, by evoking freedom from censorship, flaming and other aggressive behaviors can be interpreted in a prosocial light, as a form of corrective justice. This is not to say that all or even most men who flame have the good of Net society at heart, but rather that the behavior is in principle justifiable for men (and hence tolerable) in ways that it is not for most women.

The second theme evoked by male respondents is *candor.* In this view, honest and frank expression of one's opinions is a desirable attribute in Net interaction: Everything is out in the open, and others know exactly where one stands. One man gave the following response to the question, What Net behaviors do you most appreciate when you encounter them?

> The willingness to respond to just about anything with candor and honesty. There are no positions to hide behind or from on a list.

For many men, candor takes precedence over the positive face wants of the addressee. An extreme expression of this is the response of an African American male citing 'honest bigotry' as what he most appreciates about Net interaction. Expressions of bigotry (e.g., in the form of racial hatred) presumably directly threaten this man's desire to feel ratified and liked, yet for him the advantages of honesty outweigh the threat: 'I'm glad to talk to those who are truly hateful on the net so that I'm prepared for them when I meet them in real life.'

If one disagrees with someone, one should say so directly. It follows from this that failure to disagree openly may be perceived by adherents of this ethic as hypocritical or insincere. Thus a male participant on the SWIP list recently accused feminist philosophers of 'feign[ing] agreement where none exists' when they write 'I wish to *expand* upon so-and-so's thinking,'

> when what's really at issue is the complete rejection of so-and-so. Tamsin Lorraine suggests this is the positive feature of the 'cooperative spirit' of feminist philosophy. But I disagree. I think it's better, when one rejects another feminist's thinking on a matter, simply to say 'I reject so-and-so's approach.' . . . I frankly think [it is] exactly this kind of automatic non-criticism which is partially responsible for feminist philosophy not being taken as seriously as it should by non-feminist philosophers.

Both the poster's critical views (that feminist philosophers 'feign agreement'; that feminist philosophy is not 'taken seriously') and his directly confrontational tone ('But I disagree'; 'I frankly think') are consistent with the value accorded candor by male survey respondents.

More is expressed in this last post than a value on honesty, however; disagreement is also implicitly valued. This leads to the third theme mentioned preferentially by male survey respondents: *debate.* According to this value, confrontational exchanges should be encouraged as a means of arriving at deeper understandings of issues and sharpening one's intellectual skills. As the male participant on the SWIP list (quoted previously) put it, 'There's nothing like a healthy denunciation by one's colleagues every once in a while to get one's blood flowing, and spur one to greater subtlety and exactness of thought.' He goes on, however, to add an important caveat: 'At least if it's constructive denunciation, rather than the mere expression of hostility or

misunderstanding.' The distinction between 'constructive denunciation' and 'hostility,' or some version of this distinction, is crucial to many men: Male survey respondents regularly cite 'flaming' as behavior that bothers them online, but exclude from the definition of flaming critical exchanges that are calm and rationally argued, which they characterize instead as 'good debate,' 'balanced argument,' or 'noncombative disagreement.' In other words, there is good adversariality (i.e. agonistic debate) and bad adversariality (i.e. flaming).

In contrast, many—if not most—female Net users do not distinguish between hostile, angry adversariality and calm, rational adversariality, but rather interpret adversariality of any kind (which may include any politeness-threatening act) as unconstructive and hostile in intent. Thus, unlike men, female survey respondents tend to group together all forms of adversariality as 'flaming,' 'rudeness,' or 'provocation,' all 'designed simply to distress.' Further, female participants in online discussions are more likely than men to characterize exchanges as 'flaming' any time baldly face-threatening acts are committed (disagreement, rejection, protest, etc.). This tendency led a male participant in one such discussion to complain recently that 'some members of [this list] perceive aggression where none was intended.'

The problem is not simply one of individual misunderstanding; rather, different sets of values are involved. The strength of the clash in values is evident in the strongly emotive language women use to describe their aversion to adversariality online and off. The following quote was posted by the listowner of the SWIP list to explain why the list follows a nonagonistic practice:

> At the first APA (SWIP) meeting, we discovered we were all offended and disabled by the hierarchies in the profession, by the star system, by the old boy networks. We talked together and shared our feelings about the adversarial method of combat and attack of commentator against presenter, by audience against presenter. We found it ugly, harmful, and counterproductive.[14]

Or, as a female respondent commented about an adversarial discussion in which participants baldly criticized one another's views on the LINGUIST list,[15]

> That is precisely the kind of human interaction I committedly avoid. . . . I am dismayed that human beings treat each other this way. It makes the world a dangerous place to be.

