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“I DON’T KNOW A MAN WHO ISN’T KNEE-DEEP IN IT”: INTERSECTIONS OF AGE AND GENDER IN OLDER PEOPLE’S INTERNET USE

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Abstract

Older people use the internet less than younger people, and older women less than older men (Office for National Statistics, 2014). This presentation examines intersections of age and gender in older people’s internet use. The research perspective combines a focus on technology adoption in the tradition of domestication theory with the understanding of gender-technology relations developed in feminist technology studies, and research on ageing. Findings from a sociological study conducted in the North East of the UK, based on 33 semi-structured interviews with women and men between the ages of 55 and 80 about their computer and internet use are presented, demonstrating the significance of traditional age-gender-technology relations and the variety of outcomes of intersections between gender and age in older people’s internet use.

Introduction

Social sciences research on internet use tends to focus on the experiences of younger people, often exploring the construction of young people’s identities through internet use (see for examples: Valkenburg et al., 2005; Garcia-Gomez, 2009; boyd, 2014). This contrasts with a relative scarcity of qualitative studies that investigate older people’s internet use and more particularly the domestication of the internet in later life (see for exceptions: Haddon and Silverstone 1996; Buse 2009). However, older people, and older women in particular, have been shown to be the groups with the lowest rates of internet access (Office for National Statistics, 2014). Research on gender and internet use rarely examines the way in which multiple social inequalities shape internet use through an intersectionality perspective (see for exceptions: Kennedy 2005; Stepulvage 2001).

Gender and age are different in that all individuals rather than some change their status in terms of age. Furthermore, gender is more often studied as social inequality than age (see McMullin, 2004 for age as social inequality). I suggest an approach for studying

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gender and age as intersecting social inequalities and as mutually shaping with technology in internet use. This approach aims to take different dimensions of gender and age (e.g. access to ICT and ICT training, ascribed competences and expertise, ways of relating to the internet) into account.

Using this approach, the persistence of traditional age-gender-technology relations and the diversity of outcomes of the intersection of age and gender in older people's internet use will be demonstrated. I will first discuss the theoretical background of this approach, which is based on a combination of domestication theory, feminist technology studies, ageing research and intersectionality research.

Following this, I will describe methodological aspects, and then present selected findings from the analysis of older people's internet use in everyday life.

Theoretical background: the internet as domesticated technology and as mutually shaping with gender and age

I suggest to study the internet as a technology which is domesticated in everyday life. Following Silverstone et al (1992), technologies are appropriated, integrated in spaces and activities¹, and used to demonstrate the integrity and autonomy of households and individuals to others. In these processes of domestication, the internet is ascribed meanings by those who are possibly using it for specific purposes. Domestication is further conceptualized as process in which technology is adopted according to one's position (the position of the household and the individual) in society. Thus, for example, gender can be important for the way in which technology is used. Although domestication theory conceptualizes gender as one of several elements of technology adoption processes in households (Silverstone et al., 1992), it is not always researched in this tradition.

In contrast to domestication research, feminist technology studies focus on the analysis of gender and technology. Within the latter tradition, both are understood as mutually shaping (Wajcman, 2004) and as social processes (Berg, 1994). Traditional gender-technology relations exclude women from the use of particularly advanced technology, tend to neglect technology used mainly by women (in the definition of advanced technology) and describe women as less competent in technology use. Faulkner (2001) highlighted, following Harding (1986) the effectiveness of gender in terms of structure, symbolic associations and identity. Gender and technology are mutually shaping on these three different levels. Traditional gender-technology relations result in women being structurally excluded from technology use (e.g. due to a gender segregated job

¹ The integration of technology and ICTs into households has also been discussed as their integration into a gendered space, e.g. due to the use of different rooms for differently gendered activities (Mallett, 2004) and due to links between domesticity and femininity (Flynn, 2003). An example for the link between domesticity, femininity and computer respectively internet use in the interviews is that several women emphasized that they did not want computers in rooms dedicated to other activities (e.g. living room, bedroom). One interviewee also exchanged her own and her husband's computer (which was located in the living room) so she could have 'a tidy living room'.

market), in the symbolic association between technology and masculinity, and in the integration of technical competence in men's gender identity. I argue that an approach which integrates this analysis from feminist technology studies into the investigation of domestication processes, and conceptualizes gender as more than gender identity can take the limits of user agency better into account, since structure and symbolic associations are also analysed.

