Transcript for Episode 23: Women Scholars of Computers & Writing
Run Time: 49:44

AH: Allison Hitt (co-executive producer, host)
JR: Jana Rosinski (producer, host)
KA: Kristen Arola (guest, Washington State University)
EBe: Estee Beck (guest, Bowling Green State University)
EBu: Elkie Burnside (guest, University of Findlay)
MN: Maria Novotny (guest, Michigan State University)
KM: Katie Manthey (guest, Michigan State University)
MY: Melanie Yergeau (guest, University of Michigan)
CL: Clair Lauer (guest, Arizona State University)
ACO: Angela Clark Oates (guest, Arizona State University)
SV: Stephanie Vie (guest, University of Central Florida)
JW: Janice Walker (guest, Georgia Southern University)
CS: Cindy Selfe (guest, The Ohio State University)
KB: Kris Blair (guest, Bowling Green State University)
BK: Ben Kuebrich (co-executive producer)

Cue music: "Por Supesto" by Podington Bear.

AH: You're listening to This Rhetorical Life—a podcast dedicated to the practice, pedagogy, and public circulation of rhetoric in our lives.

       [*laughter*] Hi, everyone. This is Allison Hitt—

JR: and Jana Rosinski.

AH: This episode is an awesome collection of statements we collected at Computers and Writing this past June from women scholars discussing their experiences in the field. So first, we want to offer a little context for why we think this is an important topic that's valuable as we continue shaping ourselves as a community.

JR: As developing scholars, we work to establish our research. This extends beyond focusing on what our work is, to seeking communities and contexts to situate it within. Belonging to a community not only lends reception, but perspective to consider. Both of us have presented at Computers & Writing multiple times. For me, the conference has functioned as an exploratory space that is receptive to ideas in the making. As a newcomer to the field, feeling comfortable sharing my work at in progress stages has had a tremendous impact on seeing ideas as active. The people who attend Computers & Writing are curious, responsive, attuned—they are working not only in dominant focus areas, but are illuminating what might not otherwise be seen in writing scholarship—what happens in between, behind, and the what needs uncovering. This difference in perspectives is only possible because of the range of identities and ideas that serve as impetus for this conference.

AH: My first Computers and Writing was at Ann Arbor, and I was blown away by the support I received as a new graduate student. As I continue attending conferences, I've had more opportunities to engage with other graduate students and established women in the field who make it clear that my work can be supported in this environment. I was so amazed by the gender caucus in Frostburg and the incredible turnout of men and women who were genuinely concerned with gender equity within the conference--both in terms of how people were treated within the conference space and how identity issues were represented in the CFPs and selection of panels—and I knew I had found a space where I could productively, and safely, share my ideas.

JR: We wanted a range of voices and didn't want to necessarily pick and choose who was represented in the episode, so we posted a call to Facebook and Twitter soliciting submissions from anyone who wanted to talk about their experiences. This is what we posted:

        Inspired in part by the excellent line of female keynotes this year (on disability, access, and women in technology fields), the second year of the gender caucus, and a general urgency in the field—and beyond—to discuss what it's like to be a woman working and researching and teaching in a male-dominated field, we're interested in talking to you all at this year's Computers & Writing conference! We'd like to hear your stories, challenges, exciting achievements, or any thoughts you have about the current (or future) state of computers & writing, DH, programming, digital rhetoric, or any other matters of concern. We welcome contributions and perspectives from the full range of identities that constitute "woman" because we know factors like race, ethnicity, and sexuality all affect how women are perceived in the field.

AH: The voices featured in this episode represent a wide range of perspectives but don't begin to account for many other important perspectives. At times, the issues mentioned here connect and build on each other; at the same time, some of these perspectives may seem at odds or in conflict. But as Kris Blair said in her interview, it's important not to essentialize what it means to identify as female in the computers and writing community. When we asked folks to tell us about what it means to be a woman in the field, we didn't hope for a singular idea of what it means to be woman, what the field itself is, and what the issues are that we must work toward together. The complexities of the voices featured here represent the complexities of creating a diverse community that represents multiple people and ideas, that *includes* more than it excludes, and that creates a productive and safe space for the circulation of ideas and texts.

