Preface

We, the editors of this book, went to high school together, and were it not for the internet, may never have reconnected. Sure enough, through the joys of Facebook, we contacted one another and remained social media friends for years prior to collaborating on our first paper. Both academic researchers, it seemed to be both relevant and enjoyable to connect. Our first co-authored paper, was, of course, about women online. Specifically we first researched mothers online, having a total of six children between us, but since then have explored a variety of topics.

In this edited collection, numerous stories are told. Some are more personal, some reveal contemporary research and some provide exciting observations about the internet and how gender plays out online. The research provided is academic research, double blind peer reviewed.

Prior to launching into the research, however, we thought we’d share our personal stories about being women online…

Figure 1.
REBECCA’S STORY

When I started using a computer, online was not something we knew of. My earliest memory of a computer was at my aunt’s house. Her two boys had a Commodore 64 and I would type lines and lines of text for hours and hours, mostly because once you got to the end of the screen, it would ‘reset’ and all your words would be gone. It was a kind of guilt free, secret squirrel journal that was as impermanent as a teenager’s feelings.

I chose typing in high school because my parents said that typing would be better than French and frankly, far more practical. In the early days, I learned on a manual typewriter, and now have the strongest little fingers you can imagine, but it soon became computer screens with Mavis Beacon Typing Tutors on it. I remember, as Raechel recounts below, being allowed to play Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego when I was in Year 6 on one of the three machines (the old Macs with the disconcertingly aged looking yellow/orange plastic and the not-quite-blue screens) that the school had bought. I will never forget the practical issues of changing 5 ¼” floppy disks whenever she went to a different country. But which country was she in?

My parents borrowed a computer off a friend who wanted us to mind it for him while he went on an overseas trip in the very late 1980s. The night we went to collect it, his daughter was practicing for a recital playing Memory from the Andrew Lloyd Webber classic, Cats on piano. It seemed bizarrely poignant at that time, and it is a memory I’ll never get past. Nor will I forget unpacking our first computer, a Gateway computer in the iconic jersey cow print box. It is forever in my mind along with the tunes to Tapper and Alley Cat.

Gender has always been an interesting element of my relationship with computing technology. Whether it was my parents allowing my brother to use the computer to play Dune (over and over and over again with the “We’re mining for spice”), even though it was surely my turn. Or it was the suggestion that girls don’t code so just do typing Rebecca and don’t try to do ICT. Or, perhaps, it was the smell of the computer labs at my university during undergraduate study. The labs were always filled in the mid-1990s with spotty boys who smelled of zit cream and unwashed shirts.

Now, it would seem that the gendered nature of technology, well, certain types of technology, has changed and shifted. Whether it’s Pintrest and Instagram which, as Chapter 12 points out, has an overwhelmingly female uptake. Or, if it’s the use of Facebook to connect mothers whose work is marginalized and disenfranchised as I discuss in my own chapter (Chapter 7). Similarly, Chapter 5 discusses how women are able to use blogs to overcome disadvantage. Men still feature, including Chapter 9 where particular fundraising for health campaigns are targeted at a male audience.

There are interesting ideas and stories told in these chapters. Some of them will have personal resonances outside of their importance for theorizing the relationship between gender and the uptake and use of new online technology. It will be interesting to see how the next 20 years affects the use of online technologies. I am certain that the spotty boys in the computer labs at university will still be there, but what they’re looking at is open for anyone’s guess.
RAECHEL’S STORY

Dad brought home the first computer I used in the early 80s. Big and clunky, I was immediately enthralled. Similarly, a friend showed me her Apple and we spent hours playing ‘Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego’?

I soon got the game ‘Decathlon’, and I spent the late 80s using a couple of keys on the keyboard to get my little stick athlete over hurdles, or sprinting around a white running field on a black background. I couldn’t have been more excited. Computers opened a fascinating world for me, a little Australian tomboy who loved nothing more than finding something new. I quickly learnt that people were scared of computers, but I found them thrilling. There was nothing I wouldn’t try. An avid writer, I used to write stories on the computer – it sped up my process. We then got a Dot Matrix printer – my heart would pound with excitement as the printer buzzed and my letters dotted across the paper. I would pull off the perforated edges and smile proudly at my work. My assignments were done by creating big titles in a graphics program which I would literally cut and paste on to the document. Everyone else had fonts the same size, but I had a jumbo sized heading, albeit glued on to the page. I had always had pen pals, but suddenly I could send them typed letters, rather than handwritten letters. It was the kind of life I could never have imagined.

