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You can't be what you can't see

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“I fought really hard to get here,” she said with tears filling her eyes. “I’m in my first internship and not only am I the only woman there, but I’m the only person of color. I don’t belong in this field.”

I sat across the auditorium, stunned by this statement from a fellow audience member. I was at a forum discussion about women in the computing workforce at Spelman College. I was shaken by what I was hearing. Was it possible that the number of women in computer science is really that imbalanced?

Sadly, the answer is yes. According to [research](#), only 3% of the computing workforce is composed of African American women. Did you know that in 2016, only 19% of Computer Science bachelor's degree recipients at major research universities were conferred to women (down from 37% in 1985)? See more stats here: ncwit.org/bythenumbers.

As a school counselor educator, I am committed to providing opportunities for all of my students to pursue a career that aligns with their interests. I had never truly considered the systemic barriers, cultural patterns, and access to opportunities that affect our students as they explore interests and select career pathways.

I began talking to more young women at the high school and university level taking computer science courses. "What are the demographics of your computer science classes?" I asked. I repeatedly heard stories of being the "only one" and "feeling behind" or "out of place." Their words resonated with me because they were not isolated stories but a united demand for change.

I also asked these women what they enjoyed about computer science. Not having a background in the field, I felt like I didn't know much about technology. I was curious about the persistence of these women. What sparked their interest and inspired them to keep going? It's all about coding, right?

Wrong!

The women lit up when asked about their interest in computing. I repeatedly heard, "I love solving problems!" "It's actually a very creative field!" and most often what I heard about was a concept called CS + X. CS stands for Computer Science and the X represents an area of interest. These women talked about the intersection of computer science with other industries like history, art, finance, fashion, and so much more. I learned about how every industry has computer science in it, and these women were finding engaging, creative, and sustainable career opportunities.

As a school counselor, I realized the influence I have to spark an interest in computer science with young women and other underrepresented students. I can demystify what computer science is for all students and use resources like [Family Code Night](#) to find free, scripted activities that bring the community together, inspire interest in computing, and engage in career conversations about the intersection of computer science with every area of interest.

Google's free [CS First](#) curriculum engages content area teachers and school counselors! With [MIT App Inventor](#), anyone can build an app! Many schools are using Apple's [Swift](#) curriculum to engage students, build apps, and more! [Code.org](#) offers K-12 learning opportunities! There are many opportunities to find the right fit for your students. Explore, Share, and Engage! Ignite interest in sustainable careers of the future!

Want to learn more? Check out these resources:

- [Moving Beyond Computer Literacy: Why Schools Should Teach Computer Science](#)
- [Why Should Young People Consider Careers in Computing and Information Technology?](#)
- [Bridging the Encouragement Gap in Computing](#)
- [Which computing pathway is right for me?](#)

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About the Author



Angela Cleveland is the co-author of "50+ Tech Tools for School Counselors: How to Be More Engaging, Efficient, and Effective" and "Coding Capers: Luci and the Missing Robot." She has 15 years of experience as a school counselor and received the "2017 New Jersey School Counselor of the Year" award. She is an Executive Board Member and Webmaster for the [New Jersey School Counselor Association \(NJSCA\)](#). Angela Cleveland is the Program Director for [NCWIT Counselors for Computing \(ncwit.org/c4c\)](#), which provides professional school counselors with information and resources they can use to support ALL students as they explore computer science education and careers.

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