JR: We broke the interviews into three categories: finding space in the conference and field, issues of inclusion and exclusion, and testimonies to the strong mentorship that women have experienced and given. But first, we wanted to talk with Kristin Arola—one of the conference organizers—about her own research and the rationale for choosing the conference theme and three women keynotes.

Cue music: "Homesick" by Keytronic.

KA: I'm Kristin Arola, and I'm an Associate Professor of Rhetoric, Composition, and Technology at Washington State University. I'm also the Director of the Digital Technology and Culture program here, and that's an interdisciplinary undergraduate degree program.

So my work kind of falls into two categories: one would be best practices for teaching multimodal composition. I mean, that's a very broad category, but that's especially kind of the day to day running through a project in a class. So some of my research in that area has been more focused on producing textbooks that help teachers work through that process, particularly through the lens of rhetoric and genre conventions. So that's been one area, but that's really informed by kind of what's my more--I'm doing quotes right now--"scholarly" [*laughs*]. I feel like the textbook pedagogy stuff isn't often considered research, even though I think it is.

My area of research that I usually tell people [*laughs*] is studying the crafting practices of Native American women and how that relates to digital pedagogy. So what can we learn from the ways that women make and or have been taught to make certain cultural objects, whether that's beading or working with birch bark or working with cedar—how they've been taught to do that, how do they teach others to do that, and then what can we learn when we're thinking about digital pedagogy and teaching our students to make, say, a website? Putting those conversations side by side has been really good for me, and actually it's interesting because I haven't published a lot yet in the Native American women's making stuff. That's a project I've been working on for years. I present on it a *lot* [*laughs*].

But the reason I did that work and putting those things side by side is largely because I feel this gap in computers and writing scholarship. I guess it's a cultural and gendered gap in some ways. I think oftentimes we get so fixated on the next new thing and what that thing affords us, and "ooh, like at the cool new zoomy thing I can do." And sometimes we forget about, well, who does that empower? Why might that be useful for some audiences [and] not for others? And what are people already doing that we're ignoring by saying, "Oh my God, you can learn to code!" It's like, yes, you can learn to code, and I think that's really powerful, but why won't we also acknowledge the power and agency in a woman beading? What is it about coding that makes it seem so crucial and important to our classrooms and not other ways of making? And so that's why I do that work because I want to complicate what I often see as a pretty white, male tendency in computers and writing, which is *funny* because it's actually a lot of white women [*laughs*], but for some reason I feel like the predominant thrust and a lot of the work that sort of gets the most retweets [*laughs*] as it were *tends* to be the more kind of techy, zoomy, sort of—uhh, I'm hesitant to say it—bracketed off from those cultural concerns. And I'm using the word cultural really broadly here to be anything "other" than white male, middle/upper-class.

I can segue that into the conference itself.

So when we were thinking about proposing for Computers and Writing 2014, which has been a while now and it's a long process, one of the things we really wanted to make sure we addressed were issues of accessibility and diversity. And that was largely because of—every year at C&W, you'll see someone tweet or say something about, "this conference is so white!" And it is. [*laughs*] I think, and it's not just this conference. It's the field—composition generally and rhetoric and English and the humanities [*laughs*] and arguably higher education. [*laughs*] We can spin that out. But our hope with this conference—you know, the call was pretty broad in a lot of ways—but we wanted people to look back at what we've done, look forward at where we might be going, so the evolutions and then the revolutions [*laughs*] of where we're headed—with those concerns in mind. So what have we done, where are we headed, and how might we be *better* when it comes to issues of accessibility, issues of diversity, just making our work a little more mindful?

So we chose the keynotes in part based on—largely actually—on that drive of how can we get these different pieces? We didn't purposely go out trying to find three women. [*laughs*] It just kind of happened. But I truthfully don't think we would have chosen three men [*laughs*], so it might have gone like a 2-1, but it just happened that the best people that we wanted were women. We also really wanted a person of color, and that was really hard in this field. I mean, Sam Blackmon is actually the first person we thought of, but then you're trying to make your back-up lists. And it's like, "God, our field sucks with this." [*laughs*] Like, who's a name that people are going to want to come hear? The cool thing about Sam Blackmon to me, especially in this context is that we often expect people of color to do work about people of color, and Sam doesn't necessarily do work with people of color. She does stuff on gender and she is a woman [*laughs*], but it wasn't that like, "Oh, we're going to have a black person talk about black people things now." I don't think there's anything wrong with that at all, but for us it was *more* an issue of visibility, and so I think it's really important for upcoming graduate students to see themselves in the field.