Surely life couldn’t get much better.

Oh, but it did. In the mid 90s I had started university, studying a business degree. I majored in marketing, and we had to go to the computer labs to use the internet. I had, of course, heard all about the internet, but had never actually used the beast. During a subject, we had to find online retailers and write a report about our findings. Again, I was enthralled.

Dad to the rescue, again. He got a family internet account, with a shared email address. Because he had the internet at work, he never used the email address, and so I signed up to various sites and somehow made friends. The penpals of the 80s long forgotten and instead online friends were found, mostly male. I loved the immediacy of emailing a friend, and having them respond the next day, or, if you were lucky, the same day. Friendships were stronger through the internet because you were free to reveal yourself in a way that penpal relationships and face to face relationships did not give you.

I realized there was a space for participating online, and so I set about creating my own site, ‘Beatnick Bizarre’. I had used the title from a magazine I had created for a high school assignment. I got plenty of followers, and so later registered my first domain name, www.dynamicgirl.com - the site is no longer mine, so I hold no responsibility for what you may find today!

I took photographs of my friends and sisters, and created a black and white banner, with their images. Dynamicgirl was an online ‘zine’ for the modern girl. It wasn’t girly, though. What I particularly loved about the internet was the gender was irrelevant. Having gone to an all girls’ school, I grew up feeling that there were expectations for girls, and I loved that the internet provided us with the ability to be free of any gender norms, particularly in the mid 90s, when it was mostly men online. Therefore in some ways, it was surprising that DynamicGirl had such a gender focus, but I suppose it was my way of carving out a space for like minded females.

All in all, I wanted to create online. I often wonder if I was young today, with all the Facebook games and things to read, TV shows to download, whether I’d be bothered adding to the clutter, or simply passively reading and watching what was created by others.
My first academic journal paper was written while I was studying my undergraduate degree. My lecturer asked me if I’d be willing to submit my assignment to the journal he was an editor of, and I did. The topic, of course, was about the internet and I now had an appetite for academia. During my first degree, I started working in retail marketing and I was frustrated that I couldn’t get the organization to go online. By the time I’d finished my marketing degree and started working for my father’s IT business, I was so passionate about the internet that I started a Masters in Internet Marketing. I soon was offered a job working for an internet company, and I was thrilled to be working in my field. I returned to the IT services field as the internet was increasingly becoming important there. Over time, however, I switched my focus to academia and became an academic, completing my PhD in an internet related marketing topic.

When I moved interstate for my current job, I started a blog, so friends and family could connect with me. Over time I gained new friends through the use of the internet, many of whom I have met face to face after years of ‘chatting’. When I ‘came out’, I first explored information online and felt part of an LGBTIQ community through the internet, a community I found lacking otherwise. And when I became a parent, I explored information online to gain some understanding of raising children, something I’d never given a great deal of thought to.

To be honest, in some ways I miss the simple days of the internet. When the users of the internet were a small community of passionate, engaged people. The buzzing sound of the modem connecting became almost addictive to me. I craved it, and when I hear that sound, in movies or whatever, I smile a little. Ah, the anticipation. That wait for the internet to connect is something my children will never understand in the modern world. Already the internet has made me feel so old, like my parents discussing life without television or other modern conveniences.

Today, I use the internet for everything, and increasingly most people do. Perhaps the biggest development along the way has been social media and the way that we utilize social media to interact with our friends, and with businesses. As a marketer, I’ve watched as organisations have had to switch from carefully planned, strategic communications to ‘chatting’ with their customers. I’ve watched as customers have struggled with the use of internet enabled self-services. And, over time, the use of the internet has become ‘normalised’. In other words, well educated males are not using the internet predominately – everyone is using it, from grandparents to children, males to females, professionals to students. Web spaces have adapted as the users have grown, and changed in profile. Perhaps, as a consequence, increasingly segmentation is happening, including segmentation on gender aspects. This book seeks to explore the way gender is played out online.

