The Empowerment of Mothers through the

Internet / Meital Vakselboum - Chen

Abstract

Toward the end of the last century, the Internet began to penetrate households as home computers were increasingly connected to the Internet. This connectivity opened unprecedented possibilities, including instant access to a wide range of content and information, use of a choice of search engines and sharing of content from around the world. Along with the positive effects of the Internet, it created fertile ground for potential danger. Household boundaries, which in the past were well-defined, have now been blurred by the Internet (Oravec, 2000).

Mothers, who continue to bear traditional responsibility of raising children, must deal with these new threats which are penetrating their households.

The goal of this research was to investigate the various approaches of collegeeducated Israeli mothers to Internet-related activities, and to examine the methods they have adopted to safeguard their children online. In addition, we examined whether and how these mothers use the Internet to empower their strength in caring for their children.

The discussion of the results of this research is divided into three parts. The first part relates to the research question regarding what activities the mothers performed on the Internet, which subjects interested them and how this was reflected in their daily activities. In the second section, we examine how the Internet contributes to empowering the mothers'. The third research question, and section, relate to the means used by the mothers to safeguard their children online.

The sample population for this research included 30 college-educated married women who live in Dan region and who live in Dan region and who are mothers of children

between the ages five and 18. All mothers and children in the study use the Internet at home.

The research utilizes qualitative research methods, specifically focused guided interviews (Tsabar Ben Yehoshua, 1990). However, it is also includes tech niques and operational methods used in open ethnographic research. In this type of interview the subjects are asked a number of identical questions in order to facilitate comparison between the various subjects' answers. In essence, the result is a partially structured interview, since all the subjects are asked to focus on the same topics. However, the subject's answers in this type of interview are not limited. The interview scripts were written by the investigators specifically for this research and were administered to the mothers through telephone conversations or face-to-face meetings.

The results of the study indicate that most of the mothers view the Internet as a tool that enhances their personal experience by opening new avenues to find information and enrich their knowledge of various diverse areas. In contrast, most mothers did not since it as a resource that helps them achieve mastery in the area of child care. In this area, there was a significant difference between mother of children aged ten and older and mothers of children younger than ten years-old. Mothers of younger children used the Internet to check facts, find information, consult and read a variety of materials. In contrast, mothers of children who were older than ten did report the Internet to be assistance in furthering their needs.

The Internet did not enhance most of the mothers' feeling of mastery over their teaching function. However, some influence was evident regarding their performance of tasks that arose in the course of daily activities, such as finding organizers for birthday parties, planning family trips and similar tasks. The Internet improved the mothers' abilities to accomplish specific tasks that they must deal with as part of their daily activities. The perception of the assistance improves their feeling of mastery within the family as regards daily life, and this in turn can be assessed through various measures of family function (Elad, 1995).

Because of parents' concerns regarding the dangers that exist in "cyberspace", we expected that parents would more rigorously oversee the way this resource is utilized. A question that should be addressed, in light of these findings, is whether the Internet-

related activities carried out currently by the mothers are designed to make children

into smarter consumers. The mothers that participated in this research expressed

concern regarding the dangers that exist on the Internet and most of them directly

supervised its use, primarily by sporadically checking were their child was surfing,

and indirectly by speaking to their children, generally in response to incidents

reported in the media, as they arise. As such, these discussions are not routine among

most mothers. As a result, we asked whether the mothers felt that they made maximal

efforts to guide their children in wise use of the Internet.

There is a great deal of information available regarding the wide range of dangers that

exist today in the virtual space. However, there is a relative lack of research

discussing the activities parents undertake to protect their children.

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