Similarly with Melanie Yergeau, we were really happy to get someone doing work with issues of accessibility and disability as an area we think our field could do a little better with because technology affords lots of possibilities, but it also brackets a lot. So that was great for us, and she's setting off the conference. We did that on purpose—to do her first in the morning because we think those issues actually encompass all sorts of things. So accessibility and thinking about disability—it gets us to think about all of our embodied abilities as it were and what our bodies afford us in the world and why and how. So we like that as a starting place to open it up to all sorts of ways of thinking. I think sometimes the white guys always feel like, "Oh but how is this about me?" No. You're in here. How do *you* go about things? How are *you* framed in this situation? It's not just gender, and gender doesn't just mean women or female, I suppose.

And then we have my colleague Kim Christian-Withey. She's actually trained as an anthropologist and worked with Donna Haraway, so she's kind of got that background in anthropology and science studies and gender. But she does work with travel communities in this area and finding ways for them to preserve their historical materials that they want

to preserve. So travel librarians especially—like, "we have this old cassette tape of our last speaker of the language. How do we actually preserve this so it doesn't disintegrate and go away?" And so she helps those communities figure out what they want to do, what's best for them, and how they want to save and preserve their materials. So she was a cool addition as well because she's not quite in our field specifically, but we thought some of the things she was doing would speak to this audience.

And then Sam Blackmon is our last keynote, and we wanted to end with her to kind of bring to the fore some of the issues…she's talking about gaming specifically, but a lot of the issues in there I hope will get people to think about our own communities that we are in and who we're excluding and including in that, including the computers and writing community. I actually think C&W is a pretty awesome community, and people are really open to listening. Sometimes you just have to ask people to listen, but they're very open to listening. So that's been one of the benefits.

AH: The first round of statements focus on establishing yourself in the conference and within the larger computers and writing community. You'll first hear statements from Estee Beck about positioning her work within the field, Elkie Burnside about getting support for multimodal work, and a conversation between Katie Manthey and Maria Novotny about finding space for themselves within this year's conference.

EBe: My name is Estee Beck, and I am a Ph.D. candidate at Bowling Green State University, and my work looks at surveillance and computer algorithms to make the argument that computer algorithms are persuasive in nature and that, perhaps, as rhetoricians and digital writing teachers and researchers, we need to be mindful of that and extend critical literacies in those areas because we're being shaped by the web and by mobile technologies. As someone who is really new into Computers and Writing and within the field in general, because my work is more on the technological side and discusses things like computer code and algorithms, which has been traditionally a very male-dominated field, I'm always apprehensive about sometimes discussing my work as a woman because I think there's some coded or gendered layers that I have to find ways to negotiate when speaking with people who perhaps maybe don't fully realize or appreciate a woman working within these areas. So what I will say is that I've had a wonderful mentor, Kris Blair, who has worked for a very long time with gender and technology, and I've learned through her mentorship ways to position myself and my scholarship that it's benefiting and helping students and other researchers and that I need to work communally and collaboratively with not just women but also men and people who identify as trans for a common goal and a common purpose—and that everybody has something unique to contribute to a project. That's how I'm finding ways to make in-roads with my work, and I *hope* that's also how I'll continue to work in the future.

EBu: My name is Elkie Burnside, and I am a professor at the University of Findlay, Findlay, Ohio. I just wanted to share a little experience about being or becoming [*laughs*] a multimedia, digital scholar—whatever label you kinda want to put on it—and encourage others who may struggle a little bit. In my own program, as a Ph.D. student, it was really new. I mean, obviously this is cutting edge, up-and-coming, and some programs are more accepting of the concept that multimodal work is academically hefty and has a scholarly

worth. So there are some places where you have to argue for that a little bit more, have to contextualize it a lot more for people—convince your faculty, as it were. And I had a personal experience with that. I definitely in my Ph.D. program, when I initially said I was interested in multimodal composing had one professor say, "Well nobody studies that." And so for the [*laughs*] journal overview project that I had to do for that class, we were supposed to find 10 journals on one topic and do a historical retrospective with them. I made sure I found all journals on multimodal composing, and at the end of the semester he was like, "Well yeah, I guess it is something people study." And so if you are in this institution, in a type of institution like that, where you're getting some resistance and you're getting that push back, don't give up I would say. Make sure that you do your homework, and you know the field. Start teaching the other people at your institution.

