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WITS: Women, Information Technology and Scholarship in the 1990s

[Sound Effects]

WITS women--

SLI: Sharon Irish

JB: Jenny Barrett

AV: Angharad Valdivia

GH: Gail Hawisher

LE: Leigh Estabrook

>>SLI: Hello my name is Sharon Irish. I'm a historian at the University of Illinois and Champaign Urbana and I've long been active with a scholarly society called the Society for the History of Technology, which is an international group of scholars and teachers that you might guess would be interested in the history of technology. I'm also an instructor this semester, which is the fall of 2013 of a seminar called Dialogues on Feminism and Technology. This is part of an activated network of scholars related to FemTechNet, an international consortium of institutions interested in the intersections of feminism and technology. So this video is a contribution to FemTechNet and the archive of dialogues and interviews with key leaders who have thought deeply about feminist issues in relation to technology.

Interdisciplinarity is a word that gets used a lot and it gets a lot of lip service. But today, we're going to talk with some former members of a group at the University of Illinois at Champaign Urbana about a concerted effort in the 1990s to be interdisciplinary and intersectional around issues of women and information technology. This effort come out of a colloquium that started at the Center for Advanced Study here at the U of I in 1991 under the leadership of Cheris Kramarae, who was then a professor in speech communication and also Jeanie Taylor, who is the associate director of the Center for Advanced Study. The colloquium went by acronym WITS, Women Information Technology and Scholarship, which is active on the UIUC campus from its launch in 1991 until about 1998. This is all information you all know and it was hosted for the last two years at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, courtesy of Leigh Estabrook, who's with us today and where I currently work at the Center for Digital Inclusion. One catalyst for the formation of WITS in 1991 was a visiting scholar, Dale Spender. She gave a lecture, a public lecture called Feminism Does Not Compute: The Computer Age - Implications for Feminism. Certainly a central interest of many of us in this room are the ways in which emerging technologies, all sorts of technologies re-inscribe existing race, class and gender hierarchies and how frameworks such as feminism attempt to disrupt those hierarchies. So another aspect that we will explore today is how information technologies were different in the 1990s and how feminist networks in particular have contributed or tried to contribute to changes in network systems. So let's get started. Welcome to all of you and thank you so much for taking the time to talk with me today. So we're going to start by introducing--having each of you introduce yourself and tell us what you are doing career wise and other relevant wise in 1991 when WITS, Women Information Technology and Scholarship begun. So Jenny Barrett, we're going to start with you. Welcome.

>> JB: Hi. Good to see you all. I am still Jenny Barrett as in 1991. I was a systems programmer at the computer-base education research lab. So I was a techie and the lab was known for the development of the PLATO system, some of you might have had contact with that and was the first computer-assisted instruction system. And many modern concepts and multiuser computing were actually developed at the lab such as email, forums, message boards, online testing, chat rooms, instant messaging, multiplayer games and remote screen sharing, but it was a male-dominated world. My first day at work I went looking for a women's room on my floor and found that it had been converted to a men's room with a makeshift "men's" sign taped over the word "women", so I knew what I was getting into. I think I was the first systems programmer hired there if ever. The closest women's room were--was two stories down near the secretary's office. Of course, the secretary was a woman. And most of my colleagues were young men in their 20s, well, I was over 40 and they were cordial, but they held their brainstorming sessions late at night while I had to keep more conventional hours because of my family and I felt a little excluded. But my supervisor who was fair get assigned me exciting projects. He recognized my skills and I did things such as creating code to an enable our system to communicate with the internet. And this was back in the days when separate network and systems existed, many unable to communicate with each other. So it was exciting working in a researching development environment and when I would come in late at night to test my code, I remember the rush of pride seeing the code firing up the main frame, I felt like a goddess. So in 1990--but in 1993, the university decided to close the lab and give it to a private company. Then I went to work for the psychology department and wrote programs supporting faculty research. Today, I am retired happily and doing watercolors and trying to stay active in issues of fairness and equality and I'm also working with my husband on a book on the history of ethnic groups in Chicago.

