

Reclaiming women's place in computing history

Digital Humanism Lecture Series

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AI Bias Could Put Women's Lives At Risk - A Challenge For Regulators



Carmen Niethammer Contributor  

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

I am a private sector development expert and gender diversity leader.

When the European Commission released the long awaited white paper
“On Artificial Intelligence - A European approach to excellence and

The Switch

Uber's search for a female CEO has been narrowed down to 3 men

By Elizabeth Dvoskin and Craig Timberg August 4 



Apple made Siri deflect questions on feminism, leaked papers reveal

Exclusive: voice assistant's responses were rewritten so it never says word 'feminism'



Dutch situation

	Women students %	Women professors %
Agriculture	55.9	18.7
Science, excl. medicine	39.4	16.2
Engineering	26.6	17.1
Economics	36.4	13.9
Law	61.4	31.1
Social & Behavioural Sciences	70.2	34.7
Humanities	62.1	34.6
Overall – 24.2% of all professors are women; at this rate equality by 2041		

Sources: LNVH Monitor 2020, p.37;
UNDP Human Development Report, 2019

Other interesting facts:

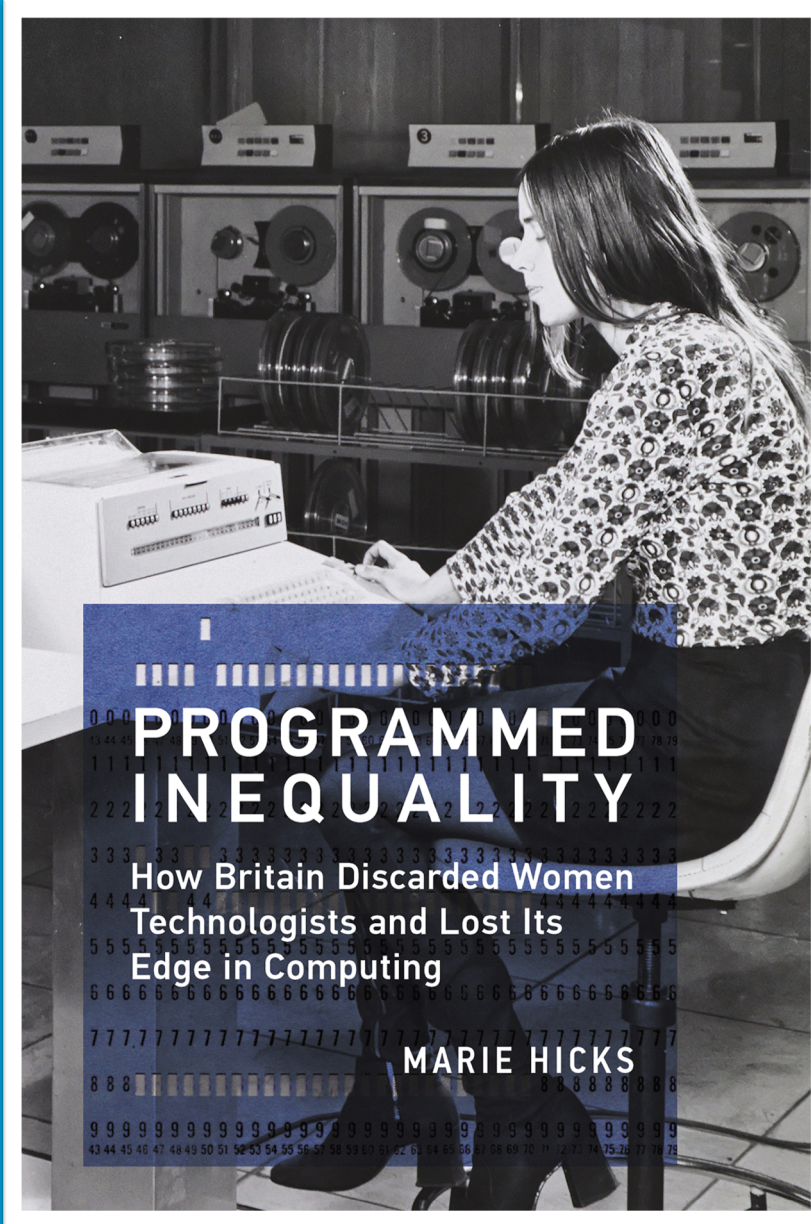
- UN gender equality – 3rd worldwide
- Teenage pregnancy – 4/1000 compared to 23/1000 in US
- Labour market participation – 57%
- Seats in Parliament – 39%
- Royal Academy members – 16%

