An Act of Hope: Black Women's Motivations to Enter a Socio-Academic Counterspace

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Abstract

For Black women positioned along the margins of traditional computing spaces, creating and discovering counterspaces for social and academic support has long been a means of navigating isolating conditions. Despite this historical practice, the role of these spaces in advancing future goals in computing remains undertheorized. This study examines how undergraduate Black women's motivations to enter a socio-academic counterspace reflect hope, an underexplored cognitive-motivational construct. We conducted a qualitative analysis of three years of applicant responses (N=78) to a socio-academic counterspace for Black women in computer science at a Predominantly Black Institution. Analysis revealed how students' accounts reflected the three dimensions of hope: *pathways* through relationships with trusted others who provided learning opportunities and support; *agency* through a sustained passion for technology despite challenges experienced in computing; and *goals* through aspirations to expand access to technology careers for the next generation of Black girls. We conclude by outlining future directions for creating new opportunities for socio-academic counterspaces from the periphery to the center of computing to support the experiences of students.

CCS Concepts

• **Social and professional topics** → **Race and ethnicity**; **Women**; **Informal education**; **Computing education**.

Keywords

Black Women, Hope, Motivation, Counterspace, Predominantly Black Institution, Broadening Participation, Help-Seeking

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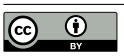
1 Introduction

In the past year, not only has undergraduate computer science (CS) enrollment experienced a historic 8% decline, but support and funding for efforts to broaden participation across institution types have declined.[1][2][3][4] Among these efforts, counterspaces, or safe spaces for students of color, show significant evidence of the positive social and academic benefits and outcomes for students traditionally underrepresented in CS, such as Black women [2, 5, 12, 13, 17, 19, 34]. For Black women, counterspaces serve as spaces to affirm their humanity, intellect, and shared experiences beyond negative social stereotypes in computing [5, 18, 24]. Yet, counterspaces remain underexplored as spaces for students to exercise agency [3].

To understand how self-selection into counterspaces may act as an intentional and goal-directed process, we use Snyder's Hope Theory as a conceptual framework to examine how applicants to a socio-academic counterspace construct their decisions around: (1) goals, (2) pathways, and (3) agency [30, 31]. We express this as an "act of hope" or the intentional selection of this counterspace to create their own architecture to reach goals in computing. Studying counterspaces as spaces of intentionality, therefore, builds on recent work urging the remaining necessity of identity-affirming spaces to fill social and academic gaps that mainstream computing environments leave unaddressed [7, 22].

This paper analyzes survey responses (N=78) from the first three years (2023-2025) of RISE Stars, a socio-academic counterspace centered on improving the experiences of freshmen and sophomore Black women in CS at Georgia State University (GSU), a Predominantly Black Institution (PBI). Unlike more commonly studied institutional contexts like Predominately-White Institutions (PWIs) and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) [25, 27], PBIs enroll the majority of graduating Black students in STEM, as well as those from low-income and first-generation backgrounds [1, 8]. Despite this unique institutional context, less research has focused on students attending PBIs and this work seeks to provide additional evidence of their importance to broaden participation. Our research is guided by a central research question: *What motivates undergraduate Black women at a Predominantly Black Institution (PBI) to participate in a counterspace?*

This study makes contributions to the current body of knowledge in two ways. First, it applies Hope Theory to counterspaces, providing a framework for understanding the motivations that lead Black women to seek out and engage with existing counterspaces, as well as how these spaces support their intentions to persist in CS. Second, it identifies the mechanisms of counterspaces that can be replicated and improved to create computing environments that better support Black women's continued participation and success.