I did one of the first I guess what you'd call multimodal dissertations in the department, in the known history. I ended up doing an interactive PDF as my dissertation, and again I had to go through a lot of extra steps. I got comments from my committee like, "This is the first dissertation defense I've ever been to where I didn't have a print dissertation. That's weird." Just remember that you can educate them as well. And they're willing to come along with you, in a sense, but you really have to push and help show the framework for them as well. So that's what I would say. I would encourage people who are in a situation where if you're getting resistance, just keep pushing forward. Obviously don't do it to the detriment of your degree if you're *really*, really not finding acceptance. But yeah, it's totally worth it, and I found a great, fulfilling job. Really awesome where I'm at teaching what I want to teach and am able to be in the scholarship and do what I wanted to do. And it took some work, but everything [*laughs*], I think everything that's work is worth it in the end.

MN: Hi, my name is Maria Novotny.

KM: And I'm Katie Manthey.

MN: We are both PhD students at Michigan State University.

KM: And we both attended and presented together at Computers and Writing in Pullman this year.

MN: And this was actually the first C&W conference we both attended and presented at.

KM: And to be honest, at first we didn't really know if this was the "right" conference for us.

MN: We both do work around bodies—specifically, theorizing the colonizing ideologies of "normal" bodies and proposing that an embodied orientation to *our* bodies makes space for bodies to become agents of activism.

KM: So when we proposed to a Computers and Writing conference, we were both a little bit like deer in the headlights: embodiment, computers, fat, fertility… how would this work together? It wasn't quite clear at first how all these would line up.

MN: *Until* we went to session C13 to hear the Rhodes and Alexander presentation "Techne: Queer Meditations on Writing the Self."

KM: Oh my God, let me tell you. Wow. We both sat there next to each other, and we were thinking, *Yup, yes, mmmhmmm. This is where, how, and why our work on fat, fertility, and technology matter.*

MN: Rhodes and Alexander's C&W presentation makes the argument that technology is not just a static object used for human interaction but an interaction where technology reaches out to *us* and touches us back.

KM: A queer phenomenological orientation as described by Ahmed and applied in the Rhodes and Alexander presentation suggests then the need to consider how moments of disorientation open up to this experience of technological forms—not just being used *by* us but using us as well.

MN: Immediately, this passive and active application of technology as an embodied practice reminded us of how our own bodies, as cyborgs, are extensions of this techne embodiment.

KM: Yeah, for me, I'm interested in fat as an embodied subjectivity. All bodies have fat, but not all bodies get marked as "fat" bodies. The body is produced and measured through technologies that both enable and resist fat oppression. Being okay with a body that isn't "perfect" or "beautiful"—and really, who decides what these terms even mean?— being okay with this can be radical.

MN: And for me, the infertile body models Dumit and Davis-Loyd's metaphor of the body as machine in which the reproductive female body is treated like a birthing machine by skilled technicians working under semi-flexible timetables to meet production and quality control demands. The *infertile* body, however, fails to conform to this heteronormative techno-ideology of the female body as this birthing machine.

KM: Yet for both of us, a queered phenomenological approach to the failing of our bodies as technical, producing cyborgs provides a space for resisting the colonizing ideological norms on female bodies.

MN: Staying present in this disorientation of our bodies, *feeling* that tension—as Rhodes and Alexander point out—perhaps then becomes a space where activism and resistance and new forms of agency can appear.

KM: And this is what we took away from our experience at the conference.

MN: That technology is not just a discussion limited in our field to the first-year writing classroom and pedagogical initiatives, although those are important and interesting discussions.

KM: But a conference that makes critical cultural arguments about the ideologies of technology.

MN: This blend of both technological practice and theory building at the conference provide a rich and exciting space for us as graduate students to consider how not only we use technology in our classroom but how it orients us to our own research and vice versa: how technology uses *us* as cyborg extensions.