Based on the analysis of age as social inequality (McMullin, 2004), age-technology relations can be conceptualized as similarly shaping on these different levels. Older people are excluded in terms of access (e.g. less computer training in retirement), symbolic associations (e.g. younger people are seen as particularly competent in ICT use), and age identity (e.g. older people deciding not to use computers because they do not see it as part of their identity as older persons)². An analysis of these three different levels (Winker and Degele, 2011) and the conceptualisation of the intersecting of social inequalities as processes of mutual shaping (Walby et al., 2012) has recently also been suggested in intersectionality research. The proposed perspective follows calls for a more integrationist approach (Risman, 2004, Kerner, 2012), in which the analysis of intersectionality can encompass more than one level. Such an approach enables us to study not only “what”, but also “how” different social inequalities are intersecting in ICT use. This allows us to examine the domestication of the internet in everyday life in a perspective which can take exclusion from technology use into account and simultaneously explain atypical cases, which do not follow traditional age-gender-technology relations.

Compared to traditional domestication theory, the claim that internet adoption takes place “according to one’s position” becomes more complicated in this analysis, since we ask how different social inequalities intersect in domestication processes. The suggested approach enables us to study mutual shaping processes including more than one social inequality compared to feminist technology studies. It allows to explore more than gender identity in comparison to traditional domestication theory, and more than structure in comparison to digital divide research.

Methodological approach

This paper is based on research I conducted for my PhD dissertation which explored the significance of age and gender for understanding internet use in later life. It reports findings from the analysis of 33 semi-structured interviews with older women and men in the North East of England. Participants were between the ages of 55 and 80, including 18 women and 15 men. They were recruited through an educational organisation for older people, an action research project, and snowballing from other interviewees. In the semi-structured interviews, participants were asked about their past and present computer and internet use. They were also asked about the use of other ICTs, of

² Richardson et al. (2005) discussed negative stereotypes related to older people and computer use as one of several barriers to computer use in later life. Neves and Amalo (2012) highlighted the role of stereotypes in popular culture which describe older people as incompetent technology users. They also surveyed older people who reported that they did not use computers due to ‘age’.

different web 2.0 applications and whether they engaged in a variety of internet use activities. Additionally, the semi-structured interviews included questions concerning differences between women's and men's and younger and older people's use of computers and the internet and technology more generally. Interviews were transcribed and then analysed through several steps of coding and memo-writing using the qualitative analysis software NVivo.

When I asked participants about differences between younger and older people's use, and between men's and women's use, interviewees had to position themselves, share their views about age-gender- technology relations "in general" and relate their own experiences to it. This is important since experience in using a technology does not necessarily make symbolic associations irrelevant (see e.g. Thornham and McFarlane 2011). This paper draws on many empirical examples of the description of gender-age-technology relations in older people's stories. These stories include the description of women's and men's and older and younger people's internet use in the experiences of the interviewees, and also an interpretation by interviewees on whether these are representative for general age-gender-technology relations.

