Barbie has a Pink Laptop: Redefining How the World Views a Computer Scientist

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Abstract
Within computer science there exists a nontraditional group with technical expertise, but also a passion for aesthetics, interaction experience and human behavior. Our contributions are valuable, yet we may feel the pressure to code to prove that we can do the "real work." The label "computer scientist" suits us, yet not by the common definition. Join us as we explore what it means to be a "computer scientist."

Overview of information to be presented
Within the field of Computer Science exists a group working along the edges that doesn't always fit the traditional mold. If you're in this crowd, you don't look like a computer scientist (you're likely a woman). You don't act in ways that are aligned with how the world defines a computer scientist (you don't routinely code and no, you can't fix that computer). Sure, you have technical training and experience, but that's not what makes you tick. Instead, you have a passion for things outside of coding and the machinery—concepts such as aesthetics, emotion, interaction experience, human behavior and technology adoption—those are just some of the things that turn you on. While these areas are gaining respect through the sub-field of Human-Computer Interaction and while you're recognized as a member of the Computer Science field, it's not always an easy fit in your environment. You continue to have to fight for attention and resources to ensure your voice and contributions are not just heard but also put into action. All of this means you may feel the pressure to set aside your real interests and take time out to code, just to prove that you can do the "real work" and that your contributions to Computer Science have value. And while you can now buy a Barbie doll who carries a pink laptop and calls herself a computer engineer, there is still work to be done.

In this session we will share experiences and explore how we can embrace our non-coding passions and strengths in order to grow and enact our definition of what it means to be a "computer scientist." We expect that session participants will not only have a variety of backgrounds, but that they also engage in collaboration across discipline boundaries on a daily basis. To add to the diversity of voices, we are also bringing an additional perspective to the discussion. Jennifer Rosenzweig, a consultant who works with corporations to create positive communities and cultures, will be joining in the dialogue.

Plan of Action
This Birds of a Feather session will be structured as a group discussion complemented by small, breakout groups.

Bios
Alyssa Rosenzweig is a NSF Graduate Research Fellow in the Department of Computer Science at the University of Toronto. She has degrees in Psychology and Computer and Cognitive Science with a minor in Mathematics from the University of Pennsylvania. Thanks to her involvement with organizations such as Women in Computer Science and Advancing Women in Engineering at Penn, she was able to thrive and pursue her non-traditional interests, despite the department's traditional attributes. She is once again in a similar environment, advocating a diversity of views of Computer Science through research on technologies for families and individuals with chronic illnesses.

Victoria Schwanda is an Information Science PhD student at Cornell University where she was recently awarded an NSF Graduate Research Fellowship. She is interested in the use of technology to maintain day-to-day relationships and how people emerge to fulfill roles in online communities. She received a BA in Psychology, a BAS in Computer and Cognitive Science, and a minor in Fine Arts from the University of Pennsylvania, where she held leadership roles in groups like Women in Computer Science and Advancing Women in Engineering. Support from these groups was instrumental in her continuing in Computer Science despite her non-traditional interests.

Jennifer Rosenzweig is a consultant who works with organizations to create collaborative, innovative environments that allow each individual to grow and contribute. Her particular areas of interest include the application of positive change strategies to build companies, the study of ways women can authentically impact the evolving nature of business, and cutting edge techniques for encouraging entrepreneurism instead of bureaucracy. She has a Masters degree in Positive Organization Development from Case Western Reserve University, a Masters degree in Performance Improvement from the University of Michigan, and is pursuing a doctorate in Organization Consulting from Ashridge College in London, England.