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## WOMAN AND INTERNET: A PHILOSOPHICAL STUDY OF GENDER INEQUALITY BETWEEN MALE AND FEMALE

**Minakshi Das**

Research Scholar  
Department of Humanities & Social Sciences  
Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati Guwahati, Assam, India.

**Abstract:** The present study will mainly try to explore the position of a woman in our modern society, which is technologically so advanced and updated. It can be stated that technology is giving us a signal of a post human future without having the traditional limitations of time; space and quantity on the availability and openness of information and communication. But the most important point is that though our society is showing tremendous growth but from the ancient time to the present women in most cultures has had to face lots of challenges to prove their potentialities. Not only in the real world but also within the virtual world women have been neglected from decades. The most interesting example of the same can be found within the video games. Thus, the article will try to focus some issues like the above and will seek to provide the philosophical interpretation of body and how the body as well as the female body has been neglected from the earlier philosophical tradition and how the present phenomenological interpretations are trying to overcome those problems. Finally, the article will try to find out a solution of the given problems by following the feminist ethics as well as the computer ethics.

**Keyword:** Gender, Internet, Body, Video Game, Feminist Ethics, Computer Ethics.

### INTRODUCTION:

By the term 'gender' we generally mean two ways of referring humanity i.e. the masculinity and the femininity. The most important point in this regard is that we cannot use the words sex and gender for the same meaning. By 'sex' we generally refer biological attributes of human being while the word 'gender' is used to refer the cultural attributes, though they are related to the biological attribute but not equivocally. But the word 'gender' involves controversy at every point of our life. We live in a society where usually gender seems to stick more to women than men. In our society men and masculinity are supposed to be as the norm and where that norm is not often challenged. "From ancient times to the present, scientifically inclined women in most cultures have had to battle against the notion that any man, no matter how incompetent, must be more adept at things of the mind than any woman, no matter how brilliant. Indeed, women were often barred, sometimes by law, from even attempting to gain an education or have an independent career." (Lisa, 2008, p. xi) "Physical violence or legal proscriptions usually were not necessary to keep women out of science, however. Social sanctions were enough. Even most women accepted the idea of their own inferiority. For instance, the 19th-century British science popularizer Mary Somerville, who might have done original research under better circumstances, wrote that she had "perseverance and intelligence but no genius. . . . That spark from heaven is not granted to the [female] sex." (ibid) Even in very recent times women are treated as physically very weak and most of the American and European parents stop their education in order to save their life. They think that their daughters would not be able to handle the mental and the physical pressure caused by intellectual studies as men did. Even parents believed that "a strange person, a person that didn't belong to society . . . even

. . . a college professor." (cited in ibid) So, they wanted their daughter to be hooked with some particular tasks like maintaining their home, looking after their childrens etc. If anyone dares to cross that barrier then she would be demoralized as well as she would be discussed as 'unnatural' for her activities. Lots of people still believe that educating girl is nothing but just the waste of time money and energy. The belief that "women have a "natural sphere" has also affected their choices and opportunities within science, making it much harder for them to enter and advance in "men's" fields such as physics and engineering than in fields such as medical and biological research, which are seen as closer to women's expected role as healers and nurturers." (ibid, p. xii) Moreover, it is not very easy to get scientific education for women. In case of job also women could not be able to get a faculty position in universities very easily. "Around 1910, American mathematician Anna Pell Wheeler similarly wrote to a friend that in "good" universities, "there is such an objection to women that they prefer a man even if he is inferior both in training and in research.'" (ibid) Though, gradually the scenario has been changed but still we can see many more examples of the same. So, we have seen the picture very clearly, but, within the virtual world also woman has to face lots of difficulties. If we notice then it would be very clear that if a female openly declares her sex over internet, then almost immediately she receives attention from being hit on, asked for cyber sex, or outright attacked due to random pent up frustration. Unfortunately, the mistreatment of females online is something no one notices, or is considered just a joke. Therefore, the issue of how females are treated is something every Internet community has to deal with. My present study is also an attempt to understand and analyse various aspects related to the problem of gender inequality within the virtual world.

