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Internet extends working moms' days

By Cindy Krischer Goodman
McClatchy Newspapers

It's nearing 11 p.m., my home is quiet, and I'm online, shooting off e-mails and responding to friend requests on Facebook.

My husband isn't particularly thrilled with my late-night computer habits. But he's sleeping now, and I have plenty of company. Working mothers across the country are online, too.

Today, working motherhood means putting in a full day, eating dinner, helping with homework, tucking kids into bed and logging on. When I polled about a dozen women about whether they're on their computers between 8 p.m. and midnight, my inquiries consistently elicited the same response: "Of course."

With the kids asleep, we're spending our evenings online catching up with friends, paying bills, shopping, working and doing all the tasks moms used to do when they had more daytime hours to do it.

The dirty little secret that few moms will admit: Nearly half of women (46 percent vs. 30 percent of men) would rather give up sex or television for two weeks than give up the Web for the same amount of time, according to a study by Harris Interactive.

The first time I sent an e-mail near midnight, I felt a little embarrassed about what my recipient would think about my computer habits. Not anymore. These days I'm increasingly likely to get a response.

Patricia Alvarez knows all about the working mom's unofficial office hours. From her laptop at 10 p.m., Alvarez, a merchandise representative, recently sent an e-mail to one of her customers. Within minutes she

had her answer.

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"It's how we get it all done," she says.

The numbers are revealing: Women make up the majority of online users and studies show surprisingly strong support for e-commerce among moms, especially those who have full-time jobs. Women also are enthusiastic online communicators and are more likely than men to use e-mail to write to friends and family, Pew Research shows.

In some ways, the ability to log on from home helps alleviate guilt for women who leave the office or power down between 5 and 6 p.m. to participate in the family dinner, help with homework, or rush a child to sports practice.

Adriana Sanchez, a vice president at Goldman Sachs in Miami, taps into the Internet at home

from her BlackBerry, responding to work e-mail. She says the alternative is staying in the office and missing the crucial evening hours with her kids.

"I try not to make it a routine to log in at night, but it's great to be part of an organization that values families and gives me the flexibility to do what I need to do."

The same trend applies to women who work from home. Dixie McDaniel Andrade runs her own business, Mom Corps of Miami, from a home office. She uses evening hours for catch-up.

With her two kids in bed, she moves her laptop around the house, often at the same time she's watching TV or talking with her husband. "During the business hours, I need to make phone calls or go to meetings," Andrade explains. "At night there are fewer distractions, I do LinkedIn, I send out e-mail."

Some moms see danger in this new trend. Natalie Boden, a Miami publicist specializing in Latin America, says she tries to limit how many nights she logs on. Boden, mother of two young children, is now opting for a good night's sleep instead of late nights on the computer.

"My husband coached me that it is not good for my health." To be sure, this new routine quickly has become a

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Re: Why do mothers tend to think that everything is their fault?

I actually agree with the list and the idea behind it. I don't see it as excuses but acknowledgment that mom can not be the perfect homemaker, worker, volunteer, gourmet chef, etc. 100% of the time. It also tells people that not being 100% is not goi...

Re: Why do mothers tend to think that everything is their fault?

Good topic busymom3! No thank you. I want to be an excellent Mom. I'll take all the crap that comes along with it. Worrying too much, giving up a gigantic portion of my life to mold my kids, and requiring more from my kids. That list of "good enough..."



source of conflict in some marriages, with significant others complaining that technology is eating into together time. Studies show parents now spend more time with their kids than they did in the 1960s. Unfortunately, they're spending less time alone as couples.

"We're trying to accomplish more as parents and workers than in the past," says Stephanie Koontz, author of several books on marriage and contemporary families. "What gives is our time with our spouse and self time."

Surely, men are on their computers in the evenings, too. But family men are more likely to stay at the office and finish up than rush home to make dinner for the kids and play catch-up in the evenings.

Admittedly, moms like me still struggle with work/life balance and technology is making it more challenging. Of course, I know the perils. Someday I will get a good night's sleep. But for now, my laptop beckons.

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