[Silence]

>>AV: Most people call me Anghy and I'm the head of the Media and Cinema Studies Department here at the Collage of Media and I'm also the interim director for the Institute of Communications Research. In 1991, I was actually not at the University of Illinois. I was somewhere else being an assistant professor and I came to the University of Illinois in 1994 and I was invited immediately to join this WITS, Women in Technology Scholarship and I did not respond to the invitation right away because I was a first year assistant professor and there was a lot of stuff being put on my desk and this is actually before email and I was never the most organized person so I probably lost the invitation, to tell you the truth. So then I got a visit in person by Cheris Kramarae, who said, "You know, we don't invite everybody and you have not replied [background laughter] to our invitation. What is going on," and I say, "Invitation? I'm sorry. Can you give me another copy?" And of course, I replied and I went to the Center for Advanced Study which to me is just such a lovely place I wish I could live there and because of all the great scholarly and intellectual things that go on in there. And I--so I came in to a group of already a community of women, really feminist scholars who dealt with issues of technology. Clearly, my research and kind of curricular interest being a professor of media studies, we always deal with technology and we study the philosophy of technology and also being a feminist scholar, always looking at issues of the relationship between systems of technology and philosophies of technology to gender and that had been something that had been very core in my education which I did get at the University of Illinois, I got my doctorate from the Institute of Communications Research here at

the University of Illinois and I had interacted with a lot the people whose scholarship we were drawing on including Cheris and Dale Spender. So those were like canonical scholars in our field and we've read them and so it was a lovely opportunity to join this group. And then to find this amazing group of feminists all over campus who had formed this community and were doing really, really creative, invigorating and cutting edge work. I think it'll be hard for a lot of people, especially our students to grasp how cutting edge everything that everybody around that table was doing was, I mean it was just mindblowingly cutting edge. And so it was very--it was really a wonderful opportunity to plug in to a network and that has, you know, to this day, I run into people in this network and it's a lovely memory, but it's also something that fueled a lot of my activities on campus and my research.

>>SLI: Thank you. So welcome too, Gail Hawisher.

>>GH: OK. I'm Gail Hawisher and I was hired here at the university as professor of English and giving the challenge of putting together what was being called a writing center at that time and came to be called the Center for Writing Studies. And when I was listening to Jenny and also to Anghy, I was struck when you were talking about PLATO, Jenny, because when Jenny says it was the first--well, would they--at that time, it may be called CAI, Computer-Assisted Instruction program. That means in 1960 and it was the first in the country. I think the only other place that had anything similar was out in Utah, who was experimenting trying to teach large numbers of students so that then interests me. I mean, in a way, we were already cutting edge, if not as you've said, we're also in feminism. But certainly cutting edge in technology, you know. And when Anghy was talking about email and coming here in 1994 when you came here say in 1990s as I did, just getting an email address was a real challenge. You had to be able to, you know, [inaudible] I need this email, I'm working at that time, I was co-editing computers and composition, which all you know my co-editor was Michigan and I said, we need to be able to you know send, you know, notes back and forth and so forth, and I'm sure attachments were around that. I'm sure there might have been, but I didn't know how to do them. And, you know, people looked at me, well, you don't need that. I mean, you're not doing the kind of quantitative research that really demands that you have this access and so forth. But I eventually got it. I mean, it didn't take me that long. But I was just sort of shocked that it would be so difficult, you know, to get an email address. So when Cheris sent you that email, that was already progress that it made on this campus that, you know, that we could have easy access to that. OK so, my challenge when I was hired administratively was trying to get this Center for Writing Studies off the ground and I'll never forget. I was given at an advising committee, OK, which is fine, later thank goodness I got to choose my own advisory committee, so, right. But this first time around, they were prominent faculty from all over the campus. And I remember one professor, gentlemen, saying "What we need on this committee," and I said, "Yes," you know, "is a more full balls," and I looked at him and I honestly did not know what he was talking about and of course, he meant that we needed more full professors that were male apparently on the committee who's not quite up to snuff in his eyes. But anyway, things got better as the years progress and I could choose better people that I wanted to have on the committee, which consisted of lots of women and guys, which had good--great ideas, OK. And I guess the other thing I'd like to say just as far as research is concerned, at that time, a colleague and I at Purdue University were starting this--a research--my research had always been

closely connected with technology or with digital media and by--in early '80s and so forth. And by 1990, I was mostly interested in computer-mediated communication. So this colleague and I from Purdue, we put together a LISTSERV, with--you know, with lots of help from good people and invited 27 women in our field to participate and talk about how they might--how they perceive themselves as being treated and participating, you know, on the various LISTSERVs that were going at the time. And I still think of course of WITS, you know, Women Information Technology and Scholarship, I mean, just that core, you know, that brought this piece together and if I had a chance later, I'll show you just a little bit of it because the women instead of just doing text and they do text, all of a sudden started doing--asking images and so that was real progress in, I don't know, 19, you know 92, '93 and so forth where images were not--or at least, we were sending images about and I attribute lots of the inspiration, you know, for this work to WITS.