**2. GENDER AND ICT**

We live in a world which is technologically so advanced. They can be regarded as the symbol of progress. The archeological as well as the physical anthropological stories of human origin tells the fact that human beings as the users of machines are more superior than other species in the world. Technology has changed our world like anything. It has changed every aspects of our life; our environment, our relationships with others, the mode of governance, control etc. By creating substitutions of everything it has changed our lives. In short technology brings the whole world in our hands. It can be stated that technology is giving us a signal of a post human future without having the traditional limitations of time; space and quantity on the availability and openness of information and communication. Among the most recent developments in information & technology internet has occupied a major role as it connects the whole world in one thread. Through internet we can meet those peoples who live far away from us, we can interact with them; we can discuss our problems with them. So, in our increasingly global society, we are changing how we interact with others and our community, because online interaction is very different from face-to-face interaction. Thus, we are in a world which is highly mechanized and advanced. But the question always may come in one's mind that is this change for good or for worse? Are we running after something like mirage water? Consciously or unconsciously we keep redefining ourselves in diverse ways to become perfect as machines. Virtually, we can do almost anything and everything that we secretly wish for without taking any risk. The most discussed topic regarding the use of internet is the issue of privacy. So, it can be stated that internet has some sort of gender dimension as most cyberstalking victims are female and cyberstalkers are male. There have been several articles regarding this form of communication over the Internet which address specifically how women are treated online. "There is evidence to suggest that women, girls and children in general are most at risk from exploitation. Most individuals involved in Internet child pornography are men." (Cited in Adam, 2005, p. 104) In this regard Donna Haraway says: "We are now in a world constituted by what has called "the scary new networks [of] the informatics of domination [which mark] a movement from an organic, industrial society to a polymorphous, information society—from all work to all play, a deadly game." (Cited in *ibid*, p. 5) Moreover, we can see the gender inequalities regarding the use of Internet also. Studies have showed that there are less women internet users than men during the period of mid 1990, when technology first became accessible to general public. But, gradually the gender gap has been disappeared. Men and women have had similar overall rates of computer usage since at least 1993. But, the question of insecurity of a female internet user still exists in our society.

**3. INTERNET DATING AND WOMEN**

Now-a-days internet dating is a very common fact. Because of the advent of all the popular social sites people started to find their love and friends through internet. It may be very helpful and profitable for many people but at the same time it is like a curse for millions of other. "AUS

study, which surveyed women over a wider age range, found that there were a number of negative behaviours experienced by some of the women in the study including stalking, unwanted phone calls and letters." (Adam, 2005, p. 106) So, it can be stated that though internet is helping people to connect with their virtual friends and love at the same time it is also opening up thousand of new ways to victimize women. "A 'dangers of Internet dating' website ([www.dangersofinternetdating.com](http://www.dangersofinternetdating.com), consulted 18 August 2004) relays the perils of mail-order brides and net addiction, contains stories of women who were let down by men they met over the Internet and contains links to a number of stories of rape or murder, almost always relating to women or girls as victims, resulting from meetings arranged over the Internet." (*ibid*, p. 6-7)

Adam in this regard has cited an example of cyberstalking by mentioning about the experiences of Hitchcock who was an author of children's books. As a part of her professional carrier she wanted to connect with one online literary company named by Woodside Literary Agency. As soon as her request Woodside accepted her as their client and asked for a very heavy amount of money as fees. Then one doubt takes place in her mind regarding the legitimacy of the organization. Then she started to warn her fellow online writer friends regarding the issue. But Woodside has never responded any of the queries regarding any issue and Hitchcock used to be hardly the only critic of Woodside. But as a result of her revolt against Woodside, they started to spread some false news of her over various newspapers and internet. They have attacked her by spreading the most dangerous message that she is a pornographer and very shockingly those messages contain certain sexual invitations to contact her and to come to her house. But, Hitchcock was so fortunate that her friend helped her to overcome the situation and finally Woodside has been found guilty and a charge was filed against them.