KM: And so we were really impressed and surprised at this conference as people who initially thought discussions of technology might be limited to the classroom and practice. Instead, the conference really surfaced the "always alreadyness" of technology—being used by us and using us as it continues to inform our orientations to our research and our teaching practices.

Cue music: "Bless" by Podington Bear.

JR: This group of responses draw attention to matters of inclusion and exclusion. Melanie Yergeau addresses the tendency to exclude affective research, Claire Lauer and Angela Clark Oates discuss the complexity of institutional support in being both a scholar and a mother, Stephanie Vie reflects on her social media research and establishing networks of mentorship and collaboration.

MY: I'm Melanie Yergeau, and I'm in the English department at the University of Michigan, and my work looks at the intersections of disability studies and digital media studies within rhetoric and composition. Much of the work that I do especially has to do with autistic culture and how it often percolates in digital spaces, but my work also looks at larger issues pertaining to accessibility and inclusion.

In terms of some of the I think pressing issues in the field or that are facing Computers and Writing more specifically, a lot of them were talked about at the gender caucus. I think that they have been recurring themes throughout some of the sessions that have happened, and also it seems like all of the keynotes in some ways had to do with issues related to identity studies and intersectionality. One of the articles that has been really near and dear to my heart was co-authored by Elizabeth Donaldson and Catherine Prendergast called, "There's No Crying in Disability Studies." And even though this is specifically about disability studies, I think that it has a lot of resonance actually with computers and writing. So this idea that somehow identity studies fields are really overly emotionally involved, and not only that but this even happens within identity studies fields, too, where there's always this, "You can't study what you are," or "There isn't room for emotion or affective dimensions." So there's just this really faulty conception of audience and who's a part of that audience, I think. I don't think that people are doing this purposefully necessarily. You know, it's not like somebody walks into the conference and says, "Who can we exclude today?" [*laughs*] But I think that it happens, and so the larger question for me is always, *who isn't here?* What are the barriers for that, right? So it's not a question of who is here and what are the difficulties that people here

are facing—although that *is* a question. But I think by asking who isn't here, those issues get really, really magnified.

CL: My name is Claire Lauer. I'm at Arizona State University. I'm in my eighth year there, and I was just granted tenure. Some of the things that have been interesting in my experience in the tenure clock is that I definitely knew that I wanted to have children. And I was always a little put out by a lot of the work that's been done on gender in our field has not included the reality of having children, and my mentor actually wrote one of the books—several years ago, nine years ago or so—that was co-authored by 4 women. I don't remember the name of it, but it was about women in the field, and none of them had children. Or if they did—I think one of them had children, college-aged—but none of them got tenure with children. And I was so put out by how that could be such an oversight on their part—that they imagined that they could represent the female experience in the academy *without* talking about children because for them that was not their choice.

But for me, that was a choice that I wanted to make. And in doing the math, I knew that if I waited until I got tenure, I'd be too old to have children. I think that that's something that concerns me the most. The reality for women is that if they do want to have children, they really can't wait until they have tenure. I had two children while I was on the tenure clock. I got two additional years on my tenure clock that were *absolutely* necessary. I would have never gotten tenure without those two extra years, and I felt pretty supported in the university setting as a result. One of the surprising things about having children on the tenure clock as a scholar is that I was actually *really* surprised at how much it forced me to be more focused. I had these real fears that having children [*pause*]—I had these real fears that having children would get in the way of my research, and that scared me to death. And what I actually had to decide when I decided to have children was that it would be okay if I did not get tenure. I had to come to terms with that decision. And that was my decision. I said, "I'm making this decision knowing that I likely won't get tenure."

But what I found is that actually I was *so* much more focused. So what happened when I had children was I started working on a project, and it was exciting and I had to finish it, but I had this *baby*. And I knew I had this small amount of time before I fed the baby, after I fed the baby, when the baby went to bed, whenever. And what it did was give me these segments of time that I had to focus. And that was the best thing that ever happened to me as a scholar because early on when my babies were babies, my parents helped me. But I also have to add to that the reality that I was not paid enough money to afford childcare on the tenure clock, and the *only* way I made it was with the help of my parents. I think that's the most troubling aspect of the narrative is that I was paid a pretty good salary and certainly more than a lot of people are made at smaller institutions. It was *not* enough to pay for childcare because I was also paying for student loans.

