Preface

This book, Gender and Social Computing: Interactions, Differences and Relationships, provides an overview of the major questions that researchers and practitioners are addressing at this time, outlining possible future directions for theory development and empirical research on gender and computing. In doing so, this volume contributes toward closing the gap between the public growing interest in gender and computing and the relative scarcity of texts on this topic.

The book focuses on three areas of research on gender and computing, (1) gender and computing in the work arena, (2) gender and computing in cyberspace, and, (3) gender in eDating.

1. GENDER AND COMPUTING IN THE WORK ARENA

In Chapter 1, Elizabeth Koh, Liu Na, and John Lim focus on the interaction between anonymity and gender and their impact on groupwork, particularly in terms of team collaboration processes, satisfaction and performance. The study that the authors report on in the chapter presents a process-based interpretation of virtual team collaboration, incorporating the anonymity of technology feature and the gender difference of team members. Using a multiple case study approach, the authors identify a key set of process variables that help shape team performance, examining the interdependencies among the processes. The major findings from the research are that task-related activities that occurred during team discussion are affected by gender anonymity, and that this in turn influences group performance and members’ satisfaction towards the collaboration process. Group dynamics including member awareness, leader emergence and member’s conformity are also salient process variables that affect the virtual team performance.

In Chapter 2, Yvonne Costin discusses why women start new business, how they select the industry for their business, and where they place their business. The focus of the chapter is on the home worker/entrepreneur or the mompreneur, namely, mothers who decide primarily for family reasons, to leave paid employment and establish a business operated from home. The chapter examines the adoption and application of ICT in the mompreneur business and discusses challenges encountered in this process. A specific emphasis is placed on the issue of ICT and its use by the mompreneur in undertaking business transactions and as a means of facilitating small firm growth.

In Chapter 3, Elaine Yakura, Louise Soe, and Ruth Guthrie examine issues of support for women in Information Technology (IT) careers. Based on open ended interviews with 38 women from nine different industry sectors and at varying organizational levels, the authors highlight areas of support for women that may influence their success in IT careers, pointing out that knowing these areas of support may give women help in planning their careers in a male dominated industry.
In Chapter 4, Sunrita Dhar-Bhattacharjee and Haifa Tarkuri-Rizk investigate the dynamics of gender segregation in science, engineering, construction, and technology (SECT) in India and the U.K. The authors point out that even though culturally the two countries differ in various ways, under-representation of women in SECT is widespread in both. Based on in-depth interviews with twenty-seven ICT professionals in the two countries, the authors comment on differences between the two countries in education, recruitment, and employment practices, work-life balance, changing gender relations, and opportunities for progression and retention, taking into consideration women’s role in power and politics in the two countries and how ‘public’ and ‘private’ patriarchy shapes women’s position in the labour market.

In Chapter 5, Erkan Özdemir discusses the role that gender has in e-marketing, particularly as it pertains to gender differences in online purchasing behaviors. The chapter consists of a literature review on the subject of Internet usage and online purchasing behaviors with a focus on gender-based differences. The aim of the chapter is to explore gender-based differences in Internet usage and online purchasing behavior and to suggest e-marketing strategies for e-marketers.

In Chapter 6, Olca Surgevil and Mustafa F. Özbilgin analyze women’s participation in the ICT field and the qualifications (fundamental capabilities and training) that women need to get into the sector. Drawing on interdisciplinary insights, this chapter explores the implications of numerical feminization in the context of gendered cultures and processes of work in the information technology (IT) sector, and proposes directions for future research on gender in the ICT field.

In Chapter 7, Bernhard Ertl, Kathrin Helling, and Kathy Kikis-Papadakis describe the situation of gender and ICT in Germany and Greece. Based on an empirical study, the chapter outlines areas in ICT education that suffer from gender inequalities in both countries, explaining how gender inequalities in education affect women’s professional in ICT in Germany and Greece.

In Chapter 8, Rob Macgregor, Peter Hyland, and Charles Harvey discuss the adoption of ICT’s by male and female General Practitioners’ (GPs) in Australia, with particular emphasis on the practitioners’ perceptions of the benefits of ICT to them. Based on a survey of GP’s perceptions, the authors discuss the differences between male and female understanding of the role that ICT can play in their practices and the benefits that they can derive from ICT’s.

