ICTs: Empowering Western Australian Women?

Jo Green BA (Hons) Murdoch University

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Murdoch University
Declaration

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work that has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

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Joanne Helen Green

25 November 2005
Abstract

The idea that women are empowered through their learning and use of ICTs (ICTs are defined as computers, the Internet, and e-mail for the purposes of this thesis) has been adopted by international development agencies and the governments of most nations throughout the world. Hence, many agencies and governments have made courses on computers, the Internet, and e-mail available to women with the aim of empowering them.

Empowerment is defined variously and has at its core the social, political, and economic development of women to create equality and challenge patriarchy. Women’s empowerment seeks to bring about societal change that will create conditions and structures that foster and maintain gender equality in all facets of life.

This thesis examines the notion of women’s empowerment through ICTs. The first section of the thesis uses development and empowerment literature to define, explain, and critique women’s empowerment and the conditions under which it is supposed to operate. The second section presents, analyses, and discusses the data collected from a questionnaire answered by some Western Australian women on their experiences of ICTs courses offered by the Western Australian government and their subsequent life changes. The questionnaire was designed to establish whether or not women are empowered to create societal change and challenge patriarchy, as suggested in literature.

The results from the questionnaire show that the majority of the women in the cohort were empowered to the intrapersonal (or micro-) level only. Hence, there was little evidence for the majority of women of the interpersonal (or meso-) level and no evidence of the societal (macro-) level empowerment of the women through ICTs. Therefore, this study does not support the contention that women are empowered through ICTs.
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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ABC Australian Broadcasting Corporation

ABS Australian Bureau of Statistics

AWID Association of Women in Development

DET Department of Education and Training (previously known as DEET (Department of Education, Employment and Training) and DEETYA (Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs)

CEDAW Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

CIS Commonwealth of Independent States

DET Dept of Education and Training WA

e- electronic (for example, e-democracy is electronic democracy)

EEO Equal Employment Opportunity

FOI Freedom of Information

GDI Gender Development Index

GDP Gross Domestic Product

GNP Gross National Product

GEM Gender Empowerment Measure

GST Goods and Services Tax

HDI Human Development Index

HRW Human Rights Watch

ICTs Information and Communication Technologies
WUNRN Women’s United Nations Rights Network
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