So the unspoken reality that makes me worried for women in the field is that I could not have afforded childcare. If that's true, then I probably would not have had my children in childcare as much, and then I probably wouldn't have been able to get as much work

done, and then I probably wouldn't have gotten tenure. You know, we like to think you can get tenure if you just work hard enough, if you are focused enough, if you are disciplined enough, if you do what you need to do to get the job done. And I did that, and I got tenure. But that negates the reality of the fact that I had someone bankrolling the fact that my children could be taken care of for the day while I worked so that I could focus on that and then be a better mother when I came home in the evening. So that's the only thing that really worries me at this point from a gendered perspective, but I think the support from universities has gotten better, or at least mine has. And I think there's more of an acknowledgement that the reality is that if you want well-rounded people working at your university, and that means people who want to have families, that you will accommodate their lifestyle needs. So that's what my experience has been.

ACO: My name is Angela Clark Oats, and I'm currently at Arizona State University in a non-tenure track position, and my job duties include teaching and administration, so hiring and professional development for the faculty who teach in the program, and then also a writing fellow program, so writing fellows are imbedded tutors in our first-year composition courses. I also graduated with my Ph.D. from Arizona State University out of a college of education, and I think one of the things that I'm really drawn to—and I don't know if this is particular to my status as a woman in a field in academia where women have historically been marginalized in terms of access and time, whether that's because of family responsibilities or other reasons—but I'm really drawn to thinking about how to professionalize those instructors and faculty and peer tutors that are kind of on the margins of our field but also contribute so much to what's happening in the classroom and the academic and personal identities of the students who are attending those universities.

I think also just growing up and coming from a working class family where my parents didn't get a college education, so I think I'm very drawn to those spaces because I've resided in those spaces myself: paying my own way through undergraduate, master's, and doctoral work; and then being in that marginal space as a doctoral student where you don't have very much power and thinking about what it meant to start a family, too, and because I think I brought myself up through this academic trajectory with not a lot of familial mentorship, I did everything in a very non-traditional ways. And so that meant my time to degree completion for a Ph.D. was a little bit longer but only because I decided to have a family. So I think women also have to think about age issues and family and balancing that with the demands of being a researcher, a scholar, serving your academic community, and then also making your work public and getting your work out there and carving out those spaces to do that as well.

SV: I'm Stephanie Vie, and I'm at the University of Central Florida at Orlando, and my research focuses on social networks and social media. So what I'm really interested in is how those technologies shape our opportunities to communicate with other people and also how individuals can shape those technologies. So I'm very interested in that reciprocal relationship. Some of my research work, published in *First Monday* recently is about how digital activism can happen in social media spaces. So how do we use networks like Facebook, Twitter, and so on to point out social issues, to address these

issues, to point people to resources, and to actually counter too the idea of slacktivism—actually enact digital activism? So that's a specific area that I see myself continuing to do work on in the future as well.

So in terms of the question that you guys had really focused on for computers and writing and being a woman in the field—I was just interested in responding because I've always found this field to be so welcoming to me as a female scholar. And it's a small group. It's inviting, it's open, it's welcoming, and I've always been able to see many different female role models. And I've been able to find different mentors in the field. So for me, my first introduction to Computers and Writing was when I was a graduate student at the University of Arizona, and my dissertation chair and mentor there—Amy Kimme Hea—saw that I kept writing about technology, and I kept talking about plagiarism detection services, and I kept talking about how social media shapes our opportunities to communicate with others. And she said, "You should really go to the Computers and Writing conference, and you should start joining this community." And I went, and it was amazing! And I looked around and said, "There are so many different people that I admire here, there are so many different strong women who are here who are doing amazing research, and again everyone was so friendly and interested in other people's research. And there are other communities that I feel that are much less welcoming that are more threatened by people's work or that are guarded—like, "This is my territory. Keep out." And I've never, ever gotten the sense of that from the field of computers and writing.

In terms of mentors, I've been doing work with *Kairos* since 2007, and you know Cheryl Ball has been someone who really, I've looked up to her in terms of her work, she is someone who I like to model myself after, her work with *Kairos* is amazing, and I just see her as a strong female role model for the kind of work that we can do in this field. People like Anne Wysocki, Cynthia Selfe, Gail Hawisher—I mean, those women were people who I looked to and said, "I want to be like them, I want to learn more from them, and I want to keep going to this conference and be part of this group."