Older people's stories about computer and internet use not only convey a description of what the interviewees observed, they are simultaneously intertwined with interviewees' views on gender and ageing. Rather than shying away from the "mess" of gender relations and gender ideology, and age relations and age ideology, I argue that we have to investigate these acts of reporting and interpreting technology use to understand the intersecting of age and gender. The interviews differ in terms of the questioning of traditional age-gender-technology relations, and the types of critique which are developed by interviewees. Following Henwood (1993), the problematization of traditional gender- technology (resp. age-gender-technology) relations is key for changing them. Older women's and men's internet use includes the shaping of gender and age by the technology of the internet and simultaneously the shaping of the technology by gender and age (e.g. through domestication processes). Asking interviewees about the ways in which women and men and older people and younger people use the internet, is an approach which allows us to directly address both the observed use and its interpretation in the interview. The interviews also include examples in which interviewees contrast their own technology use experiences with perceived general age-technology or gender- technology relations.³

Gender and age as intersecting social inequalities in older people's internet use
I will now discuss different examples for the intersection of age and gender in older people's internet use, demonstrating the significance of both traditional age-technology

³ Resistance to traditional age-gender-technology relations which might be expressed in these stories has to be thought of as being facilitated by the fact that someone occupies a subject position in which he/she can question these through his or her own practice (including action and speech). Another point worth noting is also that interviewees generally did not tend to understand age and gender as forms of oppression, producing a systematic disadvantage for women and men. However, we find in their stories examples which can be analysed as highlighting the effectiveness of gender and age on the different levels, producing a systematic disadvantage for older people and women.

and gender-technology relations, and the variety of outcomes. The main question is thus, how traditional age-gender- technology relations are reproduced, respectively how age and gender intersect in atypical experiences. The examples highlight the “what” as well as the “how”. First, I will discuss the “double jeopardy thesis”, then atypical experiences, thirdly I will focus on age-technology relations, and fourthly gender-technology relations. I argue that what we see shaping older people’s internet use are traditional age-gender-technology relations and exceptions to these.

My study focuses on age and gender in the domestication processes of the internet. I am particularly interested in processes through which technologies attain certain meanings in specific contexts in which they are used. Traditional gender-technology relations and age-technology relations were significant, e.g. only two of the women were the main computer users in multi-gender households, several individuals had started to use computers only later in their lives after they had initially thought that they were already “too old” to use computers. The examples I present include elements of age and gender shaping internet use in terms of structure, symbolic associations and identity, but I will emphasise aspects of identity in the first two and symbolic associations in the last two examples.

The double jeopardy: “that daft, you know, women in their 50ies”

As I have outlined in the introduction, older people use the internet less than younger people, and older women less than older men. This results in older women being (both compared to men and to younger people) particularly excluded from internet use. This is partly an exclusion from access (e.g. training, financial resources), partly, as I argued previously also an effect of age-technology and gender-technology relations in terms of symbolic associations and gender and age identity. In social gerontology, this has been discussed as the “double jeopardy” of older women (Dowd and Bengtson, 1978), which results in worse prejudices and discriminations compared to being only older or a woman. However, the double jeopardy thesis has also been criticized (Krekula, 2007) for oversimplifying the intersecting of different inequalities, assuming that different disadvantaged positions can be added to each other, contributing to an increasingly disadvantaged position. Krekula argued that research also demonstrated that the double jeopardy is not an inevitable outcome of the intersections of age and gender for older women.

My study includes many examples for the double jeopardy and also two for atypical experiences. There are many possible contributing factors for these different experiences. For example, intersections with other social inequalities, e.g. class, could have an impact. For the examples which I will present in this and the following section, gender and age identity are clearly also very important. Different women who occupy a similar structural position in terms of the intersecting of social inequalities, can have different technology use experiences. This also points to the difficulties of changing traditional age- gender-technology relations and the radical character of questioning them, since abandoning them then also interrogates age and gender identities (see also Harding 1986; Risman, 2004).

Monica, a retired teacher, described her own position as a woman and an older person, as someone who lacks experience with email. For her, the combination of being a woman and being in her 50s, explains her initial difficulties in using email.

“And I can remember sending my first email. And it was to my friend who lived in (place) near (place). And I actually rang her up to tell her I had sent it. And 'will you ring me back when you've got it' sort of thing, you know. That daft, you know, women in their 50s. So I can remember doing that.” (Monica, l.228)

She is now using email as well as various websites on a regular basis but she still finds computer use difficult, and described “a love-hate relationship”. This experience conveys the difficulties of using the computer for Monica. It contrasts starkly with the symbolic association between masculinity and technology, and analyses of men’s pleasure in technology use (see Kleif and Faulkner, 2003).