>>SLI: And Leigh Estabrook, who because she was dean at the Graduate School of Library and Information Science, hosted WITS for several years. Welcome to you.

>> LE: Thank you. I came to the University of Illinois in 1986 as Dean of the Graduate School of Library and Information Science. Prior to that, I was at Syracuse University and in the School of Information Studies and that place was very advanced in terms of uses of technology. When I arrived there in 1978, I don't know when ARPANET begun, but the first thing I had to have was an email, as soon as people had ARPANET accounts there. They had me writing my dissertation on a deck writer, whatever it is. I think so, right? I had an Osborne 1 computer.

>>GH: Oh yes.

>>LE: You know. So I just--I was in an environment where, though I'm not a techie and I can't program, but it was just using technology actively. So when I came to interview for the deanship in '85, I actually think the reason I got the deanship is because I immediately asked the chancellor. I said, "So, there's no computing, can we have a network in the school," and they set me up to get a grant and took me down to--so, they were captured by the idea of trying to network the school. But I said, you know, library and information studies has to be networked. So it was this sense. What was important to me the transition and I can talk more about it when we talk about lit, specifically but I'm a sociologist by training, had done a little bit of research on technology in the labor force 'cause that was my primary research interest, including looking at what had happened with cataloguers as technology people did more copy cataloguing. I mean, they copied other people's catalog records rather than doing original cataloguing and the amazing things not good that happened to cataloguers. But when I came here as an administrator, I was concerned just with computing as a way it helped other people, you know as a way to facilitate research, but not thinking about it here as a sociologist or theoretically until 1991. So it was--it really was a big change in '91 that was really important to me even though at that point, I was doing a number of things that were in front of other departments as far as implementing technology. So I'm happy to talk about that later but--

>>SLI: Great. Thank you. So Anghy, we're going to start with sort of a second round of investigations about how your interest brought you to WITS, which you've already talked about a little bit, but maybe you can expand on what feminism meant to you in 1991, of course, things have changed significantly in the last 20 years. And also what roles once you got email or once you had network systems, what roles that played

in your work. I'm sure there are many ways in which your transnational work has been affected too, so you might speak to that if you have any thoughts.

>>AV: Thank you. What did feminism mean to me in 1991, or when I got here in 1994? As I said, I was trained in my doctoral studies as a feminist scholar here at the University of Illinois, which had I believe I think it was the first doctoral level seminar feminist cultural studies in the world and that was facilitated by Amell Samuel [assumed spelling] who was the research assistant to Paula Treichler and it was a--I think it was offered in 1986 and it had like 60 doctoral students 'cause there were women from every single department in it and they brought in all sorts of great scholars, Carole Vance, Donna Haraway, Janice Radway, so they brought in--I forgot who the fourth one is, I'm sorry. They were brought in these four major globally known scholars and it was just an amazing time to be here. Some of my fellow, you know, doctoral students were Amell Samuel and [inaudible] who wrote a dissertation on gender and the telephone in Wisconsin and trying to figure out how was that women in the rural community use the telephone for gender purposes, for community formation to survive, right, to communicate with somebody and all of that and so it was very--and then Cheris and Paula Treichler were co-authoring a feminist dictionary, which most of us were in someway involved in. I mean, Amell Samuel again was the major research assistant. But everybody was always looking for, you know, finding things and sending them on to them because it's like, "Oh, this could be put in that entry of the feminist dictionary." And so feminism was very, very much bubbling in our doctoral studies. Now, I'm not saying that it was totally accepted. I still remember going to a Lana Rakow dissertation defense and her advisor was James Carey, who was the Dean of the College of Communication at that time, and goes through the whole defense, amazing defense. I wish they would have taped it because it was exemplar in terms of amazing scholarship and the candidate was asking the faculty questions rather than the other way around. But the very last questions that James Carey with Lana Rakow was after all is done and everything is perfect and he says, "I just have one more question." And she says, "Yes," and he says to her, "Why study gender? I just don't understand, why you did this other than other fleshier kinds of topics," and so I thought that right there is a metaphor for the status of gender scholarship now. Here you had this major--I mean, this great student who's obviously going to become a leading figure at least in our field and her adviser, the very last thing he asked her, why gender, right? And so that was something that I face like how to change people in my committee because they said to me why study gender and I thought, well, why I have you in my committee? And so we obviously [inaudible]. So we were very much feminism--an intersectional feminism and transnational feminism was core to what I did then and what I do now and I've never been able to get away from it. And what I mean from--by that is that every once in a while, I will approach a topic and I will same, "This time, I will not focus on gender. This time I'll just do [inaudible], I'll do political economy," and then as I'm winding up the topic, I'm thinking, this does not make sense. I'm like, I have to add gender. There's no way for me to do research or to teach if not through intersectional gender. By intersectional we mean-- I mean, in any case, gender overlaps with issues of class, of globality, of race, of sexuality, of ability and so feminism meant that to me in 1991 when I finished my dissertation and it meant that to me when I returned to the University of Illinois as a faculty member in 1994. [Silence]