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[1] https://chronicle.com/article/once-seen-as-a-sure-thing-computer-science-has-lost-53-000-majors
[2] https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/victories-higher-education-eliminating-dei
[3] https://bpcnet.org/
[4] https://anitab.org/press-release

2 Background and Related Work

2.1 Experiences of Black Women in CS

For Black women in CS, experiences at PBIs remain understudied [5]. However, existing research suggests that PWIs can act as saturated sites of epistemic power and violence [27], whereas HBCUs are often described as more supportive environments [25]. These saturated sites reinforce dominant narratives about what it takes to succeed as an undergraduate CS student, including the expectation that students demonstrate a particular "fit" (e.g., prior programming experience) [15, 26, 28, 36]. This narrative can lead students who do not fit the stereotype to be perceived as deficient and experience a lower sense of belonging [26, 33, 36]. As a result, Black women navigate these hostile environments and challenge dominant narratives, in part, by engaging in socio-academic counterspaces [22]. What is less known is where a PBI like GSU fits into this narrative.

GSU was not always a PBI. Founded in 1913, GSU was historically a Predominantly White institution (PWI) [6]. This history matters because, unlike HBCUs, GSU was not founded with a mission specifically dedicated to uplifting and centering Black students' identities, cultures, and legacies [25]. Thus, GSU's institutional origins, like those of other PBIs, are rooted in a foundation similar to that of PWIs. This historical context may help explain the contrast in Black women's representation within and outside of CS spaces at GSU [5]. Therefore, it is important to view PBIs as a complex, underexplored context where Black women still perceive a need for counterspaces.

2.2 Socio-Academic Counterspaces

A counterspace, not to be mistaken for a "third place," refers to a space, place or community where "deficit notions of people of color can be challenged and where a positive collegiate racial climate can be established and maintained [34]." In response to the pervasive racism in **social and academic spaces** at PWIs, Black students created these spaces to foster their own learning, where they could be supported and validated as students [34]. Additionally, these acted as safe spaces to openly discuss shared experiences of racial micro-aggressions by other students, faculty and staff [34]. Counterspaces were co-created by Black students and faculty in Black student organizations, study halls, fraternities and sororities, offices with targeted services, and even a few classrooms [34].

Counterspaces in computing create opportunities for novice programmers to form communities to create games that embody Black cultural experiences [23, 29], virtual spaces to engage in critical conversations that may be risky in computing classrooms [22], and gain professional development skills [5]. Despite these benefits, in traditional CS departments, Nakajima et al. discovered that counterspaces are oftentimes kept at the periphery and most commonly occur in campus identity centers, student organizations on campus (e.g., National Society of Black Engineers, ColorStack), and national race-centered conferences (e.g., Richard Tapia, AfroTech) [18]. Notably, studies have discovered that leaders in CS departments are still reluctant to learn from and center these historical practices of Black students because these efforts are misunderstood as only benefiting some, too small to support and overlooked as critical for academic support [18, 19]. As a result, there is little attention applied to socio-academic counterspaces as a strategy that could improve exclusionary climates. For these reasons, we center this paper on the intentionality behind students' decisions to enter a counterspace to further emphasize their importance.

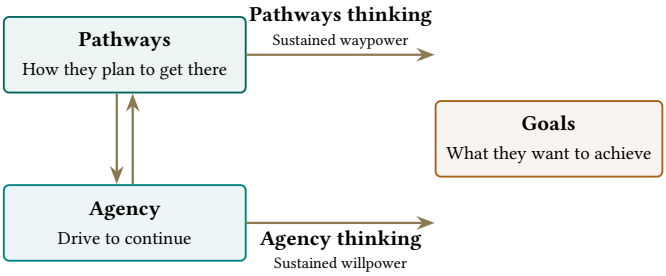


Figure 1: Snyder's Hope Theory connects goals to a reinforcement of discovering pathways and maintaining agency [31].

2.3 Applications of Hope in Education

While extensive scholarship has examined the factors that motivate students to persist in computer science [4, 20, 35, 38], *hope* as a construct remains understudied. Snyder's Hope Theory (see Figure 1) expresses hope as a cognitive process that refers to the belief in one's ability to pursue effective pathways and maintain the motivation to reach a desired future goal [32]. *Pathways Thinking* can be expressed as the ability to identify routes towards one's goals. *Agency Thinking* is the motivation to pursue those routes despite challenges that may arise [31]. *Goals* can be achieved despite challenges through the mutual reinforcement of agency and pathway thinking [31].