Conclusions

- Social justice/fairness – women and other groups marginalised in education & workplace should have access to well-paid, interesting education & jobs
- Epistemic justice/better design – including wider range of perspectives could result in better & more inclusive technologies



Very short early history



PROGRAMMED INEQUALITY

How Britain Discarded Women
Technologists and Lost Its
Edge in Computing

MARIE HICKS



1940s-1960s

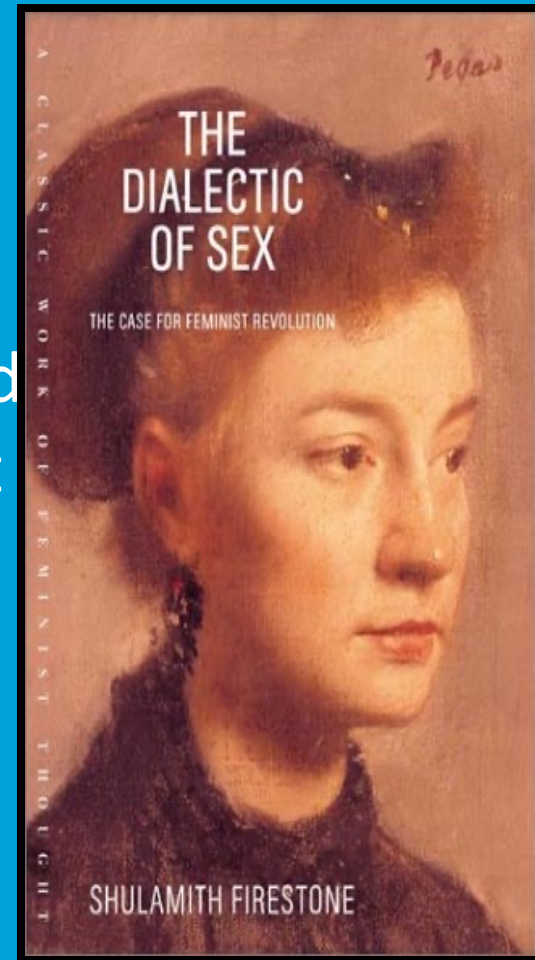
In the 1940s, computer operation and programming was viewed as women's work - but by the 1960s, as computing gained prominence and influence, men displaced the thousands of women who had been pioneers in a feminized field of endeavor, and the field acquired a distinctly masculine image.

Marie Hicks, 2017, *Programmed Inequality: 1*

1970 (2nd wave feminism)

Both movements [feminism & revolutionary ecology] have arisen in response to the same contradiction: animal life within technology. In the case of feminism the problem is a moral one: the biological family unit has always oppressed women and children, but now, for the first time in history, technology has created real preconditions for overthrowing these oppressive 'natural' conditions

Shulamith Firestone, 1970, *The Dialectic of Sex*: 219



Mid-1980s

A cyborg is a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction...The machine is us, our processes, an aspect of our embodiment. We can be responsible for machines; they do not dominate or threaten us. We are responsible for boundaries; we are they...Cyborg imagery can suggest a way out of the maze of dualisms in which we have explained our bodies and our tools to ourselves...It means both building and destroying machines, identities, categories, relationships, spaces, stories...I would rather be a cyborg than a goddess.