AV: --any number of discipline, sociology, library, science, history, psychology and literature, all of that, some of them from computer science, right? We had some techies there, engineering. Then you have that interdisciplinary, not just approach to theory but to issues of inclusion, to issues of expanding the curriculum, of expending the field, to see the intersections, to look at issues of for example, structure, not just theoretical structures, but where are the bathrooms, you know? Who can have access to the keyboards? How are professors, you know, treating women in the classroom. Who when they do meet? Because I do remember as an undergrad at the University of California in San Diego, when we had our programming classes that were required, sometimes we would get lab hours at 4 a.m. and I felt like I couldn't go. I felt like I couldn't go because I live off campus, I didn't have a car and I felt I would get raped somewhere in between my apartment riding the bike to campus and riding back in the middle of night in San Diego County. And so these are some of the issues that I think we were implicitly and explicitly taking up, as well as writing the books that many of our students read or build on to this day. So for me, it meant who I was, it meant me being a scholar and me being able to also give back to students to make it easier for them but also to keep those networks with this wonderful group of other women because I knew that that is often what makes it bearable when you come--and I was talking to Amell Samuel about this last night, there is no glass ceiling because you can shatter glass. It's a Plexiglas ceiling. You kept bouncing against it and I'm bouncing against it right now, I'm telling. And you know, and it just kind of bubbles a little and you just bounce back and it never damn breaks. And you know that's what you need to kind of a--to have a community to deal with it, kind of psychic cause of that. Yeah.

>>SLI: Yeah. And for you Gail.

>>GH: OK, yeah, I think unlike Anghy, in 1991, I did not have the theoretical background in feminism. In fact, I would say I developed that over the years, you know, beginning with WITS and some of the research projects that I engaged in--

>>LE: I'm--just to interrupt. I'm so glad you said that. I thought I was the only one who wasn't theoretical in 1991 [Laughter]

>>AV: Well, that's what I mean to say, that was like the first--I actually was looking [inaudible] the very first seminar about it because there really wasn't that much before.

>>GH: Well, I'm really sorry I missed that in 1986 seminar.

>>SLI: Me too.

>>GH: But in any case, so in 1991, I was really I think concentrating more on the practical and then from our--you know, I think it was biweekly, triweekly meetings, you know, then we would have reading groups Haraway and what have you and then I was doing this research as I was telling you so, you know, Sandra Harding became a big person and my life, and so forth. And anyway, so that all developed. But in trying to establish this Center for Writing Studies which I'm proud to say is now, you know, like 23 years old, and it looks like it has some sustainability. I would bump up against these same problems. I suspect Anghy that you're bumping up against right now as head of your department. But one of the things, I was put on the educational technologies board which is a campus-wide committee that I was really, really proud to be on and--'cause what we did is we reviewed proposals from faculty across campus and to give them some money in order to pursue this proposal so--and there were a couple of other women on that as well. But we have an interesting administration building here, the swan one as you all know, and it has five floors and there are two

seminar rooms, [inaudible] two seminars room. But the one on the fourth floor and the one on the fifth floor are almost identical. So we usually held the meetings in the fourth floor and anyway, I was pretty new here and so forth, so instead of going to fourth floor, I went to the fifth floor and I tramped around there all people sitting you know around and I looked and everybody had white shirts on and I said, "Oh, well, that's kind of interesting," and some had suit jackets on and I said, "Oh." And then the chancellor looked at me and he was really quite lovely because he said, "You may be in the wrong room?" And at that time, I gotten all the way around and I said, "Yes! I think you're absolutely right," and I made you know, left just as quickly as I could. So that is the place I knew were the decisions were really being made, you know, even though I like to think at this educational technologies board.

>>SLI: You had to go the next floor down.