“Well, if it is over an hour, I start to get, I just hate it (...). And I hate it when it doesn't work properly. It is not necessarily, I know it is not necessarily the computer. Like, you know, it is as much me as the computer. But I get all 'oh heck with that', wait, finish what I'll be doing, and I switch it off. And I do actually talk, and it is quite nice then to actually walk out of the room and shutting the door thinking 'I've done it' and I'll say to it 'I'm not coming back to it'. So it is a bit of a love-hate relationship.” (Monica)

It is likely that Monica’s way of relating to the computer could hinder her from spending more time with this technology, and as such, also result in her developing fewer skills.⁴ The way in which gender and age intersected in her experience, created a situation in which she perceived computer use to be difficult for her because she was a woman and an older person.

Atypical experiences: “It gives you a world, really”

Through an intersectional perspective, we can also explain atypical experiences. While women tended to use the internet less than men, or often had less expertise than men, this did not describe the experience of all women I interviewed. Both Therese and Tamara lived together with their husbands and were the only computer users in their households. They emphasised the benefit of the computer in connecting them to the wider world.

In terms of age-gender-technology relations, similar to Monica, these women were disadvantaged not only by being older but also in terms of being women. However, their experiences of being the main computer user in their household enabled them to challenge traditional gender-technology relations to some extent. The symbolic associations between ageing and new technologies are important to understand these

⁴ Another interviewee, who had previously had difficult computer use experiences when she worked as a teacher in the classroom, emphasized how she had to learn to do less activities on the computer compared to her friends, since her adult son would do certain things (e.g. uploading photographs) for her.

atypical experiences. The use of the computer, and its association with connectedness (Richardson, 2005) and youth, seemed to help them to avoid aspects of the positioning as an older, less connected person. For example, Therese emphasised how the use of the computer is particularly beneficial for an older person because it is a link to the wider world.

As the main internet users in the household, these women occupy atypical positions within gender- technology relations. For Therese, a designer, who spends a lot of time in her home caring for her husband and her mother (who lives around the corner in a care home), this atypical position seems to enable a different position in terms of age-technology relations, namely “being in contact like younger people” through the use of the internet. Tamara uses the computer much more than her husband, and sees it as a means to avoid being “left behind”. She taught herself the use of the computer, relying on official helplines from IT companies.

“He is only a beginner. I feel I am quite experienced now, you know, having for some years. But he is a bit frightened of it, so, he is the, he does some...He is getting used to that, printing out, saving, and he goes on the internet. He is a bit scared of messing it up, you know, pressing all the wrong things and getting, I say 'well, you know, it doesn't matter, I'll sort it out'.” (Tamara)

Therese described the computer as an important enhancement to her life.

“I don't know how to live without a computer. Because when my computer has a problem and it goes off, I feel shut off from the rest of the world. Because you can always send information, or a hello email, and it just gives you a world really...I mean like I said in the beginning, if my computer goes down for some reason, or I've got a problem, I feel as though my life has gone so small, and it is in here. Well, at my age, it must be good for you, to have the internet, for it to be so mammoth, the things you've got contact” (Therese)

“I'd like to get, really, you young people, you have your mobiles on all the time, and there is people getting in touch and texting and all that. I'd like to be more like that...I'd like to be more like that, use my mobile more. But my life is not. I am not out and about all the time. ... if you want me on the phone, you can get me here, I am here.” (Therese)

Tamara and Therese, who emphasised the advantage of “connectedness”, and who are the main computer users in their households, both argued that the use of the computer improves daily life. This has to be understood as an alternative outcome of the intersection of age and gender, which does not follow the double jeopardy hypothesis. Tamara and Therese both find that computers have a positive impact for older people, but they are not questioning the symbolic associations of traditional age-technology relations which suggest that older people are less able technology users, because they are older.