I’ve enjoyed reading the variety of chapters included in this book and I’m sure you will, too. And if anyone has a copy of the game Decathlon, please send it my way!

These stories bring us back to the context of this book and its importance in exploring what is happening now in technology and the relationship between technology and gender.

GENDER CONSIDERATIONS IN ONLINE CONSUMPTION
BEHAVIOR AND INTERNET USE

This book sits in a space between notions of gender and sociological, psychological and behavioural relationship with behaviour. These ideas about gender proscribe behavioural characteristics to the identity discourses constructed by people’s association with gendered notions. It also sits within a conceptual framework of consumption and purchasing choices as these choices are mediated in online spaces.
In this book, consumption is widely characterized. From women consuming messages about, and ultimately constructing themselves as, jihadi brides through radical social media messages (see Chapter One by Robyn Torok) to men’s online campaigns to raise awareness of health issues (see Chapter nine by Kristyn A Jackson). It spans topics as diverse as tourism (Chapter two by Naomi F Dale), pre-service teachers (Chapter four by Melissa Kelly and Anita Jetnikoff) and health (Chapter ten by Rebecca English, Shaun Nykvist and Matthew Reeves). It deals with issues faced interculturally in Australia (see Chapter six by Matthew Reeves), the USA (see Chapter twelve by Kenneth C. C. Yang and Yowei Kang), Indonesia (see Chapter thirteen by Ariane Juliana Utomo) and Central Asia (see Chapter fourteen by Carlos Alberto Ochoa Ortiz Zezatti).

As such, this book will be a useful tool for researchers working in diverse fields and domains. It will serve researchers on the front lines of research into any number of areas whose concern is the interaction of gender and the uptake of technology.

Chapter one, *The Online Feminine Mystique: Developing a Research Agenda for Women’s Use of Social Media* by Johns, MacKrell, Dale and Dewan explores the changing nature of engagement with online spaces over time, arguing an increasing ‘feminisation’ of the internet due to women’s take up of social media. Using a theoretical lens that can account for the conditioning of women in careers, lifestyles and general technology use, the authors then analyse industry based data to understand how women are utilizing technology.

Chapter two, *Gender and Other Factors That Influence Tourism Preferences*, examines the technological factors that interact with broad models of consumer behaviour to influence how travellers choose destinations. In this chapter, Dale argues the current models (economic or otherwise) focus on individuals and their decision making process without a combined consideration of information search and technology gendered preferences and the impact they have on choosing a destination for a vacation.

Chapter three by Noguti, Singh and Waller titled *Gender Differences in Motivations to Use Social Networking Sites* explores how social media sites are taken up by different genders. Focusing on Facebook, due to its ubiquiteness, the authors analyse data collected in a survey of Australian university students. They find female, more so than male, university students in their study are more likely to seek information on Facebook and thus, they engage positively with the site.

In chapter four, Kelly and Jetnikoff use a qualitative case study of nine male and female pre-service English teachers’ in Australia. They explore their preparedness to mentor their students in schools as teachers toward positive digital conduct in Social network sites (SNS). Using theories of identity, performativity, customisation and critical literacy, the authors find the ways in which “normalised” and naturalised representations of femininity on SNS were judged more harshly than masculine representations.

Coleman, in chapter five, discusses how groups use blogs to overcome disadvantage. It focuses on poverty, at those who identify as LGBTIQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer) and women. The chapter, titled Blogging their way out of disadvantage, looks at the ways that human rights bloggers have used Web 2.0 platforms to express themselves. It then applies Foucault’s work on self-expression to other groups who are also heavy users of blogs to express themselves in new ways.

Chapter six by Reeves examines the ways that schools can use technology to improve engagement. The chapter, Social Media: It can play a role in education, looks at the various formats in which the tool can be used and how it can enhance the learning experience of all students. The chapter analyses the ability for social media to act as a communication channel as well as and educational interface where every
students can learn through their peers and through their educator. The chapter, however, does not take a purely rosy view of technology and its impact on education, exploring how cyberbullying, and schools’ failure to properly implement technology, can have a negative impact on their students’ experiences.