>>GH: Yeah, the next floor down. That's a very good observation. As my time here at the university regressed, I came to understand feminism not only, you know, as research and practical actions that are for and about women. But actually, that are for and about all of us in the society, you know, regardless of our gender and that when women have an influence whether it'd be on these committees or when you think in the larger a global environment which I moved to more in my research during thistime. We know that where women are literate, that there is far less violence in those societies. And at the center of my understanding of feminism in part is also collaboration. And collaboration not in the sense that, yeah, we just, you know, the way sometimes our students really almost resent it because they say one person does all the work, et cetera. But in the sense that we're both or more contributing to the work and regarding whether we're collaborating with graduate students, whether we're collaborating, you know, with colleagues, that we all are viewed equally and receive the same kind of benefits and really going to that for those that the university might not give those sorts, that's kind of regard too so. So I guess, you know, where I was in 1991, I had some of these thoughts. But they really hadn't come together into any kind of coherent body of research.

>>LE: So I'm trying to think, the question is how are like interest in WITS, I mean, our interest brought us to WITS, right?

>>SLI: Right.

>>LE: And I think it fits what Anghy said. You talk about the connection between research and practice that I felt very divided as an administrator then. Because before I was a researcher and scholar and quite theoretical, I thought in terms how I approach things and then, I had no sort of theoretical--no ways really to theorize sort of the administrative pieces, if that make sense.

>>? It does.

>>LE: And so, that and being quite naive about feminism despite my own experiences of not getting jobs 'cause I had children and all the other things in life. But not theoretically understanding the pieces. That WITS really helped make me much more whole about, you know--it taught me so many different ways of thinking. So, it wasn't just one sort of theoretical approach. But ways to start hanging my hat on things that sort of fit. It was like an a-ha experience sometimes sitting around the table and I bet of all us may have had that. So, it helped me very much in that way. I think it also helped me understand why it had been so important to me from the very beginning that the School of Library and Information Science be highly interdisciplinary because I'd felt it that it was necessary but it helped me understand why we had to have multiple perspectives, that we needed to make sure that we stayed as

one unit and not multiple departments to bring those perspectives and I had said a number of times that if librarianship is distance from technology that the librarians will become mastodons, and if the technologist were distance from the librarians, that the technologists are just deracinated. So, trying to get those together and not just in practice but also trying to think about it theoretically was very much something that WITS helped foster and actually really help begin some of my thinking about it, so.

>>SLI: And Jenny.

>>JB: So, in 1991, I saw--I did see myself as a feminist but in the broadest sense of the world, because my race and my class background, I came from a working class background. And because of my activism both socially and politically in the '60s, I was concerned about the underprivileged and I saw the issue of class and race and gender of--you really can't separate them. If you want to address the inequities in the society and I saw IT as a powerful tool but just a tool. I saw scientific inventions as tools usually used to reinforce the existing power structure. But if it goes--if it--if it's in the right hands then it could be used to effect change and it has the potential to create a more democratic society that's widely accessible which was one of my main concerns, to make it accessible so that we could use these tools to organize and to fight social injustice. And so my goal at that time was to make IT accessible to the less privileged women, minorities, and the less well-off economically. And then as--it seems like now still, the resources are controlled by powerful white men and the whole sometimes, you know, individuals can sort of squeeze their way in. So--and I thought about it for a long time that to be accessible, technology has to be affordable first of all or free and it shouldn't be difficult to use because--and back then, you were talking how difficult it was to get on email and the internet. And I was thinking, let me point out that one when WITS was launched, email was a relatively new tool then and a lot of people did not have access to email and they didn't have access to the internet. It was mainly concentrated north of Green Street and the engineering labs. And there, they had the resources and the technical people would help them get online and I think especially in the humanities, they--people didn't have that support, even they could see a use for this new technology, they--you know, they didn't have the expertise and they didn't have the help in order to get connected. And in that setting in 1991, there were many technological advances, right? We saw--the World Wide Web came into being I guessed it was launched in public in 1991. The internet was just open to commercial use and--but the web was--that was before Mosaic was developed. So to access the web, you had this tedious menu-driven programs like Golfer. I thought Golfer was great. You can have access to this information but it took a lot of work in order to get this information.

>>GH: And all in print.

>>JB: Right. Yes, all text, no graph.

>>SLI: Little green.

>>JB: I think was it 1992 or 3 that graphics was really came along and attachments. Before that, you know, you weren't able to attach email as you were saying. And in January 1993, I was reading the only 50 World Wide Web servers existed.

>>SLI: Whoa.

>>GH: Really?