Age-technology relations: “They are competent, but only within a limited range”

Brynin (2006) argued that men are using computers more than women because they encounter them differently in the workplace. He viewed gender as shaping computer use only because men are faster in adopting technological innovations because they are differently exposed to technology at work. In contrast to Brynin’s study, the analysis of intersecting gender-technology and age-technology relations demonstrates the significance of gender and age, which goes beyond exposure at work. Some older men, for example, are able to question the position of younger people as more competent in terms of technology use.

Some interviewees had been using computers as part of their work or leisure for many years. Although some of the women had been using computers for work, it was two men in the sample who had been trained in computer programming. Some of the male interviewees, who had been in contact with computers in a leisure or work context for many years, developed a critique of traditional age- technology relations. However, it was only men who were familiar with computers before retirement who seemed to be in a position in which they could challenge age-technology relations in this way. Because of their secure position and experience as technology-using men, they could challenge the dominant association between youth and competent computer use. This is an example in which gender and age intersect in the sense that their experience and positioning as men allows them to critique dominant age-technology relations. When making this argument, they spoke about their own experience, which included their own age and gender identity, and made claims which pointed to structural relations and the inadequacy of symbolic associations. Lars, who has been using computers for many years, found that his experience of having worked as a computer programmer fits uneasily with his new age-related identity, because of age-technology relations which position him as a computer use beginner.

“I think it is backed up a little as well, by the idea, which I find slightly annoying, when you go to ... a bookshop, and you find, in the computer section, and you have a little section of books that are written for senior computer users, who are people who are over 50. I was thinking 'You don't need to say things in one syllable to me for me to understand it, you know, in regards to computers, you don't become an idiot when you are, become fifty. And besides, which, a lot of people have, who are fifty, like me, have been working in the computer industry for twenty, thirty years, so, it is a little bit patronising.” (Lars)

Peter, who worked as an accountant and company secretary before he retired, argued that his adult daughters, whom he refers to as “girls”, are rarely able to remember the actions which led up to encountering a problem with their computer.

“I think younger people use it more, whether it is knowledgeable as some of the older ones, I don't know. The thing I have found, if something goes wrong, especially if my girls have been on, and you ask them what they've done, they don't know. Whereas we quite often work backwards, to see what has actually happened” (Peter)

John, a retired community worker, perceived younger people's knowledge of computers as limited because of their scant knowledge of office software. Younger people, in his view, are using the internet and word processing programs competently, but they are not as familiar as older people with "harder office software".

"It is, you know, they, younger people, you will find they have a limited range. They are competent, but only within a limited range. You find a lot of young people are not proficient in a number of things. Particularly, they might be alright in word processing and internet, but apart from, many other aspects, for instance spreadsheets, they don't have any particular age competence there... That is what I found. And it just depends on what you are doing. I think the average young person has a very limited set of competencies. When you are, say it is widespread, they are competent, they don't, they are not afraid of computers. But what I've noticed is that they, they use Facebook, Youtube, digital and all those other things. But the harder office software, they are not any better off, are they? I don't think they are any more competent than the old people in that respect."
(John)

As these examples illustrate, older men who have been using computers for many years, develop a critique of younger people's competent technology use. However, like Tamara and Therese, they did not argue that there are no links between age and technology use. In contrast to Peter and John, Ed, a retired human resources manager, learned to use a computer only "as much as he needed to", and questions age-related competence of use in general.

"I learned as much as I needed to do the job. Whereas there were people around me who wanted to know more. Because they were interested in computers rather than the job. I always thought of it as a tool. But the, other people thought of it as a toy. So, there were always people around who could help if anything went wrong." (Ed)

"I speak to young people who don't use it... I think the majority of people my age use it. And I don't think, it is about the same percentage I think as for younger people. And I know accepted wisdom is that old people find it difficult and young people, it comes easy to them. It is not my experience, really. I mean, because computers have been around for a long time. I mean, I have been using them for 30 years. .. Old people have had access to computers for a long, long time." (Ed)

In contrast to those men previously discussed, Ed is not developing a critique of younger people's competence and positioning himself as immersed in technological culture. Instead, he occupies an atypical position (only being interested in computers to a limited extent), and questions not only the "technologically aware" description of younger people, but age-technology relations in general.