So in terms of a personal story to share, there's nothing really groundbreaking to share about my experience. But I think it's an experience that many other women in the field have had, that they've come to this conference for whatever reason—maybe they were invited to it like I was, maybe they just stumbled across it, but they've found it to be a warm and welcoming community and have come back over and over and over. And the opportunities for women to network and to support each others' work and to reach out and say, "Hey, I'm working on this edited collection. Will you be a part of it?" [or] "Hey, I'm editing this special issue of a journal. I'd like to see you in it." Those opportunities don't always happen in some of our other conferences and subfields, but they regularly do here, and I think that's something really unique that this particular subfield offers and that this conference affords people the ability to do—to network--which again, as someone who does social media, that's what I love to see is people networking.

Cue music: "Not the Droid" by Podington Bear.

AH: As Stephanie discussed, and as many of the other women attested to, Computers and Writing has a strong history of mentorship. We started this episode with perspectives from some people who are newer to the community or who had advice about establishing yourself within the community, and we want to end with some insights from the women who many cited as strong leaders and mentors within Computers and Writing. Janice Walker discusses the current status of techie women in higher education, advocating for continued mentorship and inclusion of newcomers. Cindy Selfe follows up by tracing some of the strong female leaders who have shaped the field and have made space for new scholars. Finally, Kris Blair reiterates the strong mentorship historically within Computers and Writing while reminding us that it's important not to essentialize the community and encouraging us all to engage in the feminist project of rhetorical listening and community building.

JW: In the call for #cwconwomen, we were asked to discuss what it's like to be a woman working and researching and teaching in a male-dominated field. Most people agree, as at least one of the keynote speakers at the 2014 Computers and Writing conference showed, the fields of computer programming and gaming are dominated by men. However, I don't really think this is true of the Computers and Writing field as a whole. Historically, of course, women comprised the preponderance of writing teachers with men, more often than women, to be in positions of authority, department chairs, deans, etc. Writing program administrators or WPAs, however, nowadays are just as likely to be women as men. Although many of the women are fresh out of grad school and may sometimes find themselves in untenable positions in tenure and promotion time. This may be more often true of those working in *traditional* English departments rather than those departments specializing in writing, rhetoric, digital humanities, or whatever the current term is these days.

At any rate, this year was my 19th consecutive Computers and Writing conference. And even though we are often seen as technical, techies, or geeks--and we're proud of it--I do not see our field or subfield as male-dominated in any sense of the world. It's true that males represent some important areas of the work we do, but women have from the very beginning back in the 1980s been leaders, and importantly they have been women who have been models for the rest of us. Women, such as Cynthia Selfe and Gail Hawisher led the way as editors of the journal *Computers and Composition*, who showed all of us in the field what mentoring can and should look like. And women such as Cheryl Ball, editor of *Kairos*; Kris Blair, now editor of *Computers and Comp*; and Samantha Blackmon, Not Your Mama's Gamer continue in the footsteps of those who came before. On my own home campus, I am no longer the most techie faculty member, but I do put in many hours of work to support the technology needs of our faculty. At the college level, there are as many women as men serving in that capacity.

Of course, Computers and Writing isn't really a field [*laughs*] or a subfield, and while frankly we don't technically exist at all, the 7Cs committee is a 4Cs committee tasked with soliciting and vetting proposals for hosting the annual conference. But no one really *runs* Computers and Writing, per se, [*laughs*] and most of it prefer it that way. But we do have that strong tradition of mentorship that we strive to live up to through our

conference presentations, journals, and listserv discussions, as well as through workshops such as the Graduate Research Network (or GRN), which pairs mostly graduate students doing or beginning to do work in our field with more seasoned researchers as discussion leaders. I would like to encourage *anyone*--male or female, graduate student, tenured, tenure-track, or non-tenure track--who is interested in *any* of the multifarious strands that make up our non-field to join us at the Computers and Writing conference.