Donna Haraway, 1985, A Manifesto for Cyborgs, *Socialist Review*, 80: 65-107 – reprinted in many places & translated into German, Dutch, Spanish, French, ...

CYBORG MANIFESTO



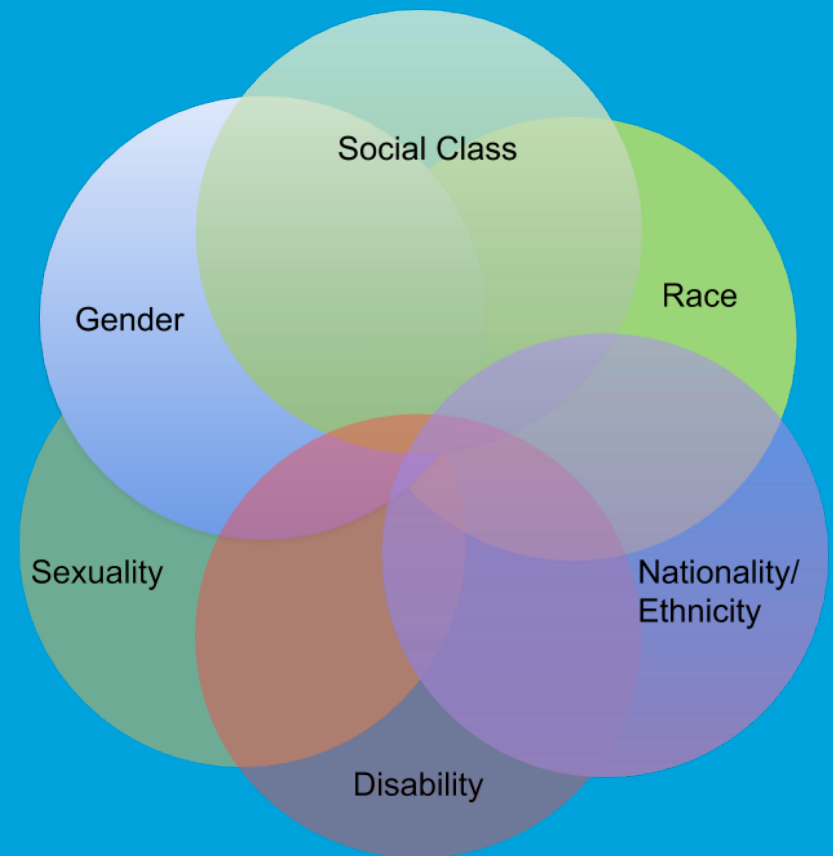
DONNA HARAWAY

Late 1980s (intersectionality)

Intersectionality draws attention to invisibilities that exist in feminism, in anti-racism, in class politics, so, obviously, it takes a lot of work to consistently challenge ourselves to be attentive to aspects of power that we don't ourselves experience.

If you don't have a lens that's been trained to look at how various forms of discrimination come together, you're unlikely to develop a set of policies that will be as inclusive as they need to be.

Crenshaw, Kimberlé (1989) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1: Article 8.



‘[e]xisting science and technology cannot transcend the capitalist [patriarchal] world. Rather, they are destined to reproduce it by their very structure. They are inherently conservative.’ (Feenberg, 2014, p.180)

Feenberg, A. (2014). *The philosophy of praxis: Marx, Lukacs and the Frankfurt School*. London, UK: Verso.

Additional references

- Janet Abbate (2012) *Recoding Gender*
- Catherine D'Ignazio & Lauren Klein (2020) *Data Feminism*
- Caroline Criado Perez (2019) *Invisible Women*
- Nathan Ensmenger (2010) *The computer boys take over*
- Nelly Oudshoorn et al (2002) On gender and things. *Women's Studies International Forum*, 25, 2: 471-483.
- Judy Wajcman (2004) *TechnoFeminism*
- Sally Wyatt (2008) Feminism, technology and the information society. *Information, Communication & Society*, 11,1: 111-30.

