Diversity Statement

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I believe that diverse working environments are more efficient and innovative, as diversity provokes thought. Moreover, equal opportunities represent a fundamental goal of modern societies. As technical fields increasingly dominate our lives, all genders, races and ethnicities should be equally involved. A little over five years ago, when I came to the USA for my Ph.D. studies, I found that my graduate school experience was enriched by the diverse pool of students and faculty, people from a great variety of countries and cultures, and from different underrepresented groups. I consider myself to be contributing to the cultural diversity on campus, by bringing my experiences and sharing them.

Contributions via sponsorship: I believe that every child has the right to a good life, and an educated individual can rise over the chains of poverty and become a successful person in life. However, opportunities are not equal for kids born in families of low socioeconomic status. Therefore, I have done my part by taking full responsibility to sponsor a 15 year-old girl named Urmila ‘Urmi’ Pargi, who lives in a small village in India, with the help of ChildFund International. I take care of her meals, preventive healthcare and educational expenses. I feel that this helps to provide her with an educated and healthy life, and eases the financial burden on her parents. I yearn to help more kids in the future and also encourage other fortunate members of the society to help the unfortunate ones.

Contributions via mentoring: I strongly encourage increased participation of members of underrepresented groups in higher education and in the field of computer science. I have actively sought opportunities to mentor underrepresented students throughout graduate school and during my postdoc. I have felt that these students are very passionate and put in extra hard work to achieve their goals and dreams. Currently, among the four students who I am mentor, three are female students at the graduate level. In addition, I also mentor and encourage my younger sister to pursue graduate school as she is interested in Mathematics and Computer Science. I have also taken steps to engage with high school students and undergraduate students to inform them how to stay safe online and how algorithms help towards this goal. Specifically, I have given lectures to high school students in India and undergraduate students at Stanford. I was thrilled to see young students getting excited by this topic.

Contributions via research: Through my research as well, I have aimed to understand and improve the equality, inclusion, and safety in online and face-to-face conversations. Social media has provided the general population with an effective medium for discussion and debate. However, women and minorities are the target of most harassment and attacks on the web and social media. In my research, I have attempted to help people engage in healthy conversations online. My research on online malicious behavior seeks to understand and quantify these issues, and identify solutions that help promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in online spaces. By identifying when people turn malicious in online platforms, we can begin to propose solutions that discourage undesirable behavior and promote more constructive and inclusive discourse. At the same time, equality and inclusion are key in productive, face-to-face conversations. However, women and underrepresented minorities do not receive their fair share of trust and equality. I found this to be true in my research on deception in face-to-face group discussions as well. I found that people rated women to be less dominant and less trustworthy than their male counterparts after only a few minutes of interaction. This is very discouraging and I yearn to build techniques that can guide us to correct this situation. By understanding the factors that lead to this decrease in trust, I hope to develop actionable insights that can lead to higher trust among people in face-to-face discussions, and promote inclusion and well-being.

Future goals towards diversity: As a faculty member, I also aim to apply these values of diversity, equity, and inclusion to my teaching and mentoring of students. By grounding my research in concepts and theories that relate to commonly-used social systems (e.g., in studying how people may drive political polarization, or how people turn malicious in web platforms), I hope to inspire interest in computer science among a larger demographic. My interdisciplinary interests also put me in a strong position to bridge conversations between individuals from diverse backgrounds (for example, encouraging interactions between students interested in computer science, sociology, psychology, and economics). Towards the goal of more inclusive and diverse community, I am very inspired by the steps taken by your department and I hope to contribute to these conversations as a faculty member.

Sincerely,
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