The choice of evaluative terms such as 'ugly,' 'harmful,' and 'dangerous' to characterize agonistic behaviors and 'offended,' 'disabled,' and 'dismayed' to characterize the women's response reveals the extent to which some women are alienated by behaviors that are positively valued by men.

The set of values cited preferentially by female survey respondents I will call henceforth the 'positive politeness ethic,' in that it is concerned with

14 From a panel presentation given by Kathy Pyne Addelson at the Eastern Division American Philosophical Association meeting, Atlanta, 30 December 1993. The title of the panel was 'Feminist Philosophy after Twenty Years.'

15 See Herring 1992 for a more extensive analysis of the gender dynamics in this discussion.

attending to and protecting participants' positive face or desire to be accepted, supported, and liked. The set of values referred to almost exclusively by male survey respondents I will refer to as the 'anarchic/agonistic ethic,' in that it is concerned with promoting freedom of expression and vigorous exchange of conflicting views. According to the positive politeness ethic, right interaction involves supporting, helping, and generally being considerate of others. As a woman on the WOMEN list posted recently:

> If we take responsibility for developing our own sensitivities to others and controlling our actions to minimize damage—we will each be doing [good deeds] for the whole world constantly.

In contrast, right interaction according to the anarchic/agonistic ethic, is that which permits the development of the individual, in service of which it is desirable to be maximally free to speak and act in the pursuit of one's self-interest. The connection between free speech and self-interest is made explicit by a male survey respondent who quoted American Revolutionary author Thomas Paine:[16]

> He that would make his own liberty secure must guard even his enemy from oppression; for if he violates this duty he establishes a precedent that will reach to himself.

Thus, self-interest leads one to extend concern to others in a principled way.

As with gendered discursive styles, the generalizations I have made here regarding gendered values do not apply universally. The distribution of male and female responses to the combined open-ended questions in terms of the values described above are represented schematically in Figure 2.

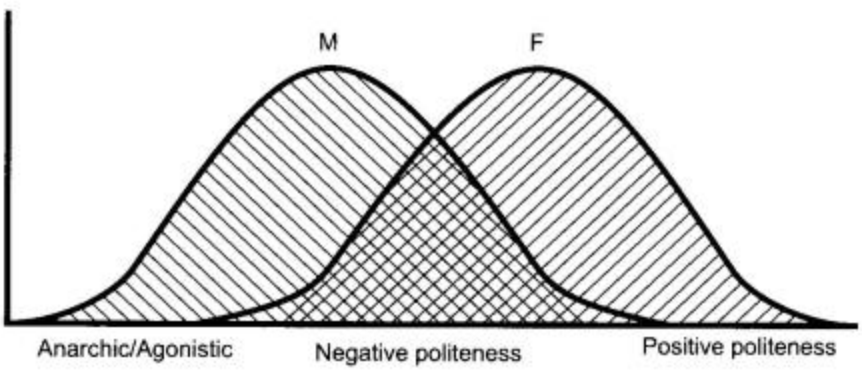

Fig. 2. Distribution of politeness-based and anarchic/agonistic values by gender

Figure 2 shows that there is a considerable overlap in male and female assessments regarding appropriate behavior on the Net. This area corresponds primarily with dislike of violations of negative politeness. Thus, respondents of both genders cited negative politeness violations such as uninformative subject headers, quoting text, misdirected/inappropriate

16 I note, in passing, that Paine is an excellent role model for the CMC anarchic/agonistic ethical standard: He advocated 'the omnipotence of reason when there is freedom to debate all questions,' and claimed he sought to write 'simply, candidly, and clearly; to be bold and forthright in order to shock readers into attention, partly by sharp contrasts; [and] to use wit and satire in order to bring opposing ideas into ridicule' (Encyclopedia Britannica 1971, 17: 65).

messages, messages with little content, and long messages as behaviors that bother them in Net interaction. There was also some agreement on dislike of violations of positive politeness—especially of flaming and egotism, although more women than men said they disliked these behaviors (in the case of flaming, twice as many women as men). Men and women agreed much less about what they like and would like to see more of, however, with women preferentially citing helpful and supportive (positive politeness) behaviors and men citing anarchic and agonistic behaviors. Note, however, that there is a fundamental tension between the values represented by these gendered extremes: Uncensored agonistic expression threatens positive face, and protecting positive face at any cost (e.g., by prohibiting adversariality) threatens freedom of expression.