>>JB: Fifty in the world. So, but then WITS as a group, we realized pretty early, it was amazing, the potential use of the internet as a tool for networking and communications and maybe to change the world,

right? So, I thought--oh anyway, to get back to the point of IT being accessible, it also must be relevant to one's work with--to enrich one's life. And back then, you know, most people, were all busy and especially being women, we had a lot of responsibilities and I'm not saying the other people didn't have a lot of responsibilities, but you don't have time to play around with something that may not have relevance for your life. So, part of our role in WITS was to make sure that IT, this tool would be relevant for us. So that would enrich our lives. So when I heard about WITS, I thought that it would provide a community of like-minded women with similar concerns even if we didn't call ourselves feminists, we were concerned about social justice and maybe create--working towards more democratic society. So--And this was a great group 'cause I was able to network with many like-minded women.

>>SLI: So, I wanted just keep drawing you out because there's so much great material here, but I don't want to keep you all day. So, let's move on and Gail perhaps, you could talk a little bit about how--you know, we've already talked about how WITS supported your work and ways in which, but maybe you could address that.

>>GH: OK. Yeah. You know, I will say, I did always consider myself a feminist, OK. But, I didn't always know exactly what that meant until I really became involved with WITS. And, certainly I think it was mentioned, the speakers that we had come in, I remember Leslie Weisman who did, what was it, "Discrimination By Design", so that the book--and then, in the workshop, she asked us to draw the kind of house that we might want in which we wouldn't feel discriminated against, and always, I climb up on the shelves to get--you know, to the very top shelf there in my kitchen, you know, to get things down and so forth, OK. So, the speakers were certainly helpful. And then as Jenny was talking about, Mosaic which was invented here, you know, came out in those early years and so, we all trumped over to look at, at Mosaic. It was the most disheartening experience. You sat there and you were in Mosaic and you waited, I don't think I'm exaggerating very much, three to five minutes before you went to the next site that you were trying to access. And so, it was very hard for us to see, you know, what the World Wide Web would really become I think and until we actually got the, you know really, super fast browsers. And then all of a sudden, you went, "Wow." OK. And WITS was there too when that happened. We also went over and this was North of Green where we have most of our engineering facilities, we went to the cave. I think the cave is [inaudible] cave. But, in any case, you know, we've put on the goggles and so forth and we could see how a brain was actually being dissected and you could--you interacted with it, you know, which was such an amazing thing.

>>SLI: So, the cave was this immersive environment with three-dimensional aspects on three walls as I recall.

>>GH: Yes.

>>SLI: And then you wear these special goggles that are attached to a computer, right?

>>GH: Yes.

>>SLI: Yeah.

>>GH: But of course when your--when you have the goggles on, you know, as everybody knows now, you don't really feel that you're necessarily attached to a computer, I mean, you scale, you can go in there, "Oh, that's the brain, oh yes, it's sliced in this way, and whatnot." And so, I mean, just these different capabilities of technology that I had, you know, no awareness that we're--you know, that WITS exposed me to I guess and then continued to support on whatever, you know, work that I [inaudible] at that time, so.

>>LE: Actually for me, I mentioned earlier the sort of connection to theory for just sort of personal thinking about technology. But what was more important was really this connection to other women in other departments across campus. That was--I think that was the most important. In the late '70s, the American Library Association had a pre-conference prior to their National Convention on women. And the people I met there have ended up through my life. Being not necessarily really good friends but the connections have been important all along in terms of knowing people, seeing one other, people I could call on. And I think that sort of that sense of not being isolated was one of the greatest contributions for me. When I came as a dean, I was only the second female dean and Nancy Cole [assumed spelling] had been appointed just four months before me. And when I talked to her, she's-- I said--one time, I was going to a dean's council meeting and start to sit next to her and she said, "Don't ever sit next to me." So, the sense that I--the sense of isolation was great and so those connections were important and remain important in some ways that are probably hard to even understand. And just one other thing about it, Jenny, you were talking about the issues of race, class, and gender and technology and it was actually, in the early '90s that Prairienet began. GSLIS [Graduate School of Library and Information Science], Prairienet as a way to provide computing, not only teaching about computers but to provide technology to--just people who suffer from race, class, gender inequality was important. But the university said to me when I went to get permission from them to have free email, free internet access to people in the community, they said yes, but in order to do this, you must have a slower connection than what's offered by the private firms that are starting up in this community. Enough said. Well, there are all sort of reasons, you know, don't compete, you're getting state funds, those pieces. But it also said something about race, class, and gender.

>> GH:Who gets what.

>> LE: Who gets what.

>>JB: I was a volunteer for Prairienet. I wrote some of the documentation for the user interface and I also did some workshops for seniors citizens and how to sue [inaudible].

>>LE: Thank you.

>>SLI: So, Prairienet was launched in 1994, after a grant in 1993.