The importance of hope is documented in education literature. Students with a high sense of hope tend to identify effective routes to achieving their goals [31], be more resilient in rigorous coursework [11], show greater persistence in STEM disciplines [10], and strive for social change in computing [37]. Similarly, Yosso, in her extensive work on counterspaces, describes aspirational capital as the ability to maintain hope and dreams in the face of significant real and perceived obstacles experienced by students of color [39]. Counterspaces can be understood as the realization of the cultural wealth of Black communities [19] and this paper helps position them as an intentional mechanism for constructing and facilitating student hope.

3 Positionality

The author team comprises three women-of-color scholars who bring diverse viewpoints and experiences to this research. The first author is a Black woman, a doctoral student, and a GSU alumna. This positions her as an insider to the experience of attending a highly diverse university in which the CS department itself remained comparatively lacking in diversity. The second and third authors are professors at GSU and identify as Black and Indian American, respectively. This work stems from our shared interest in ensuring that Black women (across Afro-descent) who attend PBIs and seek support in computer science have safe spaces to build community, joy, and the resources to thrive.

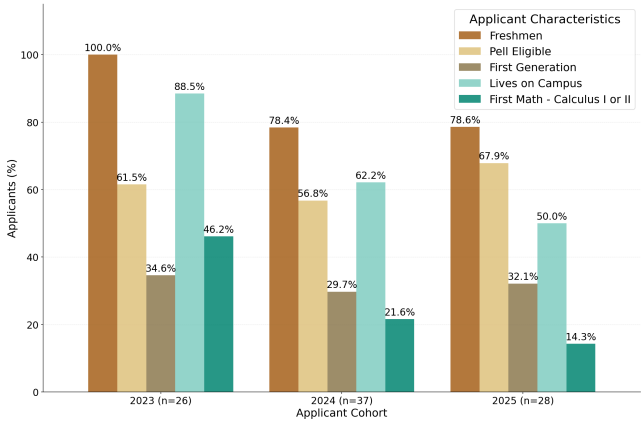


Figure 2: Applicant characteristics across the first three years of RISE Stars. All 91 applicants identified as Black women. Percentages are calculated relative to each cohort's total applicants.

4 Methods

Our research question asks: *What motivates undergraduate Black women at a Predominantly Black Institution (PBI) to participate in a counterspace?* We examined this question in the context of RISE Stars at GSU, a socio-academic counterspace designed to support Black women in CS during their freshman and sophomore years.

4.1 Context

4.1.1 Georgia State University (GSU). GSU is a PBI and urban public university with an R1 Carnegie classification. PBIs are among the least-researched Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs) and, yet to be designated as such, serve over 40% of Black students and over 50% of low-income and first-generation students [1, 8]. GSU is nationally recognized for granting the most bachelor's degrees to Black students.[5] CS is one of the largest undergraduate majors at the university, with 2,700 students enrolled in Fall 2025. At GSU, Black women represent 30.5% of the overall undergraduate student body, but only 9.6% of CS majors, and 8.4% of CS graduates, meaning that despite attending a PBI, in CS classrooms, Black women remain underrepresented. Furthermore, over 80% of GSU students are commuters, limiting opportunities for informal interactions outside the classroom. Despite CS being one of the largest majors on campus, there is no dedicated space for CS students to connect and build community. This institutional context creates both an opportunity and a responsibility as GSU has the *potential* to make a meaningful national contribution to increasing the number of Black women in CS, but doing so requires *intentional* structures that support students.

