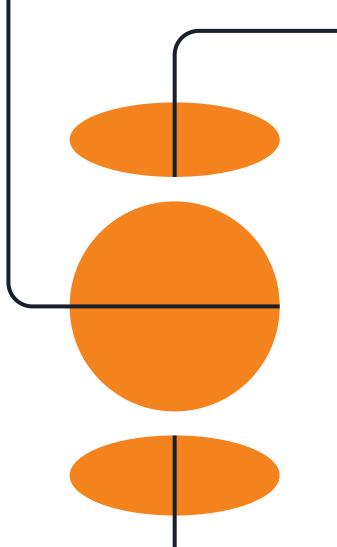
# The Diversity-Hire Narrative in CS: Sources, Impacts, and Mitigation Strategies

Christopher Perdriau<sup>1</sup>, Vidushi Ojha '17<sup>1</sup>, Kaitlynn Gray '25<sup>2</sup>, Brent Largesse<sup>3</sup>, and Colleen Lewis<sup>1</sup>

1: University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign (UIUC), 2: Harvey Mudd College, and 3: University of Washington Bothell



Students report hearing from family members and peers that women receive jobs because of their gender and not their merit. Women provided arguments against this "diversity-hire" narrative that educators can share with their students.

definition:

# Diversity-Hire Narrative:

The idea that a person was selected for a position due to one of their identities, such as their gender or race/ethnicity, rather than their merit.

## Background:

The goal of affirmative action programs (AAPs) is to increase the representation of people from historically underrepresented groups (HUGs) in the workforce. AAPs can unintentionally signal that a person from a HUG was selected for a position based on their gender or race/ethnicity rather than their merit. We call this signal the **diversity-hire narrative**. In computing, prior work has found that women hear the diversity-hire narrative during their computer science (CS) internships [1], but women's experiences surrounding the narrative have not been thoroughly explored.

### **Objectives:**

We seek to understand the:

(1) **sources** of the narrative

(2) **impacts** of the narrative

(3) **mitigation strategies** women use to **challenge** the diversity-hire narrative.

#### **Methods:**

We conducted **23 semi-structured interviews** with third and fourth year undergraduate CS students:

- 16 of whom self-identified as women,
- 1 as non-binary, and
- 6 as men.

We analyzed these interviews qualitatively using descriptive and values coding.

#### **Results:**

Participants reported hearing the diversity-hire narrative from **family members** and **peers**. Our work illustrates that **undergraduate women in CS appear to be affected by the diversity-hire narrative in many ways.** In particular, our participants reported:

(a) questioning their preparation,

(b) ignoring the narrative, and

(c) working harder in order to prove themselves.

Participants appeared to mitigate the diversityhire narrative by stating that:

(a) their peers are jealous,

(b) diversity-programs address gaps in privilege

(c) CS is a meritocracy: people are selected based on their abilities

RQ3: How do undergraduate women in CS challenge the diversity-hire narrative?

"[the diversity-hire narrative] comes from people with a certain amount of privilege and [they] don't understand that just because they have a certain identity, um, means that they have an amount of privilege that exists because of society and what these programs are trying to do is fix it" (Diane)

"maybe affirmative action allows, like, people with certain identities to have more opportunities to interview, maybe, but at the end of the day, everyone has to pass the interview." (Belle)

heir

don't wanna be the person who, kind of, gets targeted at by that." (Tisha)

"I think it comes from a lot of like men, honestly, who are salty that they didn't get [an

internship]." (Esha)

"[The diversity-hire

narrative] kind of

motivated me to

work harder ... 1

RQ1: From whom do undergraduate women in CS hear the diversity-hire narrative?

"[The diversity-hire narrative] comes from family members and people that you're close to. And they don't, like, explicitly say it, but they're like ... all these tech companies they're hiring for diversity." (Anya)

"[A classmate] told
me, like, oh, you
only got into this
company because
you're a girl."
(Diane)

RQ2: How does the diversityhire narrative impact undergraduate women in CS?

"I actually got my [company] internship because I went to, uh, the Grace Hopper conference and they found my resume through there ... I had some doubt or it was like, did they just like, give me a really easy interview process because I'm a girl" (Idris)

"sort of been better about, um, sort of tuning out the negativity." (Ruchika)



# **Implications:**

Our results:

- Expand our understanding of the experiences that may negatively impact women in undergraduate CS programs.
- Provide examples of how women mitigate the impacts of the diversity-hire narrative by challenging it.

And thus:

• Illustrates how educators can help students challenge the diversity-hire narrative.

#### Summer of CS Contribution: HMC Student Researcher: Kaitlynn Gray '25

Kaitlynn reads through the interview transcripts and **identifies codes** using SaturateApp, an online qualitative analysis tool.

After reading, Kaitlynn:

- Cross-references quotes used in the paper and provides feedback on their interpretations and uses.
- **Determines connections** between themes shared by interviewees.
- Writes about how the themes shared add insight to how the diversity-hire narrative is challenged.

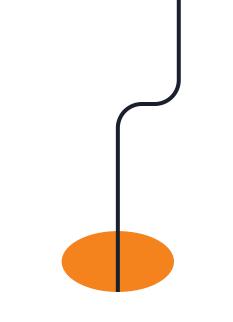
#### Reference:

[1] Julia C Lapan and Katie N Smith. 2022. "No Girls on the Software Team": Internship Experiences of Women in Computer Science. Journal of Career Development (2022), 08948453211070842

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A collaboration between