[Multiple Speakers]

>>LE: Well, yeah, Prairienet had started, but '94 it had funding. And GSLIS kept supporting it with money. And then also we just kept going in the hall on purpose, I mean, the university wouldn't give us money but at the end of the year, I said, "OK, well, we'll shut down," but then they couldn't deal with the PR.

[Multiple Speakers]

>>JB: And you got--you did fund raising, as well. I think people--

[Multiple Speakers]

>>GH: And just about that same time, they're doing some consulting at the Wayne State University and they had this wonderful program called, Computers for Commuters. So, I was trying to work with the people that were--you know, had--had the computers, they had an email program. The email program was still the line editor and I had the most difficult program to work with. And I mean this was like '94, 95 and the rest of the people, you know, on campus did not have [inaudible].

>>SLI: Oh, they had something more accessible.

>>LE: I do have to say in fairness that we did get a fair amount of support from [inaudible]. I don't want to just trash talk.

>>SLI: But supporting Prairienet for internet was always an uphill battle.

>>LE: Yes.

>>SLI: And then, we did finally shut it down in 2008 and that was very painful.

>>LE: And it was more than town gown. It was race, class, and gender.

>>SLI: It was.

>>LE: Absolutely.

>>JB: And age.

>>LE: Age too.

>>SLI: Yeah.

>>JB: Right.

>>SLI: So, we need to wrap up because I know, I'm so blessed that you're here but two of you are sick. And so, I'm not sure that we got to Jenny and Anghy in this sort of round of how WITS supported your work but maybe while you're addressing the last question, we could go back to Jenny and think about ways in which feminist networks might help in the future or where you see some of the lessons from WITS contributing to the future. And any other nuggets that you want to share to wrap up.

>>JB: So, I think I had mentioned--well, I still think the internet is--was still a powerful organizing tool and you can disseminate information quickly and organize for effective political action. And so far, it's a relatively easy to--I think [inaudible] public terminals or accessible in public libraries. But we have to make sure that it stays free and for example, the recent fast food workers organizing, that's have been spread throughout the internet and have you gotten emails about it.

>>SLI: Oh yes.

>> JB: And yeah, and they're using it--the fast food workers are using it to organize and get popular support nationally. And I think online petitions have actually changed the policies of some corporations who are concerned about their image. So--And I still belong to LISTSERV of women and IT you seek advise on work, and how to deal with sexual harassment at work, how to raise daughters free of gender stereotypes and this was good for women who don't have mentors or public--or positive role models and this is an international group. So some women in other countries really want to know how things are done in places where women have made some advances. But still, it's interesting how these same issues keep cropping up, you know. It seems like there's a continuing battle. We can't say OK, we won this and we could relax and so, anyway.

>>SLI: So, that LISTSERV is kind of a manifestation of certain kinds of networks where women continue to support each other.

>>JB: Right.

>>SLI: Yeah.

>>JB: Yeah. And my role in WITS, well, I gave workshops and some of the existing technology in software and I set up the first list--the WITS email list--

>>SLI: Great.

>>JB: --and then moved it to the LISTSERV so that we could communicate easily so.

>>GH: It's still up, if I'm not mistaken, has been up for a long time.
[Multiple Speakers] [Laughter]

>> SLI: And so Anghy how about you?

>>AV: In terms of lessons for the future and I guess I'll just pick up on Jenny's last comment that--and we know this from social movement, history and theory, right, that the gains have to--they're never

permanent especially when you're talking about subordinate groups, you can just--there can be so much slippage and I think we're in a moment historically where there's a lot of potential slippage so it's tanking a lot of activism just to stay, you know, kind treading water. I think we're treading water and we know from a--you know, a history of media technologies which with the media studies would consider the internet as part of that is that these technologies have immense liberatory potential, right, and so the potential for networking, for you know, progressive politics, it's huge, but we also know that there's huge forces within--you know, within the economy that will kind of turn this kind of technology into the ways that for example, radio, you know. Radio is sending and receiving technology by invention and it turns into receiver where we just hear NBC on it or right now, Fox or Howard Stern, you know, and so the technology is still there. I always tell my students, first of all, all you have to do is get a radio because when the Armageddon comes, the internet is not going to help you out, it's the radio that's going to help you. Second of all, you should try to build a radio 'cause that would just give you--it's not impossible. You buy radio kits and when you build a radio, it's sending and receiver kind of thing and it kind of reminds you in that practice of what the technology was supposed to do, what it's supposed to receive messages from Fox Network. It was supposed to be something that we all communicate across the world, across the world through the ether. And so once that is driven, think about the internet in a similar way as well. very few of our students can put together a computer but some of them can actually. So the potential I think for WITS in the future kind of--I'm kind of, you know, interested in a lot of you said, we didn't think ourselves as feminists, I guess if it would have been feminist, it would have FITS. [Laughter] [Multiple Speakers]

