

# Women Graduate Students in Computer Science

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What they say about themselves  
and their field

Presented by Jennifer Sader at

The Ohio Celebration of Women in Computing

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# The Methodology

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- ❖ Schools selected for research
- ❖ Interview protocol
- ❖ Data analysis



# What Participants Said

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Some  
(very preliminary) findings

# Blatant sexism is rare

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“There’s one faculty member that I had and I’m convinced he’s sexist and I’m convinced he’s racist and there are probably other –ists out there too. He’s just a weird, weird person... He’s probably the only one I’ve seen so far”

# They feel pressure to prove themselves

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“I think that women are treated most of the time like they really don't know, like they need the easy task in a group project...”



# Sometimes feel isolated, especially as undergrads

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“It was kind of, I don’t know, almost alienating, I think. Maybe not now as much, but as an undergrad, it was definitely alienating, and I still sort of expect that.”

# Computers are fun!

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“It was a toy, a gadget to play with. I just like playing with things, or technology. For some reason, I just, really, it just fit the way I thought. It’s like, ooh, I can do this, or I could try this. I always wanted to see, what else can I do, to kind of push the limits. And so, that was kind of the first thing, ‘ooh, this is fun!’”

# Programming as a puzzle or a problem to solve

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“You’re sitting down and you’re frustrated because it’s just not doing what it’s supposed to, and part of that challenge is just being like, ‘OK, what’s wrong with this,’ and then when you finally get it to be, ‘Yes! It works!’ I just kind of like that”

# Women faculty are important

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“Once I got to college in my undergraduate years, I had two female professors most of the time. There was no question of whether or not you could be successful as a woman.”



# Obstacles and Challenges

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- ❖ Admissions difficulties
- ❖ Advisor issues
- ❖ A need or desire to work while going to school
- ❖ Requirements and prerequisites: “They make you take random engineering courses”

# Strategies and Approaches to “Geek Mythology”

- ❖ Finding other role models
- ❖ Cultivating a general professional, serious persona
- ❖ Embracing the “geek”



# Gateways into Computing

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- ❖ Early experiences with computers
- ❖ Math and science fields
- ❖ Language and linguistics
- ❖ Graphics and gadgets



# Other Common Elements

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- ❖ Independence
- ❖ Determination
- ❖ Family emphasized education
- ❖ Questions or rejects traditional gender roles
- ❖ Defines a happy woman as:  
“One who has the ability to realize her dreams.”

# Discussion and Questions

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For more information, visit:  
<http://personal.bgsu.edu/~jsader>



Pictures by Suzanne Menzel and Kyle Ross were respectfully borrowed from the

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