

# Women, harassment and the 'Net



by Anuska Garcia

MONTREAL (CUP)—From cross-dressing and gender bending to idle chit-chat about fast cars and food, the monopoly on the Internet previously held by geeked-out Net gurus is being shattered.

Although more women are making forays into cyberspace, they are still outnumbered by men. Of course, the widespread harassment of women on the net isn't helping to even out the numbers.

Some of the worst acts of male chauvinism and misogyny is on Internet Relay Chat (IRC). IRC lets users around the world who are tapped into the net have on-screen conversations with each other about various topics.

Users log onto different channels devoted to specific interests. An incredible information source, IRC can get you in touch with experts on various subjects.

But some men are just cruising the channels, looking to pick up women for net sex. Sex on IRC is much like phone sex, where people talk dirty to each other on channels separate from the general public. It usually includes a certain amount of one-handed, masturbatory typing.

Similar to IRC are chat Bulletin Board Systems (BBSs), systems that

can sometimes be reached through the net or by dialling locally. Chat BBSs also have a tendency to draw a number of pick-up artists, as in the case of "Betty."

Betty had spoken to him twice before, under informal terms. He's a 30-something year old lonely computer geek in Boulder, Colorado who figures that he can score over miles of fibre-optic cable. They were talking about cooking. She told him that she's French.

<Desperado> When you come down to Boulder, I'll take you out.

<Betty> Yeah, next time I'm in the area.

<Desperado> Well what if I told you that I'd send you a plane ticket for Christmas?

<Betty> What? I don't think so... He starts to get pushy.

<Desperado> How do you know that you wouldn't like me?

<Betty> That's not the issue. I'm sorry.

<Desperado> C'mon. Trust me, when you come down to Boulder, you'll fall in love with me.

<Betty> I don't think I want to come down to Boulder, sorry.

<Desperado> What? Are you afraid of meeting people over the Internet?

<Betty> Among other things. I don't know you.

<Desperado> Well, come on down!

<Betty> NO. Others are not so subtle, opting for the direct approach.

<nuggets> i've gotta find sum pussy

outside  
<raiders> nuggets, big tits, big fucking asses

<nuggets> u like wet pussy raiders? <Nymphoman> any women out here?

<iky> anyone wanna lick my black dick?

"Betty", a 22-year-old arts student at Concordia, discovered the uses of her Internet account in September after hearing all the hype about the "information superhighway." With next to no previous knowledge about computers, she's developed a hands-on knowledge of Internet. Betty is one of the hordes of cyberwomen who are taking the Net by storm, replacing generations of male cybergeeks who previously laid claim to the vast areas of bandwidth.

I tried logging into IRC with dif-

ferent names. I'm still a "newbie" at this, and I log in with the genderless name of 'clo.'

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clo has joined channel #masseur1. <clo> Hi.

\*FunOne\* Hi, babe. Where are you from?

<clo> Canada. Umm... you on the masseur1 channel? I'm trying to figure out a few techniques for shoulder blades without using oil.

\*FunOne\* Nope, honey, I'm on a private channel but I saw ya. Soo, whaddaya look like, eh?? You cute Canadian gals...

I have no response to that.

\*FunOne\* Hey, R U ignoring me? <clo> Lookie here, I'm busy.

\*FunOne\* Fine, yer probably ugly anyway, bitch.

\*frat-boy\* Hey baby, want some action??

I decide it's time to make my exit. But on another channel I use a female user ID called TankGrrrl. And then the message flooding begins. <Hot4U> Hi! So, how cold is it up there in Canada?

<TankGrrrl> Freezing. <Hot4U> So, want me to come on over and warm you up baby?

<DrLove> Hi babe, tell me what your desires are, the Love Doctor's here.

Oh great, Barry White on-line.

<Stud> Hey, babe, wanna blow me?

<Joo> Hey!!! So what do you look like?

This channel, by the way, a sex channel that I was lurking about in search of a few 3 a.m. laughs was attended by the highest rate of McGill, Harvard and MIT students I have seen.

# Toxic shock



by Claire Farid

TORONTO (CUP)—Did you know that you are risking your health and harming the environment when you use menstrual products from your local drugstore?

In terms of health, Toxic Shock Syndrome (TSS) is still the most serious issue.

TSS is not a thing of the past. TSS can be fatal and its symptoms include fever, diarrhea, rash, loss of hair, aching muscles and organ failure.

It is associated mainly with tampons, especially those that are highly absorbent. At any given time, one to three per cent of women have the toxin-producing version of the staphylococcus aureus bacterium (a normally friendly micro-organism) in their vagina.

This version of the bacterium is very comfortable in environments like those provided by highly-absorbent tampons. As many know, the longer you wear a tampon, the higher the risk of TSS; you should never wear a tampon more than four hours.

Young women are at highest risk to TSS because they have not yet developed a strong immunity to the bacterium.

Other health issues are related to

the production of tampons and pads. For example, most tampons and pads are chlorine bleached.

When chlorine combines with the organic molecules of the trees used in the production of these menstrual products, a toxic chemical called dioxin is formed. Dioxins are one of the most potent chemicals known to humans.

When dioxins are released into the environment, they are attracted to fats and through this medium, move up the food chain. This can have an effect on the whole ecosystem, including human beings. The physiological effects of dioxins include damage to the liver, reproductive and developmental impairment, infertility, birth abnormalities and cancer.

Trace amounts of dioxins have been found in tampons. To put this in perspective, Liz Armstrong and Adrienne Scott write in *Whitewash* that rainbow trout experience death 28 days after exposure and changes to growth and development at 38 parts of dioxin per quadrillion.

Magnesium, acids, alcohols and waxes can also be found in tampons.

The environment has not been spared the negative effects of these products. The chlorines and dioxins produced from the manufacture of

menstrual products are poisoning many of the areas around pulp and paper mills.

Second, enormous amounts of bulk waste result from the uses of these products. A typical North American woman throws away an average of 250 to 300 pounds of tampons, pads and applicators in her lifetime. Third, plastic applicators are often flushed and can be found strewn on many beaches.

Last, the excessive packaging, overwrapping, and applicators accompanying menstrual products are simply not necessary.

But don't despair! There are things the average woman can do. There are alternatives to the mainstream tampons and pads you find in most drugstores.

Chlorine-free menstrual pads and tampons, reusable cotton cloth pads, sea sponges, the menstrual cup and other alternatives do exist.

North American women spend approximately \$2 billion each year on menstrual products. They have the consumer power to demand changes and to be heard.

Don't shy away from phoning the toll-free numbers provided by the companies making these products. It's your right to have safe and environmentally-friendly products.

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