

Looking at Free / Libre Open Source from a Gender Perspective: Ideas and Discussion

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what is a gender perspective in technology?

- + **assumes that there is disparity and difference in how women and men access, use, control and benefit from technologies**
- + **takes into consideration the various contexts that affect and influence women and men's use of technology**
- + **looks into roles that have been ascribed to women and men in technology**
- + **probes into barriers to equal access and control of technology**
- + **analyses power dynamics between women and men in technology**

gender issues in free and open source

The Programming Culture (Myth) in Open Source

"So far, the freedom of FLOSS seems to be enjoyed only by those who are capable of manipulating the technologies... We see a strong programming culture in the FLOSS development and implementation nowadays-- if one does not programme, s/he seems to be left out of the FLOSS movement."

Yuwei Lin, A Techno-Feminist Perspective on the Free/Libre Open Source Software Development, 2005

+ open source is more than programming

+ there ways that non-programmers can actively participate in the open source movement and community

+ the current community has an image of being only for techies and programmers >> gender inequality in participation

+ consider as well the fact that there are much fewer women programmers in computing

gender issues in free and open source

Women's Multiple Roles Outside of Technology

“ One of the many questions to be asked from the gender perspective is: who takes care of the home and/or children when the hacker is hacking?”

Commitment to free software requires lots of free time. A woman usually doesn't have that luxury because domestic and family obligations usually falls on her. We noted that this may be particularly so in an Asian context. Many woman's role in the free/open source software movement may in fact, be a support person for the hacker.”

Gender and FLOSS Statement, Asia Source Camp I
28 January – 4 February 2005 Bangalore, India

+ women and men have different roles outside of technology (in the home, in the community) that affect their ability to participate in open source

+ women may be playing an “invisible” role in open source, providing support for those that have a more active role in the movement

+ women's multiple roles mean that they are only able to participate in and engage technology if it is meaningful for them

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Where are the Open Source Heroines?

“Women in computing do exist, but most people aren't lucky enough to meet a female computer scientist. Women are socialized to be modest and avoid self-promotion, which makes them even less visible than they might otherwise be. Mothers and female schoolteachers regularly protest that they don't know anything about computers. As a result, girls grow up without examples of women who are either competent or confident with computers. I encourage all women in computing to be as visible as possible--accept all interviews, take credit publicly--even when you don't want to. You may be embarrassed, but by allowing yourself to be publicized or promoted, you might change a young girl's life.”

Val Henson, HOWTO Encourage Women in Linux, 2002

+ while there are some women in leadership roles in open source, they have not been elevated to “hero” status within the movement

+ women fall into the same old patterns of deferring to their male counterparts << lackof confidence

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Sexism within Open Source

"A hatred email titled 'Death to Women's Rights' appeared on the [Debian-women] mailing list on 18 June 2005. In this email, a man said how much he despised women because women usually complain there is not enough women in male-dominated but successful fields. This certainly was not the first time that [Debian-women] was flamed by this kind of message. Messages looking for female mates, messages discouraging women liberty/rights/freedom movement appear often on the list even with filtering software or ban applied. This kind of message demonstrates the unfriendly environment women usually face in the online free/liber open source software (FLOSS) world, let alone the equally unfriendly environment that women encounter off-line..."

Yuwei Lin, A Techno-Feminist Perspective on the Free/Libre Open Source Software Development, 2005

+ typical behaviour that women encounter: sexist jokes, sexual advances, stereotypical treatment of women

gender equality in open source

Promoting Open Source to Wider and Broader Audience

- + demystify open source “just for programmers and techies” by stressing other areas and ways in which people, particularly women, can participate
 - + to encourage more women in open source, a strong case needs to be made as to why they should engage in and use open source
 - + promote women who are already doing great and cool things in open source >> women in open source should also make themselves visible
 - + build capacity in open source in all levels (end user and high level)
- What else can be done?