2. GENDER AND COMPUTING IN CYBERSPACE

In Chapter 9, Abbe E. Forman, Paul Baker, Jessica Pater, and Kel Smith examine the portrayal of disability, gender, and identity in virtual communities where representation is a matter of convenience, style, or whim. Based on survey of groups that identified themselves as disabled or having a disability, with a focus on gender, four distinctive categories were analyzed in this study: groups associated with disabilities or being disabled, race/ethnicity, gender, aging, and sexual orientation. The findings from this research are that in virtual reality environments (like Second Life) where the visual cues are removed; users with disabilities are still associating with others who identify themselves as having disabilities. Furthermore, gender appears to play a role in the group (i.e. “communities”) in Second Life. The authors point out that the differences between the groups that are externally classified as having some degree of disability and those who choose to self-identify or affiliate with disability related groups have rich import for the sociology of online communities, as well as, for the design and characteristics of games.

In Chapter 10, Natalie Sappleton suggests that virtual networking via web pages, email, chat rooms and networking sites can provide a solution for women in male dominated contexts stuck in a ‘segrega-
tion/stereotyping bind’. Social computing allows individuals to cross barriers of space, time, and social category and to share expertise, opinions and ideas with each other. As a result, virtual communities of female business owners in non-traditional areas can provide access to a large number of diverse others and opportunities for network maintenance that may not be available to females in these situations.

In Chapter 11, Antoinette Pole examines the role of women political bloggers and how they use their blogs for purposes related to politics, public policy, and current events. Based on a combined purposive snowball sample, in-depth interviews were conducted with 20 women political bloggers. The findings show that respondents blog about a range of topics, not necessarily unique to women, use their blogs to inform their readers, check the media, engage in advocacy efforts, and solicit charitable contributions from their readers. The data also show that women deal with a range of challenges blogging the political, including discrimination. Though a majority of women political bloggers report that they do not face discrimination, interviewees qualified their responses saying they witnessed discrimination and discriminatory attitudes, suggesting the political blogosphere is somewhat inhospitable to women.

In Chapter 12, Tim Hill, Leslie Albert, and Shai Venkatsubramanyan explore the impacts of perceiver gender, target gender, and social networking presence on subjects’ perceptions of potential teammates otherwise unknown to them and revealed to them by ratings based only on search engine results. The results of the study on which the chapter is based reveal differences in how male and female perceivers view others’ social networking activity in general and suggest that how the perceiver gender matches, or differs, from the gender of the target affects how social networking presence plays into impression formation. The findings hold implications for professionals, academics and individuals concerned with the role that Web-based information plays in impression formation and how inherent gender-based biases may affect power and politics in the workplace and beyond.

3. GENDER AND eDATING

In Chapter 13, Monica Whitty examines the differences between the development of on-line relationships and the more traditional face-to-face courtships. The chapter presents a model for the phases of online dating and compares this model with Givens’ (1979) work on a traditional model of courtship. It argues that eDating follows different “phases” than other courtship models and that these differences pose challenges and create benefits that are different from the challenges and benefits that traditional daters face.

In Chapter 14, Celia Romm-Livermore, Toni Somers, Kristina Setzekorn, and Ashley King introduce the eDating development model. The model focuses on the changes that male and female eDaters undergo during the process of eDating. The discussion in the chapter focuses on findings from a preliminary empirical research undertaken by the authors. The findings supported all of the model’s hypotheses, indicating that: (1) male and female eDaters follow different stages in their eDating evolvement; (2) the behaviors that males and females exhibit as eDaters are different; and (3) the feedback that male and female eDaters receive from the environment is different too.

In Chapter 15, Sudhir H. Kale and Mark T. Spence consider the marketing and cross-cultural aspects of mate seeking behavior in eDating. The study that is presented in this chapter is based on a content analysis of 238 advertisements from online matrimonial sites in three countries: India (n=79), Hong Kong (n=80), and Australia (n=79). Frequencies of the following ten attribute categories in the advertiser’s self-description were established, including, love, physical status, educational status, intellectual status, occupational status, entertainment services, money, demographic information, ethnic information, and
personality traits. The results support several culture-based differences in people’s self description in online personal ads.

And, finally, in Chapter 16, Nainika Seth and Ravi Patnayakuni use an ethnographic approach to examine the role of matrimonial web sites in the process of arranging marriages in India. The chapter explores how eDating web sites have been appropriated by key stakeholders in arranging marriages and how such appropriation is changing the process and traditions associated with arranged marriages in India. The investigation undertaken by the authors suggests that the use of matrimonial web sites have implications for family disintermediation, cultural convergence, continuous information flows, ease of disengagement, virtual dating and reduced stigma in arranged marriages in India.

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