English, in chapter seven, looks at how mothers in the home education community are using Web 2.0 to create communities of practice. These parents, who are marginalised, can use Web 2.0 tools to enhance their connection with parents who are like minded, and are able to create a virtual ‘school gate’ for themselves. The chapter, Techno Teacher Moms: Web 2.0 Connecting Mothers in the Home Education Community, explores how through these groups that parents, in relation to schooling it is especially mothers, are able to ask for advice, to vent, to explore options and find connections that may be lacking in the wider community. However, as with Reeves’ chapter above, the view is not entirely rosy, with the chapter exploring how policing and management occurs in these communities, and the punishments for transgressions.

In chapter eight, Increasing Value of a Tangible Product through Intangible Attributes: Value Co-Creation and Brand Building within Online Communities – Virtual Communities and Value, Johns explores the increasing importance of the concept of value co-creation in the marketing literature. Using the case study of the Thermomix community, and its online connections, the author argues the connection between value and virtual communities arguing that value co-creation within online communities can targeted predominately at women, especially in the case study chosen.

Chapter nine, by Jackson titled How Movember’s Online Community Influences Australia’s Men’s Health Debate, explores the negative impact of hegemonic masculinity negatively on the recognised global male health treatment gap. Using the case study of the Movember Australia health campaign, a global NPO dedicated to raising awareness of and funds for male health illness, the author utilises the principles of value co-creation and applies these theories to the analysis of the online campaign to promote conversation around men’s health in Australia. The author investigates Movember’s facilitation of online community conversation, engagement and its utilisation of hegemonic masculinity to promote online male solidarity and resultant health conversation.

In chapter ten, Nykvist, English and Reeves explore the online anti-vaccination community. It examines the role of social media in the information search by families who are looking for an ‘informed choice’ by seeking out the blogs of anti-vaccination activists in that supposed search for ‘truth’. This chapter investigates the other side in light of the growing adoption and reliance on social media as a source of anti-vaccine information. The authors adopt a qualitative approach to data collection, using a critical discourse analysis of online social media discourse. The findings demonstrate the valuable contribution this approach can make to public policy work in vaccination.

Torok, in chapter eleven, looks at the female role in online social media forums and how they continually change and reflect the global social and political context. The author argues these women are active online in terms of recruitment. Using two case studies focusing on the roles of women as wives and warriors and the changing dynamic between the two roles, the author argues women demonstrate a high level of gender utility and can change roles as required by the security and political context. Thus, their engagement is different from men.

In chapter twelve, Yang and Kang look at the growing importance of the Hispanic dollar, estimated to reach $1.5 trillion by 2015. Using qualitative in-depth interview data analysed using Technology Acceptance Modeling (TAM) and TAM2 as theoretical lenses, the authors argue useful data can be
Preface

found. The chapter, *Exploring Female Hispanic Consumers’ Adoption of Mobile Social Media in the U.S.*, contains four major themes from the analysis. These themes are 1) family and peer influence; 2) perceived functional benefits of mobile social media; 3) Latinas as a primary decision-maker to adopt; 4) cultural and sub-cultural influence.

*Online Sisterhood: Women, Income Generation, and Online Social Capital in Urban Indonesia*, chapter thirteen, explores the role of social networks and social capital in facilitating women’s access to income in developing countries. Using the case study of Indonesia, Utomo argues Social Media Sites (SNS) can be an effective medium of trade in urbanised developing countries, in this chapter it is Indonesia. Using qualitative interviews, the author finds there is a positive role for social networks and social capital in facilitating women’s access to income however, as with other chapters, the situation isn’t always clear cut. The effectiveness of the link between SNS and income-generating social capital depends largely on the class, gender, and cultural specificities that shape the nature of online and offline social interactions of the group.

The book shows the multiple and competing ways that gender can be considered in relation to online consumption behaviour and internet use. As can be seen from the chapters introduced above, the concepts of behaviour and internet use are widely applied and thus, the book makes an important contribution to the field. Its bringing together of different research fields, research agendas and theoretical and methodological approaches make it a perfect introductory text to early scholars concerned with the impact of gender on consumption behaviour and internet use.

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