These results show that when male and female Net users are asked open-ended questions about what they like and dislike, they provide qualitatively different answers. Moreover, the answers cluster and pattern in ways that reflect patterns in posting styles: Expressions of support and appreciation are natural manifestations of positive politeness, and attenuation follows from negative politeness, while adversariality and even flaming can be seen to derive from (and be rationally justified by) anarchic and agonistic ideals.

Netiquette Guidelines

Having established distributional tendencies for different male and female value systems that correspond to different posting styles, we turn now to netiquette guidelines—publicly available statements of recommended posting and Net use practices. Whose values inform the content of netiquette guidelines? In particular, how do netiquette guidelines resolve the tension inherent between positive politeness values on the one hand and anarchic/agonistic values on the other?

For this part of the study, I analyzed the content of nine sets of netiquette statements: seven from introductory messages to discussion lists and two global sets of guidelines (one for Usenet and the other for electronic mail in general).[17] The data include two women-centered lists, WMST and SWIP, and one list, TESL, which has a slight majority of female subscribers and represents a feminized field; all three have female listowners. It was hypothesized that netiquette statements for these lists would incorporate positive politeness values. In contrast, while no lists in the data self-identify as 'male-centered,' POLITICS and the Computer Underground Digest (CuD) represent masculinized areas of interest, and PHILOSOP is 90% male; these lists are also owned by men. I hypothesized, therefore, that netiquette statements for these lists would incorporate anarchic/agonistic values. Finally, the global Usenet and e-mail netiquette guidelines are intended to apply to users of either sex, and thus in principle should reflect the values of each (or neither) group.

Each normative statement found in the documents was categorized in terms of positive and negative politeness, if applicable. These statements are of two types: avoid violating N/P (abbreviated Avoid –N/–P), and observe

17 See note 6.

N/P (abbreviated +N/+P). An example of each type of statement is given below.

Avoid –N: Avoid irrelevancies. Given the limited phosphor window we have onto this electronic universe, succinctness and relevance become prized attributes. The message that makes its point and fits on one screen does its job best, and you will be well regarded. (Shapiro and Anderson 1985)

+N: Please include a meaningful subject header, so that people will know whether your message deals with a topic of interest to them. (WMST)

Avoid –P: There may be no flames of a personal nature on this list. (POLITICS)

+P: We are strongly committed to maintaining an uncensored list; but to do this, it is important that members respect in their postings the attitudes and sensibilities of all other members. (TESL)

In addition, statements communicating agonistic and anarchic values (abbreviated A/A) were coded. An example of this type is the following:

> *A/A*
>
> *those who have never tried electronic communication may not be aware of what a 'social skill' really is. One social skill that must be learned, is that other people have points of view that are not only different, but *threatening*, to your own. In turn, your opinions may be threatening to others. There is nothing wrong with this* [emphasis added—SH]. Your beliefs need not be hidden behind a facade, as happens with face-to-face conversation. Not everybody in the world is a bosom buddy, but you can still have a meaningful conversation with them. The person who cannot do this lacks in social skills. (Nick Szabo, quoted in Salzenberg and Spafford 1993)

The distribution of statements of each type by source is summarized in Table 2. (An asterisk after list name indicates that messages sent to that list are screened by the listowner(s) before being posted; i.e., the list is moderated).

Table 2 shows that the guidelines for all of the electronic forums include prescriptive statements about negative politeness. Three, in fact, mention *only* negative politeness; I will call this the 'conservative type.' This type is conservative in that it does not address potentially controversial behaviors such as flaming or supporting others, but, rather, is concerned solely with the avoidance of imposition, a concern that male and female users share. It is noteworthy that the three lists whose guidelines illustrate this pattern—LINGUIST, PHILOSOP, and WMST—are all academic lists that restrict their focus to exchange of information and discussion of academic issues. Possibly, the listowners who prepared these netiquette guidelines consider the sorts of behaviors that lead to strong disagreement or supportive interaction as outside the scope of the lists, and thus did not think it necessary to provide for such eventualities. In any event, the academic nature of these lists appears to take precedence over gender make-up, as there is no correlation between the conservative pattern and gender of subscribers or listowner.