4.1.2 RISE Stars. After several focus groups with current Black women in CS at GSU to understand what a safe space may look like, RISE Stars was created (learn more [5]). It is designed as a year-long cohort-based socio-academic counterspace for students during their first or second year of the CS pathway. To ensure that this space maintained authenticity, an upper-level Black woman CS student (the first author) worked closely with a CS professor (the last author) to develop and lead the program in the CS department [34]. The program includes near-peer mentoring, cohort meetings, technical and professional development activities, bonding events, and online communication platforms for connection and sharing opportunities and resources. During the Fall semester, students work in teams alongside a mentor on a social-impact project to experience how computing can be used for good. For the Spring semester, students work in teams on a research project, where they present their results at a university-wide undergraduate research event. These components are intended to build a strong academic community for Black women in CS.

[5]https://commkit.gsu.edu/fact-sheet/

4.2 Data Collection

After IRB approval, students were recruited to RISE Stars via an email written by the first author targeting incoming freshmen and sophomore Black women in CS before the Fall semester. The outreach email did not explicitly describe the program as a counterspace. Instead, we welcomed students to the department, affirmed their choice of major, introduced RISE Stars as a mentoring and community-building program for Black women, and invited them to a welcome brunch. Figure 2 summarizes the characteristics of the applicants. As part of the intake process, interested students completed an online application to facilitate mentor matching.

This study focuses specifically on participants' responses to the following open-ended prompt: *Briefly address how participating in a cohort focused on experiences of Black Women in Computing would be beneficial to you as a freshman/sophomore in computing.* While this item was optional, applicants were informed that responses would receive priority consideration for program admission, providing a meaningful incentive to complete it. In total, 78 (86%) of RISE Stars applicants between 2023-2025 provided a response (2023: 77%, 2024: 87%; 2025: 93%). As part of the application process, all students whose data are included in this analysis provided informed consent for their responses to be used for research purposes.

4.3 Data Analysis

The first author adopted a bottom-up approach to qualitative data analysis using first- and second-cycle coding [16]. First-cycle coding generated initial descriptive codes; second-cycle coding then clustered those codes theoretically. During first-cycle coding, the first author assigned descriptive codes to short phrases within each participant's response, with each phrase representing a distinct motivation for applying to RISE Stars. This process was inductive. Because participants typically cited multiple motivations, each response could receive multiple codes, and a single phrase could be assigned more than one code. As a result, we identified nine codes, summarized in Table 1. During the second cycle, the first author organized the inductively developed codes according to the three components of Snyder's Hope Theory: pathways, agency, and goals [31]. The full author team reviewed the resulting codebook and discussed representative excerpts to assess the fit between the data-driven codes and the theoretical constructs.

Table 1: Codes organized by Hope Theory. Counts represent coded excerpts; each response could include multiple codes, but each of the 78 excerpts is counted only once.

Theory	Code	N (%)	Description
Pathways	Community	61 (78%)	Supportive networks and belonging
	Role Models	31 (40%)	Mentors and industry leaders
	Skill Development	18 (23%)	Technical learning and collaboration
Agency	Underrepresentation	35 (45%)	Isolation and lack of diversity
	CS Experiences	17 (22%)	Classes, coding history and transfers
	Upbringing	5 (6%)	Family and relationships back home
	Social Identity	2 (3%)	Motivation tied to other identities
Goals	Career	28 (36%)	Internship preparation
	Impact	16 (21%)	Paying it forward

5 Findings

We found three themes that explain the motivations of undergraduate Black women in computing in our study to participate in a socio-academic counterspace. In the following sections, we connect each theme to a component of hope [31].

5.1 The pathway is community

The first theme captures the participants' motivation to enter an identity-affirming space. For participants, this socio-academic counterspace is a strategic way to co-construct a clear, visible route to learn from trusted others and navigate an exclusive discipline.

5.1.1 Sisterhood. A majority of participants (78%) highlighted community as a space with trusted peers, where some even expressed hopes for a form of "sisterhood." This sisterhood is fostered by a shared identity, as many participants were excited to discover that the program was not only for Black women, but *created* by Black women.