As explained above now-a-days lots of such cases occupy the pages of newspapers very frequently. Sometimes the perpetrator used to be a group of people and sometimes the other. Whoever they are but their main intention is to harass the woman sexually. The most important point in this regard is that the issue of privacy is generally connected with the females of our society. Though we cannot deny the fact that sometimes men are also harassed sexually but the numbers of female victims are usually very high than the male victims. Internet has become the most popular way of taking revenges in modern time, because in the real world it is not very easy to assault a person. But, through internet even if we have a very little information of the victim then also we can do any sexual harassment to her.

**4. GENDER INEQUALITIES IN VIDEO GAMES:**

Because of the hurried development of ICT, now a day's video games have started to receive lots of popularities among different age groups of our society. Along with the others it is mostly popular among the childrens. In today's world a children cannot grown up without computer games though s/he can without their friends. As a result the computer game industry is a billion dollar business at the present time. But lots of sociological as well as

psychological studies are showing a very serious issue regarding the computer games. Those studies are saying that girls and women are less interested, they even do not have much knowledge regarding those games and used to play less frequently and for a very shorter period of time than the boys and young men. It is a fact that the majority of characters in those video games are male and at the same time they do not represent the females. Most video games are focused toward being masculine and able to conquer everything. In this regard it would be more relevant to mention that whenever we used to type the keywords like "Female video games" into goggle search then we will receive some sex related pictures. Females are generally represented as "sex-objects" in various video games mainly through clothing. But at the same time males are portrayed more likely to be heroes and main characters, who use more weapons, have more abilities, and are more muscular and powerful and sometimes they used to rescue the females from dangers. Again, the most hazardous issue regarding video game is that it always involves violence. In this regard Hartmann & Klimmt, 2006, in their article Gender and Computer Games: Exploring Females' Dislikes maintain that "Research on media genre preference has demonstrated that males are more interested in violent environment than females are. Female tends to display a very low preference for observing and participating in conflicts and their resolutions through violence and find non-violent environment, such as comedy or sad films, more attractive." (p. 3-4) So, if we see in the market then we will be able to find more violent video games than others. The main reason behind this is that most of the designers of those video games are male. So, while they design those games they mainly concentrate on the interest of the males than females. Moreover, the lacking of social interaction within the video games is also the most important reason behind the less female players of video games. But, gradually the female players are increasing but still we cannot compare both. So, from the discussion it can be stated that in today's world video game cannot be regarded just as the medium of entertainment but day-by-day knowingly or unknowingly it is occupying a major part in our life and also becoming a form of art. Therefore, the video games should be like that which can appeal to both genders and the game developers should keep that point in their mind when they make video games.

But the most awaiting question in this regard is that why only females have to face such type of situations? If we see then it would be clear that from the very ancient time female's body has been used to exploit her in the society. We live in a world where men are regarded as superior than women mainly because of their physical or biological structures. Because of her biological body our society believes that she should be protected and covered up. Body has been regarded as the unnecessary part of human existence and which has been equalized with the female members of our society. So, a philosophical discussion in this regard is much required which can show us the scenario from the very beginning.

#### **5. PHILOSOPHICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE BODY:**

If we notice then it will be clear that the problems of privacy, hacking etc are those problems which generally involve the body. Even in the history of philosophy body has been regarded as something which is inconsequential as well as negligible. If somebody asks the reason behind this acceptance then we should realize that our ever existing socialized process is responsible for this, which regards body as vulnerable, as the symbol of sexual abuses. Both male and female possess body but female body is regarded as weaker than man. Whom we can blame for this inequality? Definitely our mindsets are responsible for this. Our socialized system is responsible for that which regarded body as something which can be wrapped, abused and assaulted.