TABLE 2. *Distribution of netiquette statements by source and type*

	Gender of listowner	*Percentage of female subscribers*[18]	*A/A*	*Avoid –N*	*+N*	*Avoid –P*	*–P*
CuD*	M	5	x	x	x	(x)	
PHILOSOP	M	11		x	x		
POLITICS	M	17	x	x	x	(x)	
LINGUIST*	M & F	36		x	x		
TESL	F	56		x	x	x	x
SWIP*	F	80		x		x	x
WMST	F	88		x	x		
Usenet	n.a.	?	x	x	x		
e-mail	n.a.	?	x	x	x	(x)	

Beyond this, however, the distribution of values across lists supports the hypotheses advanced above with regard to gender. Male-centered lists are more likely than female-centered lists to evoke agonistic/anarchic values; of the three male-centered lists—CuD, PHILOSOP, and POLITICS—two contain statements of this type, as compared with none of the female-centered lists. Conversely, female-centered lists are more likely to recommend observations of positive politeness (+P); of the three female-centered lists—SWIP, TESL, and WMST—two contain statements of this type, as compared with none of the male-centered lists. It is possible to observe in this distribution a pattern of partial overlap similar to that found in posting styles and posting ethics, with A/A values on the 'male' end, +/–N values in the area of overlap in the middle, and +P values on the 'female' end. Thus, it is not only individuals who are gendered in their evaluation of Net behaviors but electronic forums as well.

Further support for this conclusion is found in the various lists' recommendations involving avoiding violations of positive politeness (Avoid –P). A different attitude is evident toward adversariality and flaming in the guidelines for the female- and the male-centered lists. SWIP and TESL make it clear that such behavior is not welcome on the lists in any form; SWIP makes it a matter of policy to 'be respectful and constructive rather than agonistic in our discussions,' and the TESL guidelines state: 'If you find something posted on the net objectionable, you have every right to voice your objections . . . but not in public.' In contrast, POLITICS, CuD, and the e-mail guidelines all proscribe flaming in ways that explicitly or implicitly authorize public disagreement. Thus POLITICS prohibits 'flames of a personal nature,' but presumably allows for flames of a nonpersonal nature (e.g., of another

18 These percentages are rough estimates calculated from counting unambiguously female and male names on publicly available lists of subscribers to each discussion list. Gender-ambiguous names, organizations, and distribution lists (which typically comprise 10–15% of subscribers to any given list) are then excluded, and the percentages of women and men calculated out of 100%. Thus, if a list has 17% female subscribers, 83% of the subscribers are male. Since subscription is not necessary to read Usenet newsgroups or to send e-mail, comparable figures are not available for the two sets of global guidelines.

participant's views), and explicitly advocates 'argument.' Similarly, Shapiro and Anderson's e-mail guidelines decry 'insult[ing] or criticiz[ing] third parties without giving them a chance to respond,' although if one gives them a chance to respond—which in most electronic forums is automatic if the criticized party reads the forum—insults and criticism are presumably acceptable(!). Finally, CuD discourages 'ad hominem attacks or personal squabbles,' but describes itself as 'a forum for opposing points of view' and stresses 'reasoned debate.' These distinctions are consistent with the distinction made by male survey respondents between 'hostile' adversariality and 'rational' adversariality: The former is to be avoided, while the latter is held up as the ideal for Net interaction.