AV: And but definitely, and I agree with Gail that the goal of feminism is not necessarily to advance women, but to make the world a more just place when you analyze the kind of gender discrimination and work and do it, you make the world a better place for everybody, and--right. And so I'm still committed to that. The network of, you know, as you said Leigh is to me was almost the most important element of that group because really, politically, and you know, academically, the network is so invigorating. And just for you to know that it's there sometimes is the kind of impetus or energy you need to keep going, right.

>>SLI: It's like instead of the woman saying, "Don't sit next to me," it's the women saying, "Please come sit next to me."

>>AV: Right. Or, let's just walk--work across the table and then kind of work this room together. You know what I mean?

>> GH: But--

>>AV: I mean, so there would have been so many different ways to say that than to say, "Don't sit next to me."

>> GH: I hope they had a conversation after that because I would think or would hope Nancy Cole would be saying, it's not strategic for you to sit next to me, but let's talk about some of these things [inaudible].

>>AV: You would hope that.

>>GH: I would hope that. I won't ask. I would hope that, yeah.

>>AV: So I think that in terms of network, FemTechNet, you know, network and the docs that Amell Samuel has created in relation to MOOCS, that there's still a lot of flaming going on. I just had a student defending a dissertation on Reggaeton and she was looking at blogs and anti-fans and most of the kind of flaming that's going on in those blogs is like in relation to gender. Men from also to Latin American countries not like in Reggaeton but it's really not so much about Reggaeton, but its about controlling women and their sexuality

and public spaces and you know, so that's still very much going on and this is a task that takes a lot of work and that we should still be committed to. The network is still important. Most women I know still are enduring some kind of gender discrimination in the workforce and so you still need the network and you still need to do the scholarship to document that this is going on and you still need to kind of figure out what are the possibilities to kind of improve the situation and to maintain the gates that we have--you know, that we have gotten to this point and not to lose because I think we've lost ground and so in a sense, so how to keep going. So I think this is still very much a work in progress and one that we still have to be involved in.

>>GH: And then I guess I would say, you know, the network, the face-to-face networks which these were are still some important today like in conferences. We're holding for example of rhetorics, feminisms in global communities conference and a colleague is hosting at it Stanford just this week. I mean, so this goes on and those kinds of conferences, you know, build I think that kind of networks that we're talking about. I see less of them say on Facebook, and granted I don't look for them, but I suspect that you see an awful lot on the blogs as you exactly said, you know, of the flaming, you know, not even sure people today even know what flaming necessarily means or--but we'll have to check with the students that get a chance to watch this as well, yeah. But one would hope that we can use these networks, that we can use these social networking sites which I think we hadn't really mentioned at all is a place where we can build cooperation in collaboration among all of us regardless of them.

>>SLI: Thank you, and Leigh, any thoughts about forward looking issues.

>>LE: Well, it's just I want to pick up on Gail's last point talking about using social networks and reflecting on--I have one of my children, a daughter, who is in a very male dominated, you know, cut throat business and she in her late 20s then got really initiated a monthly meeting of women in that field, sort of lunch and it all levels to not, you know, from interns on up. And it's strikes me that the social networks certainly crossed the distance barriers of distance, but I found in teaching our online course when I teach our students in the summer face-to-face--excuse me, face-to-face before they start working online, those face to face relationships really changed qualitatively the way in which people are able to work on social networks. So that I would say even the women I met at that pre-conference on women, almost all of my connections with them subsequently have been virtual, but it seems so important for us to find face-to-face opportunities and why WITS was so great was that you talk about the Center for Advanced Studies, its ambience is lovely and the food was terrific. You know, it just built that kind of sense.

>> JB: Dancing Party. [Multiple Speakers]

>>SLI: Well, I want to thank you all again for sharing both kind of the aspirational aspects of feminism, the transformational aspects of WITS and also the very complex and multilayered ways in which technology and culture overlap. I've learned so much and just appreciate your really deep profound contributions. Thank you.

>>JB: Thank you, Sharon.

>> All: Yes. Thank you very much.

>>JB: Yeah, I think we learned in WITS too that in order to change--deal with some of problems that we faced in '90, there really needed to be societal change that really sort of determines what happens on the internet and these networks.

>>SLI: So onward, adelante. [Laughter] >>?: Thanks [Music] [Silence]