

A Feminist Internet

By Claire Gagnon

Throughout history, new technological developments have left specific individuals behind, including women and other traditionally marginalized groups. Far too often, technology is often aimed at wealthy white men who can afford its purchase. Those who cannot afford it are left behind socially and economically, often paying with their physical and mental health.

In recent years, the Trump administration sought to demolish basic human rights for women and marginalized groups. Social media spread these issues across the globe, but also constantly reminded these groups of the rights they had stripped, leaving them upset with their new reality.

Published in August 2016, the Association for Progressive Communications (APC) released the “Feminist Principles of the Internet.” The goal of these principles was to encourage Internet rights to be human rights. In the preamble, the APC wrote:

A feminist Internet works towards empowering more women and queer persons – in all our diversities – to fully enjoy our rights, engage in pleasure and play, and dismantle patriarchy. This integrates our different realities, contexts and specificities – including age, disabilities, sexualities, gender identities and expressions, socioeconomic locations, political and religious beliefs, ethnic origins, and racial markers. (APC, 2016)

The principles are presented in five sections: *Access, Movement and Public Participation, Economy, Expression, and Agency*. As a whole, the document is aimed to improve social justice for women and traditionally marginalized groups on the Internet.

The *Access* section focuses on universal, accessible, unrestricted, and affordable Internet access “relevant to women and queer persons, particularly information on sexual and reproductive health and rights, pleasure, safe abortion, access to justice, and LGBTIQ issues.” (APC, 2016, para. 3). In the United States, as technology is advancing, false information plagues the Internet. It has become increasingly more difficult for women and traditionally marginalized groups of individuals to find adequate information on sexual and physical healthcare - information which can be critical to their livelihoods. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, many BIPOC individuals had limited access to reliable information about the COVID-19 vaccinations due to insufficient access to reliable Internet and targeted disinformation campaigns on social media. As a result, the Kaiser Family Foundation found “people of color [were] not receiving the vaccine at the rate of white people” (Rodriguez-Cayro, 2021). In a world where the Internet is vital for understanding essential information such as health and wellness, access to high-quality Internet must be an essential right for women and traditionally marginalized groups.

The *Movements and Public Participation* section discusses the need for the Internet to give all traditionally marginalized groups, especially women, the space to speak their minds. Without judgment or hate, the Internet should be a safe space for all to engage in resistance, movement building, and decision making in Internet governance (APC, 2016). After the 2016 election, a large feminist movement (#MeToo) spread internationally – in-person and online. The #MeToo movement gave marginalized individuals the opportunity to express their resentment towards the gendered gap, the patriarchy, and the new administration. As the founder of the global #MeToo movement, Tarana Burke claimed, “‘Me too’ was just two words; it's two magic

words that galvanized the world” (Burke, 2022, para. 3). A feminist Internet requires a safe place for marginalized groups to come forward, discuss modern politics, and resist.

The *Economy* section rejects capitalism and its chokehold surrounding politics and technology. There should not be a divide in who has access to technology. As the COVID-19 pandemic struck the United States – forcing everyone to remain at home for months – technology became the bane of the existence of those who could not afford a computer, Internet access, or electricity. A scientific study found:

Relatively privileged people are able to use their access to digital technologies to enable remote access to health and education, as well as economic and political empowerment. However, a significant proportion of the global population is digitally excluded because they lack Internet access and/or have low levels of digital literacy. It is estimated that over 40% of the people in the world do not have access to the Internet. (Seah, 2020)

Capitalism is rooted in technology and technology is rooted in capitalism, and unfortunately, one of the only ways to survive the pandemic (economically) was having that capital. Rejecting the capitalist society considers the economic disparity worldwide, allowing everyone to have equitable access to the Internet.

The *Expression* section calls for the freedom to let everyone have equal rights to express themselves over the Internet. This can take multiple forms, including political and religious interests. Men often comment on a woman’s, a BIPOC’s, or a queer individual’s social media post in the hopes of tearing down liberalist agendas. Traditionally marginalized groups are constantly harassed online for their expressions, often cyberbullied off of the Internet to stop

them from posting their responses. This section is about amplifying feminist discourse and eliminating harmful content that reinforces existing power structures (i.e. pornography).

Finally, the *Agency* section focuses on the hope to design an Internet that is safe, private, and prevents marginalized individuals and their children from harm. With the Internet being key to education, students need to keep safe online while completing homework. After the Trump administration reduced government money going into providing Internet aid, children were left vulnerable and naïve to the power of the Internet. The same goes for women who fear their menstruation is being tracked by the government. Under the Trump administration and the recent Supreme Court ruling of *Roe v. Wade*, many states have begun using the Internet to track women's health and report to the authorities if any research on abortions or pregnancies appeared. "The technology industry is bracing for the uncomfortable possibility of having to hand over pregnancy-related data to law enforcement..." (Dastin, 2022, para. 1). Many women have been advised to stop using period tracker apps as they might sell or give data to the federal authorities that can be used against them in a court of law. The *Agency* section is about an Internet that empowers and protects women and traditionally marginalized individuals, not one that is used to surveil, control, or harm those at greatest risk.

What can a feminist Internet do for education? By adhering to the APC statement, schools and educators can create a safer environment for students, especially females and students from traditionally marginalized groups.

Association for Progressive Communication. (2016). *Feminist Principles of the Internet -*

Version 2.0. Association for Progressive Communication (APC), [Feminist Principles of the Internet - Version 2.0 | Association for Progressive Communications \(apc.org\)](https://www.apc.org/public/feminist-principles-internet-version-20).

Burke, Tarana. (2022). *'Me Too' Global Movement - What Do We Do?* Global Fund for Women.

['Me Too' Global Movement - What is the 'Me Too' Movement \(globalfundforwomen.org\)](https://www.globalfundforwomen.org/me-too-global-movement-what-is-the-me-too-movement)

Dastin, Jefferey. (2022). *U.S. Tech Industry Frets About Handing Data to States Prosecuting*

Abortion. Reuters Journal. [U.S. tech industry frets about handing data to states prosecuting abortion | Reuters](https://www.reuters.com/technology/us-tech-industry-frets-about-handing-data-to-states-prosecuting-abortion-2022-09-28/)

Rodriguez-Cayro, Kyli. (2021). *How BIPOC-Led Outreach Campaigns Are Closing The COVID*

Vaccine Gap. Bustle. [BIPOC Communities COVID Vaccine Outreach Sheds Light On Myths About Vaccine Hesitancy \(bustle.com\)](https://www.bustle.com/p/biopo-communities-covid-vaccine-outreach-sheds-light-on-myths-about-vaccine-hesitancy-2021-09-28)

Seah, KT Matthew. (2020). *COVID-19: Exposing digital poverty in a pandemic*. National

Library of Medicine. [COVID-19: Exposing digital poverty in a pandemic - PMC \(nih.gov\)](https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/34814441/)

Claire Gagnon (she/her) is a history and education major at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Graduating in December 2022, Claire is planning on teaching history and social studies in Massachusetts. She focuses her research on historical impacts on marginalized groups, as well as British involvement and child education during and after World War II.