What, then, of the global guidelines, those that supposedly apply to all three million users and four thousand-plus newsgroups of the Usenet, and those that apply to sending electronic mail in general? The Usenet guidelines (Horton and Spafford 1993; Salzenberg and Spafford 1993) are compatible with a male rather than a female or conservative interactional ethic: They value anarchy as desirable and conflict as inevitable, as can be seen in the statement about 'social skill' given as an example of A/A norms above. They also include, under the heading 'Words to live by,' the following statement:

> Anarchy means having to put up with things that really piss you off. (Salzenberg and Spafford 1993)

The interactional norm assumed in these statements is one of threat, conflict, and control of one's hostile or violent reactions (defined as 'social skill'). While this may represent the reality of online interaction for many men, it is not a comfortable scenario for those whose value system emphasizes harmonious and supportive interaction, and no doubt accounts for why participation on Usenet is overwhelmingly male.[19]

Finally, as if this were not potentially alienating enough to female users, the Usenet guidelines also actively discourage appreciative and supportive postings in the name of reducing message volume:

> In aggregate, small savings in disk or CPU add up to a great deal. For instance, messages offering thanks, jibes, or congratulations will only need to be seen by the interested parties—send these by mail rather than posting them. The same goes for simple questions, and especially for any form of 'me too' posting. (Horton and Spafford 1993)

It is not hard to imagine that users with a supportive interactional style could feel uncomfortable participating in forums where exclusively supportive posts are not only not valued but are defined as violations of netiquette.

Shapiro and Anderson's print pamphlet, *Toward an Ethics and Etiquette for Electronic Mail* (1985), also gives an androcentric view. In addition to authorizing insults and criticisms (provided one gives the other party a chance to respond), the guidelines stress the undesirability of emotion in responding to e-mail ('avoid responding while emotional'; 'if a message generates emotion,

19 For a telling example of male domination even in a female-centered newsgroup, see Sutton 1994. According to one estimate, 95% of postings to the Net overall are from men (Sproull, cited in Ebben and Kramarae 1993); this percentage may be higher on the Usenet.

look again'), advocating instead 'self-control.' Consistent with other sets of guidelines with a male bias, there is no mention of appreciative, supportive, or relationship-building behaviors. It is important to recall that what I have characterized (for the sake of balancing my corpus) as 'male-centered' lists are ostensibly ungendered and open to all.[20] When we add to this the masculine orientation of global Net guidelines, the picture that emerges is one in which masculine norms of interaction constitute the default, the exception being in a few women-centered groups. These results not only support the claim that there are different value systems preferentially associated with male and female users, but further reveal gender bias in netiquette guidelines.

This bias is not limited to the particular sets of guidelines included in the present analysis, but can be found in the 'etiquette' section of almost any popular guide to using the Internet. Moreover, it is well on its way to becoming the unquestioned norm for cyberspace as a whole. Thus, a brand-new, attractively packaged paperback volume on netiquette (Shea 1994) advertises itself as 'the first and only book to offer the guidance that all users need to be perfectly polite online.' It has the following to say about flaming:

> Does Netiquette forbid flaming? Not at all. Flaming is a longstanding network tradition (and Netiquette never messes with tradition). Flames can be lots of fun, both to write and to read. And the recipients of flames sometimes deserve the heat. . . . Netiquette doesn't require you to stand idly by while other people spout offensive nonsense. (43, 78)

What Netiquette does forbid, according to Shea, is extended flame wars, which are 'an unfair monopolization of bandwidth.' In other words, agonism is more highly valued than positive face (it's fun; other people deserve it) and only becomes a problem if extended to the point that it violates negative face (monopolizes bandwidth). But what if the person flamed did not 'deserve' it? What if they merely expressed a view that someone else did not like, a feminist view, for example, in response to which they were treated to offensive sexist remarks? And what if, further, that person happens to operate from within an ethical system in which flaming is the ultimate online insult? In that case, according to the new guidelines, 'if you're a sensitive person, it may be best to avoid the many hang-outs of the politically incorrect' (78). Avoidance is, of course, one solution, but as one of the sources quoted in the book itself observes, '*Every* discussion list of which I have been a part—no matter what its subject—has fallen victim to such ills—a few have gone down in e-flames. The pattern is absolutely consistent' (73). Should people with a positive politeness-based communication ethic avoid all discussion lists then? When we consider that the positive politeness ethic is associated predominantly with women, the adverse implications for women's use of the Net become uncomfortably clear: As one contributor to CuD put it, 'if you can't stand the heat, ladies, then get out of the kitchen' (quoted in Taylor and Kramarae, forthcoming, 4). In effect, a proflaming netiquette implicitly sanctions the domination of Net discourse by a minority of men.