Gender-technology relations: "I don't know a man that isn't knee-deep in it"

The focus on traditional gender-technology relations in feminist technology studies has been criticised for its neglect of atypical experiences. Lohan (2000), for example,

argued that feminist technology studies should examine men's gender identities more. Some men who have only started to use computers later in their lives and often after initial resistance, relate to the internet in a way which does not position them as competent users. In contrast to similar descriptions by women, these men talk about genderless "people" who are interested in computers and do not portray computer use as a typically male activity. For example, Jack, a retired GP, distanced himself from a position of intensive use, where computers dominate an individual's life. For some of the men, their initial resistance to learning to use computers was framed within age-technology relations. They thought that they themselves were already too old to learn computing, and only later revised this position. Age-technology relations, and their identification with becoming older, initially supported their choice not to use a computer.

"And obviously we all know people who are mad about computers. You know, and all their life is dominated by them. They just love it." (Jack)

Norman, a retired shift supervisor, similarly took a very critical stance towards the use of the internet for communication, as he preferred letters and phones.

"I think that there is a tendency for some people to avoid, well, avoid is not the right word, but, to put off having personal contact with acquaintances, or friends, or something, via the telephone, or the good old fashioned written letter, by utilising a computer for either contacting people or staying in contact with people, using it as a communication exercise with friends. I am not convinced that is the right thing. Because I find that to be very negative, particularly looking at typed info." (Norman)

These examples demonstrate how age-technology relations enable older men to delay the use of the computer. Despite their unusual positioning in terms of internet use (they are older and do use it), they do not discuss their atypical positioning as men who do not enjoy technology use. It could be argued that the symbolic association between technology and gender is so important for their gender identity (and presentation in the interview), that they prefer not to discuss non-use as atypical for men. In contrast to this, the women who do not enjoy internet use connect it to what could be described as a critique of male cultures of technology use.

Faulkner (2001) argued that within the male-dominated profession of engineering, men's pleasure in technology is important not only for their individual identities but also for their shared culture, offering them compensation for limited power in their work environment (Faulkner 2001). Men's intimacy with technology has been researched in both work and leisure settings (Kleif and Faulkner, 2003). Kleif and Faulkner argued that it is linked to the socialization of boys and girls, in which boys are allowed more time to play; subsequently adult women feel that spending time with technology is gender-inauthentic, and that they have to justify spending more leisure time. They suggest further, that for the men who spent large amounts of time with technology, this was a "gender-authentic" and "gender-available" way to deal with uncertainty and ambiguity, offering them the experience of being powerful in relation to technology.

Some of the female interviewees in my study emphasised the associations between masculinity and technology in terms of internet use. They stated that they used the internet as a “tool”, rather than as a (men’s) “toy”. While some men also described their use of the internet as tool-like, they did not relate this to masculinity-technology associations. The use of the internet as a tool is often also associated with a lack of enjoyment. Monica, the retired teacher, does not see her internet use as entertainment.

“So I think I tend to use it as a sort of a tool, as a means, rather than for my own entertainment really” (Monica)

This contrasts starkly with the description of being pleurably lost in the activity, losing track of time when using the internet by John, the retired community worker. Harriet, a retired marketing research assistant, also emphasised how women would use the computer as a tool and not as a (musical) instrument, highlighting the mundanity of the internet for her.

“Men like complexity. The, men like to go into the far end of everything. And they do things, just because they can. Women use it, because they need to, want to, and they do what they want, that's the end of it. We don't need, computer to me is just (.), it's a tool, it's not an instrument. ... It's a tool, that's all it is. It is not a substitute for real life.” (Harriet)

Amanda, a retired care home inspector, also viewed internet use as linked to masculinity and enjoyment within a male culture of technology. Her own use of the internet helps her stay in contact with others. Amanda previously also maintained her own blog, and uses Facebook. However, she does not perceive her technology use to be as enjoyable as her perception of male pleasure in internet use.