> *"I was not expecting to receive an invitation to this, but I feel extremely grateful. All summer/year I've been trying to find an internship. At first I wanted a paid one because I knew I would need a job once school starts. Eventually I didn't care about the money anymore. I started to look for more programs and also applied for scholarships. Seeing this opportunity and learning that* ***it's a program supported and ran by Black Women*** *overfilled me with joy! "* **P04**

This reflects how a foundational principle that counterspaces should be created by the communities they aim to serve can make a space feel welcoming and more attainable [34]. Participants were also motivated by the opportunity to share lived experiences with other students **in** computer science. Participants expressed a clear need for a comfortable setting where they could openly discuss these experiences without fear of judgment.

> *"I want to surround myself with people who understand the barriers and opportunities that exist for us in tech so we can uplift each other and create success together."* **P88**

Oftentimes, Black women are the only or the few in CS classrooms and experience hostility by peers, leading to discussions on underrepresentation feeling riskier [22, 25]. For participants, choosing the counterspace was part of identifying a path where they could "feel seen and supported" as expressed by P81. RISE Stars offered a route to have these discussions with both peers and mentors.

5.1.2 Guidance from role models. Almost half of participants (40%) described role models who they could be vulnerable with as an important factor for applying to the counterspace. Surprisingly, these aspirations were primarily connected to learning both professional and technical skills (23%) from these role models. Among the professional skills highlighted, participants overwhelmingly wanted to use this space as a route to developing confidence.

> *"Having a space where I can learn from and connect with other Black women who have faced similar challenges would give me the confidence and support I need to keep going."* **P66**

Participants often connected confidence with their ability to succeed in computer science. They described confidence as important not only for persistence in coursework, but also for asking questions, seeking help, and preparing for future opportunities. For instance, many of the participants shared their worries about being behind in technical skills, despite being incoming freshmen and sophomores. To them, this counterspace offered a community where they could finally ask for help and develop the coding skills that they believe could make them competitive in tech.

> *"I feel like participating here will make me feel more comfortable with asking for help, and not feeling too shy to ask."* **P73**

> *"I would love the opportunity to improve my skills and become a better coder."* **P37**

The participants consistently described the importance of being in a safe space with other technical peers. Despite attending GSU for an entire year, incoming sophomore students expressed CS classrooms with limited opportunities to meet other Black women and hopes that this space could help them bond over shared interests.

> *"I want to connect with more women who understand the technological part of me that many of my friends and family just don't get… I want to talk with another person who gets it and can show me more things that I didn't know before."* **P17**

The motivation for applying to RISE Stars for these students was deliberate pathways thinking. Participants viewed the socio-academic counterspace as an alternative pathway to traditional institutional routes that they perceived as unsafe, unclear, or unavailable. Through this pathway, they hoped to have a foundation of trust to find guidance from peers and mentors "who get it," clarify ambiguous academic milestones, and ultimately form a sisterhood.

5.2 The agency comes from experience

The second theme captures how participants drew agency from lived experiences that shaped their desire to continue in computer science.

5.2.1 Family. A small percentage (6%) of participants described RISE Stars as a structure that could feel like home. For example,

P27 described her siblings as a primary source of motivation for joining RISE Stars.

> *"My entire life, I've had my sisters—I'm the youngest of three girls—and they've allowed me to learn from their mistakes, give me advice, and just be a listening ear. My hope is to be able to* ***find that same feeling within the professional community*** *of computing."* **P27**

The support she received from her sisters shaped her expectations for what a computing community *could be*. Family and cultural foundations can be the first sources of support and knowledge that shape students' aspirations [21, 39], and Snyder argues that agency is shaped by previous experiences of success [31]. For students who enter college with existing understandings of safe and supportive community, computing culture can be shocking to them [26].

5.2.2 Computing Culture. Participants described how isolating experiences in computing environments (45%) challenged their confidence, even before entering college. These tensions emerged as participants reflected on their earliest computing experiences in high school.

> *"In high school I took AP computer science and* ***I was the only Black woman*** *that was going to major in computer science and had little to no experience. In that class I often felt behind and as though* ***I couldn't connect with any of the other students****."* **P50**

This aligns with the dominant narrative of CS, which can lead to students feeling behind before even entering [26]. In turn, P50 described the counterspace as an avenue to find other students with a "similar skill level." Sophomore participants, who had already spent a year at GSU before entering the counterspace, described similar experiences of isolation.

