Diversity Statement

Srijan Kumar

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 the field of Computer Science increasingly dominates 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. I strongly encourage increased participation of women and members of underrepresented groups in the field of computer science, and I have actively sought opportunities to mentor them throughout graduate school. I also encourage my younger sister to pursue graduate school in Computer Science. 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. Equality and inclusion are key in productive, face-to-face conversations. However, women and underrepresented minorities continuous 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 group discussion. 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.

As a faculty member, I also aim to apply these values of diversity, equity, and inclusion to my teaching and interactions with 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). To that end, I hope to continue fostering similar conversations and cross-departmental collaborations in the future.

Sincerely,
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