20 We do not have, for example, a list for the Society for Men in Philosophy (SMiP) corresponding to the SWIP list; the men's list is simply called PHILOSOP (Philosophy).

Discussion

In this paper, I have argued that, contrary to the assumption that CMC neutralizes indications of gender, there are gender differences in public discourse on the Internet. Moreover, these differences are not randomly distributed across individuals, but rather display a systematic pattern of distribution with male users as a group tending toward more adversarial behavior and female users as a group tending toward more attenuated and supportive behaviors. I further submit that these systematic behaviors correspond to two distinctive systems of values each of which can be characterized in positive terms: One considers individual freedom to be the highest good, and the other idealizes harmonious interpersonal interaction.

As with all ideologies, however, these value systems also serve to rationalize less noble behaviors. Thus, adversarial participants justify intimidation of others and excessive use of bandwidth with rhetoric about freedom, openness, and intellectual vigor, and attenuated participants justify flattery, indirectness, and deference to others (and perhaps silence) in terms of ideals of care and consideration. Given that members of the former population are mostly men and members of the latter population mostly women (and, in some cases, male students), the value systems can be seen to reproduce male dominance and female (and other less powerful individuals') submission. They provide a mechanism by which these behaviors can be understood in a favorable, face-saving light by those who engage in them, and thereby facilitate their unquestioned continuation. This arrangement, in which both genders are complicit, is in one sense highly adaptive: It allows people to continue to operate within an oppressive power arrangement that might otherwise make them feel intolerably guilty or angry, depending on the role they play. But from a standpoint that affirms gender equality, a standpoint implicit in proponents' original claim that computer networks would neutralize gender differences, dominance and submission patterns on the Net are disadvantageous to women (as well as to nonadversarial men), and therefore it is important that they be recognized and questioned.

Gendered arrangements of values perpetuate dominance even in cases where no intimidation is intended. The same behavior—for example, directly criticizing another participant—is susceptible to different interpretations under an anarchic/agonistic system, as opposed to a politeness system. As a consequence, cyberspace may be perceived as more hostile and less hospitable by women than by men, thus discouraging female participation. There is no simple solution to this problem, since to require women to understand adversariality differently is to place all the burden for change on the less powerful group, and to prohibit direct criticism, or to require that criticism be attenuated, is to impose what would be seen from the anarchic perspective as unreasonable restrictions on freedom of speech. Nevertheless, this is an issue that must be addressed if the dominant adversarial culture in cyberspace is not to marginalize women by rendering them largely silent in mixed-sex forums or by limiting their active participation to women-centered groups, as is currently the case.

Even women-centered groups are not free from adversarial incursion. Some men are resentful of the existence of women-only groups and attempt to infiltrate their ranks by presenting themselves as women. One male

contributor to CuD offers the following tips to 'she-males,' men who impersonate women to gain access to women-only forums:

> The lesbian channels are hilarious, where the women ask you questions that the men 'couldn't possibly' know the answers to, like the small print on a packet of tampons. Also you have to string off a list of very right-on lesbian-friendly music that you're supposed to like . . . They seem to think this will keep the she-males out. Bwahahaha!

Even when gender imposters are exposed, however, it is difficult to exclude them, since they can always present themselves again from a different account under a different name. Partly for this reason, women-centered lists such as WOMEN and SWIP do not restrict membership on the basis of gender but rather allow men to participate who are friendly to the purposes of the list. Inevitably, however, there arise incidents of adversariality involving men, some of whom are perhaps initially well-intentioned, while others clearly aim to be disruptive. Thus, within the past several months, SWIP adopted a moderated format and TESL is contemplating switching to a moderated format because of repeated contentious posts from a few men and the effects these had on the overall quality of the discourse.[21] Similarly, the GENDER hotline on COMSERVE was shut down in 1992 and reopened as a moderated forum after being taken over by several men who bombarded the list with misogynistic messages, until only a few hardcore subscribers remained. In each case, the female listowner who made the decision to restrict access became the target of angry messages from the offending men accusing her of 'heavy-handed tactics,' 'censorship,' and 'authoritarian expressions of power.' These cases illustrate that freedom of speech when combined with adversariality may effectively translate into freedom of speech only for the adversarial; some restrictions on free speech were necessary in these cases in order to preserve the common good.