In Western philosophy we can find the tendency of associating body or the bodily matters primarily with women rather than men. Moreover, they try to relate mind and rationality with masculinity and body and irrationality with femininity. According to them, reason anchorages itself within the mind and regarded superior to emotion, feelings and body because emotion is off-putting. From the time of Plato, the tendency of underestimating the body has been taking place in philosophy. When he establishes the fact that we can know the Forms through our mind alone and which is the only reality and we must get rid of our body in order to grasp the truth. After that the same tradition continues when Rene Descartes establishes his famous dictum "I think therefore I exist" by 'I' Descartes only means the mind the thinking thing. To explain very briefly if we see the Cartesian concept of a person than it would be clear that for Descartes the existence of a person depends hardly on his/her body. According to him, Bardo, writes that "As regards gender, the philosophical identification of women with the bodily arena of unreason provides a powerful "argument" for keeping women in their "material" place, excluded from those activities seen as requiring rationality and objectivity. Instead they are relegated to activities of which the man of reason wishes to have no part: the mundane care of the body, food preparation, the management of everyday dirt and disorder, and so forth." (Bardo, 1999, p. 11) Bardo also explains the very fact that how Descartes's philosophy gives privilege to males compare to females. Therefore, Princess Elizabeth, who was close to Descartes, complains him by saying that "...the responsibilities of her household did not allow the time or concentration for the philosophical meditations that Descartes recommends to her." (ibid) In this regard Clarke, Stanley points out that Descartes's dualism between mind and body ignores the traditional life of woman as negligible. But Descartes himself had never addressed the issue of gender in any of his writing. Descartes writes that to get the manlike power a woman should cancel out their bodies. Not only Descartes but philosophers like Plato, Hegel maintain the fact that "...a woman almost cannot do otherwise than develop a preoccupation with her body, since that body has made her the negative other of culture." (Heywood, 1999, p. 273) According to them, a woman should be able to defend herself by saying that she is not her body as body is deceiving and destructive. Moreover, if she cannot defend herself like that then she would be definitely lacking the subjectivity which she could have possessed but

now it is not possible for her to possess at all. So, according to Descartes's position reason is present in both male and female but that reason should be embodied. Like the same way Kant maintains the fact that moral agent cannot have the physical body as it is constituted out of pure reason. So, philosophers from the very early period tried to avoid body as important part of one's existence and accepted mind or pure reason as something real. But if we notice then it will be clear that a woman cannot leave her body behind. Though Descartes said that his cogito is gender free but a serious study will show that a woman cannot leave her household works, she has to look after her family; she cannot avoid her bodyliness, therefore as an existing human person she always carries her body along with her mind. Body is that part of our existence where the subjectivity and the objectivity meet. If we accept the philosophical distinction between mind and body and ignore our body then we would not be able to know anything which exists outside of the world as whatever we come to know not only because of our mind but also because of the interaction that takes place between our body and the external realm. But with the phenomenological tradition in philosophy a change takes place regarding the concept of body. Maurice Merleau Ponty in his book called Phenomenology of Perception describes, "Because we use bodily perception to understand the space around us, how we perceive things thusly affects how we use and dwell in space and how we perform as humans in the world...as subjects we must always incorporate and synthesize our actual view of the world itself. We are always in motion and always occupying space, and we must not accept that taking up of space as a way of knowing; instead, we occupy space and move through time so that we may gain access to knowledge through this crucial interaction with what Merleau-Ponty above calls "other points" of view." (Canode, 2002, p. 32) Merleau Ponty states that we can understand a thing or the movement of something only after when body has understood it. Thus, Merleau Ponty tries to overcome the earlier philosophical inequalities with his theories. But, later he has been criticized vehemently because of his various writings regarding sexuality, body-subject etc. The present writing does not have any intention to show Merleau Ponty's conceptions regarding gender but to show how he tries to overcome the earlier philosophical inequalities regarding body.