> *"The transition during my first year of college was challenging, as I often* ***felt isolated and lacked a sense of community****. In particular, I found it difficult to connect with peers in computer science, making it hard to collaborate or seek guidance. While others seemed to grasp the material quickly, I often needed more time to fully process and understand the concepts."* **P25**

Similar to past research at PWIs [27], participants described a computing culture that made belonging feel uncertain. As P27 explained, "it can be hard to feel like you are meant to be in many of these spaces." Despite these experiences they describe an unwavering commitment to computer science revealing agency thinking despite constant challenges that arise.

5.2.3 Positive experiences and passion. For 21% of participants, agency was sustained by focusing on what first drew them to CS. These participants expressed a deep love for computers and enjoyment from coding from their earliest experiences.

> *"I grew my love for computer science from the seed the "Hour of Code" program planted in me as a curious 3rd grader. [...] I am proud to represent* ***the little girl who loved coding****."* **P32**

Across participants, agency was rooted in more than perseverance alone. The exclusionary computing culture that many encountered in high school and during their first year of college often communicated that they did not belong. Yet rather than diminishing their motivation, participants connected their current aspirations to supportive family relationships, early technical successes, and a lasting passion for CS. In seeking out this socio-academic counterspace, they were intentionally selecting an environment that reinforced those sources of agency to reach their future goals.

5.3 The goal is impact

The final theme captures the participants' motivation to pursue their goals in computer science. Across responses, goals extended beyond personal success to creating lasting impact. Through the mutual reinforcement of the counterspace as a pathway and their own tenacity sustaining agency thinking, participants describe their goal of developing as computer scientists while creating future opportunities for Black girls in computer science.

5.3.1 Proving to themselves and the naysayers that they belong. Many participants described a goal of first breaking through CS and into the tech industry (36%) by dismissing the doubts formed against them. P08 expresses a desire to "prove more than the world expects of me." Similar to recent work [9], participants describe this constant tug-of-war even as early as high school.

> *"In high school, I was hit with the painful realization that I had no friends who shared my passion. I was often teased, and constantly told that* ***coding was "nerdy" and "for boys."*** *Desperate to prove them wrong, I asked my counselor to place me into an introductory computer science class. [...]* ***I am confident that I belong in this field****."* **P32**

For this participant, being told that she did not belong became an opportunity to define herself rather than accept the doubts of others. Choosing CS was an act of self-definition [22], and the counterspace represented a pathway to continue building that identity within the discipline. This desire for self-definition was reflected in several participants, many of whom viewed the counterspace as a space where their identities as future computer scientists could be affirmed.

> *"Being a minority in a male dominated industry can be intimidating and I think [RISE] would greatly encourage me by showing that* ***people that look like me DO belong in the space of computing****."* **P46**

5.3.2 Make computing more inclusive. Although many participants first wanted to establish themselves in CS, their aspirations extended beyond themselves. Many described a desire to become the change they wished to see in CS by expanding opportunities for other Black women and girls (21%).

> *"By joining [RISE], I am hoping to have a similar experience with people who have the same goals in* ***closing the gap*** *with Black women in the STEM field."* **P19**

> *"Not only will [RISE] help me define my place as an [individual] in the Tech world, but it will help me build my path to success as a Black woman striving for* ***change in her community****."* **P58**

Participants found importance in being in computing spaces to become that source of encouragement for future generations. This

supports work that suggests that students are more likely to pursue opportunities that they believe are affordant of communal goals [14]. For example, P76 expresses that:

> *"**Representation matters a lot in this modern world**, and I aspire to become one of the Black women thriving in computing so I can inspire others who also share my background and experiences."* **P76**

Together, each of these components of Hope Theory helps us understand the decision to join this counterspace as a choice to pursue an alternative to traditional CS spaces, informed by both an understanding of the climate within CS and a deep commitment to persisting in the field. Participants viewed the counterspace as an important part of their journeys toward becoming computer scientists and hoped that their own successes would help make computing more inclusive for the next generation of Black girls.