In contrast, the anarchic solution of harassing (or ignoring) the offender until he desists requires a tolerance for adversariality—perhaps even extreme forms of adversariality—that may be anathema to participants who are offended by adversariality in the first place. This solution has also been spectacularly unsuccessful in two of the worst cases of recent abuse in cyberspace: the repeated, lengthy, cross-posted flames by several individuals on Turkish–Armenian hostilities, and the repeated 'spamming' of the Usenet with advertisements from a small law firm in Phoenix. The individuals responsible for these behaviors have been warned, flamed, and, by feats of technological adversariality, had their messages zapped by 'kill files' and intercepted

21 As of this writing, the TESL list is attempting to avoid shifting to a moderated format, but has instigated several new guidelines. Notable among these are limits on frequency of posting ('no more than 2 postings per day, 10 per week, per netter') and a proscription against 'baiting, goading, demeaning messages' and 'complaints about postings, the net, the way the net is run, etc.' As the listowner, Anthea Tillyer, explained in a recent post to the list (13 July 1994):

> No one is suggesting or advocating a humorlessly rigid and doctrinaire application of inflexible rules; the goal is to keep TESL-L on focus and to return it to its previous state of pleasant and cooperative collegiality. There will always be netters who enjoy a more abrasive and wide-ranging set of debates than we wish to see on TESL-L; and for those netters, we will continue to post news of other lists and netnews groups that suit other kinds of discourse. We hope that in this way we can serve all our members and at the same time keep TESL-L true to its stated focus and to the pleasant atmosphere that has characterized the list for most of its existence.

by electronic 'patriot missiles' before reaching their destination (Elmer-Dewitt 1994; Lewis 1994). Yet still they persist (fueled, no doubt, to new heights of determination by the challenge of holding out against their multiple adversaries). These are cases of anarchy taken to the extreme, anarchy that cannot be stopped by anarchic means. It is interesting in this regard to note that while male Usenet administrators continue to propose ever more violent forms of harassment in the law firm case, a female administrator, less encumbered by anarchic scruples, recently proposed partitioning the net in such a way that incidents of this sort would be impossible.[22] Whether or not such a solution is feasible is irrelevant here; the point is that it is a different kind of solution, one in the spirit of the actions of the women-centered list owners who limited the speech of a troublemaking minority in order to insure that the majority would still have a place to speak.

Conclusion

We have seen that the existence of gender differences in cyberspace has implications for the norms, demographics, and distribution of power on the Internet. I hope to have demonstrated that it is in the interests of those concerned with actualizing egalitarian ideals of CMC to recognize these differences—and their practical implications—for what they are. In particular, I hope to have pointed out that there are problems with an uncritical acceptance of the dominant anarchic/agonistic model as the ideal for CMC: Not only does it incorporate a male bias that marginalizes women, but it authorizes abuse that more generally threatens the common good.

That said, the description of gender differences presented here should not be taken as a prescription for difference, or a glorification of female ways of communicating and valuing to the exclusion of those of men. Both of the gendered extremes described here are just that: extremes. Ideally, citizens of cyberspace would cooperate in minimizing intimidation and abuses of others' resources; failing self-enforcement of this ideal, limits on extreme abuses would be imposed to preserve the 'virtual commons' as a resource for all (Kollock and Smith, forthcoming). Most interaction would fall ideally into a vast middle ground of self-regulated behavior, where free speech would be tempered by consideration for others and where politeness would not preclude the honest exchange of differing views. Ritual adversariality and ritual agreement would be replaced by mature, respectful, and dynamic joint exploration of ideas, leading to the creation of a Net society greater and wiser than the sum of its parts.

Whether such a Net society can in fact be achieved depends in part on our ability to set aside narrow self-interest in the pursuit of shared goals. It also depends on educating a critical mass of the Net population to recognize limiting gender stereotypes in all their manifestations; the present work is intended as a contribution toward this end. Finally, it requires exposing systems of rationalization that mask dominance and opportunistic abuse. At a minimum, freedom from blatant intimidation must be ensured if the

22 I am indebted to Arthur Hyun (personal communication) for this information, which is based on recent discussions on the Usenet group <news.admin.misc>.

majority of users are to have meaningful access to the communicative potential of the Internet, irrespective of gender.

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