#### 6. CONCLUSION: TOWARDS A BETTER SOLUTION.

It is a well known fact that ICT has changed many aspects of human endeavor and subsistence and the process is still going on without any exception. This is a truth which is beyond dispute for most. But still there are a lot more for dispute. There are lots of reasons of these disputes in which one can conceptualize and interpret the information technology/society interrelationship. We basically the human beings are technology dependent. Today online community plays most important role in our lives and we do socialize in a virtual environment. As a result tons of new challenges and problems started to happen in our society. That is why, we strictly need a new ethics which can offer technological solutions to all our problems, including moral ones and which at the same time is confident. If we try to find

out the solutions of the current problems through the traditional ethics then we would not be able to find anything as one cannot easily address value questions from a deontological Kantian perspective that will always keep room for centrality of human agent to guide the direction of technology. The use of computers in different areas in our daily lives, lead us to several ethical issues and dilemmas. Various professional scientists and philosophers are trying to resolve those problems but many of these issues are so new and complicated that conformist laws and rules are unable to interpret and resolve them. Therefore to address those problems we need a new ethics in order to judge the new reality of our disembodied being in cyberspace. As a result "computer ethics" has been aroused in response to the apparently new social and ethical dilemmas that have resulted from the widespread adoption of information and communication technologies. As a discipline computer ethics came to exist in the mid of 1940s. The founder of this new philosophical field was the American scholar Norbert Wiener, a professor of mathematics and engineering at MIT. As already explained now-a-days we continue to depend on machines that do think on our behalf therefore the value questions remain unanswered. As a discipline computer ethics mainly tries to address those value questions. The computer ethical concern includes various issues as there is growing public interest in such areas as computer viruses, the dangers of the internet for children as well as for women and at times, internet romances, hacking and computer fraud etc. So the prime ethical concern has remained how best to address issues related to computer crimes from every location in the world. Computer ethics tries to address these issues.

At the same time, if we notice then we will be able to see the major developments in feminist ethics over the last two decades. This newly developed area can be regarded as important as computer ethics and even can be regarded as more important on the theoretical front in terms of overall contribution to philosophical ethics. In this regard a very interesting quotation by Adam is as follows "It also seems to me vitally important that we find ways of bringing feminist scholarship to mainstream audience otherwise feminist writers will remain, forever, talking to themselves. Imagine another logo. This time we will have a 'toilet door' man and he is holding an appropriately recognizable symbol of masculinity, let's say an electric drill. He is enclosed in a red roundel with a diagonal red strip across. The accompanying logo reads: 'Feminism. It's not for boys!' This is not a logo I would like. In this study, at least, I hope to show that feminism is for boys as much as it is for girls." (Adam, 2005, p. 5) Feminist ethics, with other relevant aspects of feminist theory, applied to computer ethics promises a novel and prolific substitute to current direction in computer ethics. As "Feminist ethics embrace attempts to rethink and revise the facets of traditional ethics which devalue the moral experience of women. Arguing that traditional ethics fails women in that it regards their experiences as uninteresting, at the same time it overemphasizes traditional masculine ways of ethical reasoning which look to individual, rationalistic, rule-based ethical models. In developing various women centered approaches to ethics the overall aim of feminist

ethics is to create a gender-equal ethics, a moral theory that generates non-sexist moral principles, policies and practices.” (Cited in Adam & Green, 2005 p. 167) It is very worth mentioning that feminist ethical theories offer alternative readings of computer ethical problems. As feminist ethics tries to maintain the fact that “...feminist ethics holds much promise both in forming alternative analysis of computer ethics problems and in offering a more collectivist vector for computer ethics theory” (ibid, p. 175) So, it can be concluded by saying that though feminist ethics has afforded lots of materials in order to provide a better solution regarding the issue of gender inequality at the same time we also need computer ethics to civilize people regarding the use of internet. But, of course, the feminist ethics addresses the issue of gender inequality like no other at the present scenario but still the study will recommend to follow both type of ethics to get a better solution and a peaceful society.

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**Minakshi Das**

Research Scholar Department of Humanities & Social Sciences  
Indian Institute of Technology Guwahati  
Guwahati, Assam, India.

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