



A Technology Named Desire.

Changing perspectives on the co-production of
gender and ICT

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A moving target?

- Gender and ICT as a research topic has changed to some extent in step with the way ICT has changed, perhaps not so much with regard to gender?
- This talk will discuss some of these changes, with an emphasis on the issue of utility vs. pleasure vs. desire

Back to the 1980s

- Women and computers as an issue of office work and office automation
 - Would women be replaced by computers?
- 'Upstream': Men's dominance in higher education in computer science
 - Differential treatment (MIT report)
 - Masculine computer science due to the influence from mathematics and military interests
 - More women if computer science was moved to Humanities and Social Science faculties?
- Approaching 1990: An intellectual shift from emphasizing discrimination and the lock-in of the sexual division of labour and the use of computers to the inkling that computers might be women-unfriendly due to the symbolic properties

The hacker pest: Killing enthusiasm through utility

- Computers were serious business, but could it offer pleasure? (Sally Hacker, Sherry Turkle)
- The steady movement of computers into everybody's home: Facilitated the entry of the hackers or nerds
- Hackers or nerds marked the computer as non-feminine or masculine – how could that be remedied?
- A new discourse about computers and young people: too playful boys, serious and level-headed girls
- Aim: exorcise playfulness with respect to computers. Pleasure and playfulness had become a problem.
- In terms of approaches: Increasing popularity of symbolic explanations. Enter: the idea of computers as 'gender in-authentic'
- Successful educational policy: Computing became boring!

The (re)discovery of pleasure

- Into the 21st century: Speed and graphics and broadband. NB! Online computer games, downloading and chatting
- Three genders: women, nerds and men
- Allowing for play and pleasure?
 - The struggle with binaries like toy vs. Tool
- The problem with stereotypes
- Desire as composite and heterogeneous

Desire at work

- A widespread image: The ICT industry as a chilly place for women
- Alternative images
 - Prizes for family friendliness
 - Meiksins and Whalley: Increasing varieties of employment modes
 - McKinney et al. Fairly equal reports
 - Lagesen et al. Widespread and shared desire to be useful
- A need to correct the image?

Thinking from desire

- Transgressing the protestant ethic
- Three suggestions:
 - Improved quality
 - Changing the discourse to get rid of binaries and stereotypes
 - Care is needed to work from desire in schools