“I think most men just love anything that they can press a button and something happens. They just love it! They are like children in a toy shop, aren't they? And they love it! And that's why they love the, you know, they love the games and funny little creatures running around a screen, at least all the men I know love that sort of thing! And just the sheer technology, just the whole business of a shiny little piece of equipment that is this size, that you can talk to somebody in Iceland, you know, and find out all this information and, they just love it! Is my experience. I don't know a man that isn't knee-deep in it! I don't think I know, I do know one man who won't touch a computer, but it is the only one! Everybody else is, yes. Even the elder, you know, the elder ones. The very elder ones don't, because they, you know, they are not gonna do it well, so they are not gonna do it. Mainly, it is a man thing that. So they are not gonna touch it at all. But anybody you know, below sort of 80, is gonna have a pretty good crack! And before you know where you are, they'll have all the gist of the gadgets and what have you, that go along with it. And, I think that is one of these competitive things that they tend to have more than we do. Maybe not. But that, sort of my experience is that they explore what is, the possibilities of all these, excite them far more than they excite my friends, certainly. You know, we acknowledge that it is very useful, we acknowledge that it is very time saving on some things.” (Amanda)

Discussion

I have demonstrated four different examples of intersections of age and gender in older people's internet use: (1) An example for the double jeopardy hypothesis, (2) atypical experiences of older women who are the main computer users in multi-gender households, (3) older men who develop different types of critiques of age-technology relations, (4) the absence of references to gender in the stories of some older men who started to use computers later in their lives contrasting with the critique of masculine cultures of technology use in some older women's stories.

These examples highlight different aspects of traditional age-gender-technology relations. For some, these explain their own experiences (1), for others traditional gender-technology relations do not explain computer and internet use in the household, but the symbolic associations of age-technology relations are very present and an opportunity to position themselves differently in terms of ageing (2). Some men develop a critique of younger people's competences, one interviewee a critique of the importance of age-technology relations for internet use (3). The description of male cultures of technology use by some women contrasts with the absence of a discussion of gender among men who have only later in their lives started to use computers (4). In terms of the mutual shaping of social inequalities and ICTs, and the opportunities to change traditional age-gender-technology relations through their problematization, it is important to examine how gender and age are effective on several levels, and whether they are taken as explanations for use and non-use. This could be illustrated with the difference between arguing that someone 'uses the internet because he is a man' and that someone 'uses the internet because men are advantaged due to gender inequality'. Whereas the first example contributes to a naturalization of traditional gender-technology relations, the latter leaves more options for changing these.

Although traditional age-gender-technology relations were important for understanding the experiences of many interviewees, some interviewees also had atypical experiences, demonstrating the diversity of outcomes of intersections of age and gender in internet use. Instead of focusing on patterns of use (e.g. Habib and Cornford 2002), this approach particularly enables us to study what has been largely neglected up to now - the social construction of gender and age in the context of age-gender-technology relations. Research on technology use in later life often limits itself to studying older people as less able technology users (see Joyce and Mamo 2006 for a critique of this approach) without a further theorization of age-technology relations, emphasizing the physical ageing of older bodies, and neglecting the importance of symbolic associations.

Studying age and gender only as men's and women's and older and younger people's use, does underreport their significance and locate both only at the level of the individual. This risks projecting an essentialist view in which gender and age have a uniform impact upon all women, men, younger and older people in terms of shaping internet use. If traditional age-gender-technology relations are analysed as context of internet use it is possible to highlight how they are significant but can lead to varying outcomes. I argue that the study of social inequalities in internet use needs to take the

intersecting of different inequalities on several levels into account. This approach can also be expanded to include more social inequalities than gender and age.

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