6 Implications for the Field

This work has three implications for understanding the role of counterspaces in students' academic and professional trajectories.

Counterspaces as academic help-seeking structures. Our findings on pathways echo recent calls in computing education to move beyond standardized support models, given that historically marginalized students' expectations for help-seeking spaces are not aligned [7]. The participants described the counterspace as a place they hoped to learn from trusted peers, gain technical guidance, and build confidence in computing. Therefore, we argue that CS departments should invest in and legitimize dedicated, socio-academic counterspaces like RISE Stars for incoming freshmen and sophomore students that already reflect these student-identified needs.

Counterspaces as social and professional support for navigating the changing computing industry. Our findings on agency suggest that students entered the counterspace already aware of challenges they may face in computing such as persistent underrepresentation. The participants described that they anticipated the counterspace as a way to navigate this by gaining access to mentors, learning new technical and professional skills, and being surrounded by peers in the process, allowing them to see their goals as closer rather than farther away. These motivations matter because computing students are navigating not only difficult coursework, but now the fear of a rapidly changing technology landscape shaped by artificial intelligence (AI). As AI continues to change the skills, roles, and expectations associated with computing careers, students need spaces where they can make sense of the discipline by learning from more senior peers. For Black women in computing, participants viewed this socio-academic counterspace as an opportunity to ask important questions and develop a collective sense of agency for navigating computing.

Counterspaces as opportunities for impact-oriented computing goals. Our findings on students' goals reveal that participants saw their success as collective. Many described wanting to prove that they belong in computing, become role models, and help create a more inclusive technology field for future Black girls and women. This goal orientation suggests that the motivation for these students to participate in counterspaces is not simply a reactive response to "barriers" in computing. Rather, they reflected an intentional, hopeful strategy through which students pursue their own computing futures while imagining how their success can open doors for others. This suggests that socio-academic counterspaces warrant institutional investment as structures that respond to students' expressed needs and future goals.

7 Limitations and Future Work

While this study reveals what motivates Black women to join this socio-academic counterspaces in computing, it has several limitations. *First*, our analysis is based on application responses, which capture students' aspirations and perceived needs at the point of entry but do not reflect the full range of their experiences before or after participation. *Second*, this study is situated in one program at one PBI. This context is central to the contribution of the paper, but it may not reflect motivations for entering counterspaces across PBIs, HBCUs, PWIs, and community colleges. Future research should examine how institutional context shapes these motivations and whether similar patterns emerge among other groups in computing. *Third*, relying on a single open-ended survey question administered at program entry limits the depth of the data, as the format precluded follow-up probing or clarification. Additionally, because students knew their responses would factor into the application review process, social desirability bias is a reasonable concern. Future research would benefit from incorporating interviews to explore motivations more deeply and tracking how motivations change over time. *Finally*, although Snyder's Hope Theory [31] helps frame students' goals as an intentional process, it does not fully account for the co-construction of hope that occurs within counterspaces [24]. Future work should emphasize Black Feminist epistemologies to explore hope through shared identity and experiences.

8 Conclusion

This paper examined what motivates undergraduate Black women at a PBI to participate in a socio-academic counterspace in computing. Through their application responses, participants described the counterspace as a pathway to a trusted community, renewed confidence, and computing goals that extend beyond individual success. Framed through Hope Theory, these motivations show that self-selection into a counterspace is an "act of hope." Participants were not simply attempting to overcome obstacles; they were identifying the relationships, resources, and affirming spaces they desired to persist and contribute to the field. For the computing education community, this reinforces that socio-academic counterspaces should not be treated simply as peripheral supports. Instead, we hope that this work positions counterspaces as intentional structures that help students build pathways, sustain agency, and imagine computing futures where they belong and succeed.

Acknowledgments

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