CS: My name is Cindy Selfe, and I teach at Ohio State University now. I'm a long time participant in the Computers and Writing Community because my career started was contemporaneous has been contemporaneous with the invention of the first fully-assembled microcomputers and from there to individual computers and how they have expanded through networks to extend people's reach in different ways. But also how they are unevenly distributed around the world in terms of race and in terms of gender and in terms of age and in terms of economic privilege, I think. I should say that, for me, women have always been at the heart of the Computers and Writing community—not only because I've known some really *terrific* women in this field who have served as leaders but because when the field was first emerging, some of the people who were those early pioneers—many of them—were women. And one of the particular reasons we had so many great women doing this work is because many of them were adjuncts or many of them were in positions of non-power, right? [*laughs*] They were in positions where they had very little to lose. And so I think they were particularly courageous and adept at using technology to amplify their own work and also to explore—they were courageous in exploring the boundaries of computers, computer software, computer networks as these things changed and putting them to good use in the ways only women can do.

And the other reason I think that women have always assumed a leadership position in this organization—or this community is more like it—is that so many of the social theorists that we read were women as well. So Donna Haraway was always a huge influence in our field, and that kind of intellectual seeding of our work, I think, attracted women. And then because there were women leaders, and they continued to do that kind of intellectual work, I think young women like yourselves have grown to see a place for their work and their vision and their leadership in this kind of community. And that makes me very happy indeed.

KB: I'm Kris Blair. I am a faculty member at Bowling Green State University where I've worked since 1996. I have been a member of the Computers and Writing community for about as long. My first Computers and Writing was about 1992 as a graduate student at Purdue, and then I skipped a few years and started coming regularly in 1995, and I've only skipped one conference since that time. So I really view this forum as my scholarly and intellectual home, and I think the reason for that is very much tied to my own interests in the politics of technological and digital literacy acquisition. A lot of my work over the years has addressed the way in which access is mediated through what can be inequitable system of difference for populations like women and adolescent girls, older adults. So really looking at it through that cultural lens in a way that isn't meant to essentialize on the basis of gender but to understand that various groups—particularly women—do have varied lived experiences in terms of their own relationships to

technology. My methodologies for exploring that kind of work have been—no surprise—focusing on the role of narrative.

And so kind of thinking about why this conference is so important to my work, I really tie that back to Cindy Selfe and Gail Hawisher. When I was a graduate student at Purdue, both Cindy and Gail were frequent visitors to Purdue for colloquia. Gail had worked there at one point. And their mentorship and their support of graduate students in general, and graduate student women in particular who weren't even their own students, really was very indicative of the way this field has formed and the way in which people like Cindy Selfe are a major part of that evolution. You know, she is—as are other women in the field—part of our history, and that shouldn't be ignored. I think that she's had a vital role, Gail has had a vital role, and other women throughout the years in sort of shaping the Computers and Writing community. And so I think that's important to document, so I'm thrilled that you're doing this type of project for This Rhetorical Life. I think it's important.

Even as I sort of talk about the notion of community, though, I think that it's important to problematize that emphasis because it suggests a homogeneity that may inadvertently exclude other voices or presume that a gender issue isn't also a race issue, a class issue, a sexuality issue. So I think it's very important even as we sort of try to come together and be advocates and change agents to really use this conference through venues such as the gender caucus tomorrow and the race caucus a little later this afternoon to problematize and not presume that everyone feels included—that we're one big happy family. Because that's not realistic. Every community operates within a system of power, and who feels enabled by that, and who feels disenfranchised? So I think it's important for all members of the Computers and Writing community—but particularly women—to really engage in that type of rhetorical listening that Krista Ratcliffe has talked about so you get a sense that *my* position in the Computers and Writing community as someone who's been coming to this conference for nearly twenty years, for someone who edits a journal, as a white middle-class heterosexual feminist, my perception of what this space offers to the community is very different from someone else's. I think that needs to be very much the feminist project of the conference and of the field as a whole.

Cue music: "Rain-bow Window" by Diaphane.

AH: You've been listening to This Rhetorical Life. Thank you so much for everyone who participated in this episode by providing us with statements, and thank you all for listening.

BK: This Rhetorical Life is brought to you by graduate students in the Composition and Cultural Rhetoric program at Syracuse University. Executive producers of This Rhetorical Life are Ben Kuebrich and Allison Hitt with additional production and editing from Karrieann Soto, Tamara Issak, and Jana Rosinski.