

## PROLOGUE: A VISIT TO THE VERSAILLES OF SILICON VALLEY

The shuttle drops me off in a large courtyard. Dotted the walkways are nine sculptures; three are busts of women, including oceanographer Sylvia Earle. I take a moment to walk through a beautiful garden with flowers and edible plants. Next to the garden is a brightly lit cafeteria offering a smorgasbord of fruits, vegetables, and grains. I stop in my tracks at the sight of a life-sized skeleton of *Tyrannosaurus rex* that is being set upon by flamingos. Dozens of bikes painted in primary colors are lined up outside the building. Much like polytechnic universities such as MIT, buildings are assigned numbers instead of names. Upon entering No. 43, I am greeted by a troupe of corporate representatives in bright blue golf shirts. They check my identification, direct me to wear a badge, and head upstairs. Looming above the stairs hangs a huge replica of a space shuttle with Paul Allen's name inscribed on it. Colorful, comfortable couches are around every corner. I pass by outdoor patios adorned with plants and more sculptures and kitchens stocked with espresso machines, fruit, and candy. Individuals are hard at work on their laptops.

Everywhere I turn there is a "No Visitors" sign in bright red. Security guards in the same bright blue shirts stand closely together in a wide-legged stance, forming a perimeter around the conference room. Their presence restricts my movement so that I cannot walk more than 10 feet without being asked: "Can I help you find something?" At first, I feel conspicuous as an outsider and disconcerted at being so closely watched and surveilled. But then I remember I am here to do the same. I ask one of the guards, Terrence, what he and the other guards are doing. He says their job is to help

to guide visitors and treat medical accidents. Apparently, lots of people fall off the communal bikes that the employer provides to help expedite trips across the large headquarters. I smile and say “Okay. Why security guards and not medics?” He shrugs and says, “I’m just doing this gig until I graduate from school and enter law enforcement.”

Men roam the halls in packs, wearing jeans, hooded sweatshirts, and t-shirts and carrying MacBooks. During this long first day of the conference, I see more male security guards than women employees. I speak with two of the women I see working here, both from human resources. Through closed glass doors, I see three meetings with over 15 people in each one and not a single woman!

At the end of the day, on a different floor, I search for a bathroom and observe a fourth meeting. One woman is present among nine men.

I see a woman running frantically through a hallway. She looks at me anxiously. Here is another woman . . . I smile. She replies by shaking her head and mumbling: “Meetings, meetings, meetings.” Then I find myself lost. The air has shifted, buzzing with energy. People are working closely in groups and individually. Whiteboards are covered in a programming language foreign to me. A poster of Napoleon Dynamite is trimmed in red tinsel. Cubicles are packed, and the conference rooms and offices are small and transparent. The space is dense with people and offers little privacy. I am out of my element and getting more lost, so I retrace my steps. Once more on secure footing, I realize I have accidentally wandered past a “No Visitors” sign.

I discover a few private phone rooms within the visitors area, and I use one of them for some moments unobserved (or so I hoped) to check in with colleagues at my university. In the bathroom, the toilet seats are heated and the tampons are free. In every stall, there is a laminated poster with tips on how to code more efficiently. Each stall proffers different coding tips. Apparently, this place wants every moment of your “free” time.

Later, as I wait outside for my hotel shuttle to take me back to my accommodations, I peer inside building No. 34. An entire wall of the first floor, at least 2,000 square feet, is a large screen, lit up by the corporation’s name bouncing across the room—a screensaver to fill a room. With my nose pressed up against the glass, I see in the middle of the room a stairwell that is also lit with screens. There are also screens on each stair’s riser, illuminated with the names of cities where the corporation’s offices are located.

I am incredulous at the sight—the screens have taken over the room. My shuttle arrives to take me back to my hotel, and I climb onboard in a daze, overwhelmed by the culture at the Versailles of Silicon Valley.

This book is an ethnography of women knowledge workers in sites of computer science and engineering, fields that focus on the design and building of computer systems. In these pages, I share the stories of technologists in US computing workspaces that confer preferential treatment to men from dominant racial groups. Such favor in these lucrative, prestigious jobs has societal impacts that need further investigation. These technologists and their stories help us to understand how this occupational injustice is a danger not only to disenfranchised workers but to broader society as well. I examine the intellectual challenge that women face navigating and persisting in computing culture, despite the contradictions between their lived experiences and the performative philanthropic heroism performed by their bosses, who are prominent computing figures. I argue that technologists have the potential to provide leadership critical to ameliorating these harms.

Sexism stubbornly persists in computing culture, as does technocracy, a dogmatic belief that computer technology is always needed and always munificent. The cultural means by which these problems entwine and fortify one another in computing is the crux of this book's inquiry. I am especially curious because other scientific fields have been yielding to broader social movements for justice and public criticisms of computational machinery are proliferating these days. What is special about computing culture that makes it seemingly impervious to desegregation? By spotlighting this potent combination of sexism and technocracy, we can learn how digital bosses have come to operate in our society imperiously, dodging taxes and oversight with impunity, and how some programmers who look like them, serving at their right hands, are enchanted with a sense of divine right. In the context of the powerful influence of computers, we may also do some divination of our own and speculate on how the cultural mechanisms sustaining sexism and technocracy in computing workspaces affect society.

Technological acumen in this cyber era is a form of social power, and yet access to acquiring such acumen is reserved for a select few. My field memo in the beginning of this Prologue describes the context in which

computing labor takes place, exhibiting themes significant to this book, including gender, surveillance, privacy, labor practices, and wealth. The rest of this book will explore relations of power inside these citadels. A highly segregated workforce produces computing knowledge and products. How and why this segregation happens in computing workplaces is important to understanding regressive politics in the context of computing labor, artifacts, and the digital economy. High technology's dependence on sexist culture calls into question the socially revolutionary narrative promoted by the computing industry. Further, it also challenges us to think about the costs of society's growing dependence on computers and the consequences of trusting those who own the means of their production and their vision for the future of humanity.

In this book, I bring together feminist anthropology, feminist science and technology studies (STS), and Marxist feminism to frame how a fusion of reproductive, economic, and knowledge politics shape and are shaped by computer technology. I draw on two years of ethnographic research with cisgender and transgender women who persist in computer science organizations at all stages of a technical career. *Cracking the Bro Code* is in chorus with other scholars who are working to foment the social and intellectual movement to transform barriers to women's opportunities in computing—which, I hope, may also have a salubrious effect on the kinds of technology that are developed and adopted.

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# Cracking the Bro Code

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