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## Women Narrow the Internet Gender Gap, Survey Finds

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Traditionally, women have lagged behind men in adoption of Internet technologies, but a study released yesterday by the Pew Internet & American Life Project found that women under age 65 now outpace men in Internet usage, though only by a few percentage points. But the survey also noted that the disparity between women and men on the Web is even greater among the 18-to-29 age group and African Americans.

The report, "How Women and Men Use the Internet," examined use by both sexes, looking at what men and women are doing online as well as their rate of adopting new Web-based technologies.

The Washington-based organization, which has been conducting surveys on different aspects of technology and Internet usage for several years, highlighted the disparity among younger people, noting that it could set the stage for usage in years to come.

"I think the real interesting story is the young women, because that is the one age cohort where there are many more women online," said Deborah Fallows, who wrote the report based on findings from surveys conducted over the past five years. "The younger women are just much more comfortable with the Internet."

The report found that 86 percent of women ages 18 to 29 were online, compared with 80 percent of men in the same age group. Among African Americans, 60 percent of women are online, compared with 50 percent of men.

In other age groups, the disparity is only slight, with women outpacing men by 3 percentage points. However, among the older group, those age 65 and older, 34 percent of men are online, compared with 21 percent of women.

It's enough of a disparity, Fallows said, to keep men in the overall lead in Internet usage, 68 percent to 66 percent.

In some cases, the findings aren't any different than similar studies conducted by Pew over the years. Men tend to use the Web for information and entertainment -- getting sports scores and stock quotes and downloading music -- while women tend to be heavier users of mapping and direction services, and communication services such as e-mail.

And, in general, men are more likely to be early adopters of technology than women, the survey found.

A separate survey released earlier this week seemed to underscore some of the findings of the Pew report. Of those who listen to podcasts, or streaming audio segments distributed over the Internet, 78 percent are men and 22 percent are women, according to the survey sponsored by Podtrac Inc., a Washington company that helps connect podcasters with advertisers.

"With podcasting just over a year old, the current maleness of the podcast audience at the aggregate level is consistent with gender usage trends of the early Web," Mark McCrery, co-founder and chief executive of Podtrac, said in a statement. Over time, however, there likely will be "a more balanced gender composition of the podcast audience," he said.

Fallows agreed but also said that the disparity between the sexes among younger people was especially interesting because it could shape the way the general population uses technology and the Web in the future.

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"It's hard to say where that will settle," she said. "I imagine things will even out over time, because there is so much for everyone online."

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