

DIVERSITY STATEMENT

J. NATHAN MATIAS

As a white-passing Guatemalan-American whose family moved to the U.S. during the civil war and genocide, I sit at the confluence of key themes in diversity and inclusion related to power and access. I grew up in rural Pennsylvania with one latino parent and one white American parent. As my father mastered English and learned to participate in U.S. society, I gained empathy from his struggle and gained experience by supporting him. As my mother advocated for many of our fellow latino immigrants, I learned how to support others through my appearance, language skills, and cultural knowledge. Later, at Cambridge University on a scholarship for students who are among the first in our family to attend college, I encountered an institution that hadn't yet developed much experience with first generation students. Throughout my career, I have worked to support students and institutions to make the most of the world-changing potential of diverse, inclusive participation.

My research agenda is shaped by this personal and professional commitment to diversity. At MIT, my master's thesis studied gender inequality on Wikipedia and Twitter, and my first randomized trials tested theories and pragmatic ideas for broadening gender diversity online. My online harassment research also draws from my interest in inclusion, since harassment is often used to silence people who are already marginalized in a society. My methods are grounded in a commitment to learn from the people most affected by the issues I study, and I take a multi-lingual, global approach to that work.

In my teaching and mentorship, I work to include and support diverse audiences, and I incorporate research on inclusive education into my teaching practice. For example, research has found and I have experienced that seminars, lectures, and workshops with diverse material tend to draw and communicate effectively to broad audiences. Having personally struggled as an undergraduate with unspoken norms in university education, I work to scaffold success for every student I teach and mentor—regardless of their prior experience or advice network in higher education. If I am invited to panels that feature no women or people of color, I routinely decline to participate and often help organizers find a more diverse set of speakers. I have seen many times that when educational settings include a diversity of experience and perspectives, a broader range of students remember and engage with the subject and develop more creative work together.

In my industry and nonprofit experience, I have created and chosen to work in environments that value diversity. Two of my tech startup employers and both industry research labs where I interned were led by women who created environments of excellence and mutual respect. When starting my nonprofit CivilServant, I chose to build our capacity for diverse excellence by incubating it with GlobalVoices, an inclusive network of bloggers and translators working in 40 languages and 140 different countries.

Finally, my commitment to diversity also shapes my service. Every year for the past eleven years, I have visited first-generation students at Cambridge University to support and advocate for them—no matter where I live at the time. I am also committed to continuing involvement in initiatives that broaden the pipeline for women and minorities like AfriCHI, Innovate Salone, the Latin-American HCI conference, and other global endeavors that support inclusion and innovation at the intersection of computer science and the social sciences. I am especially energized when contributing to projects that support excellence among people who aren't commonly included in academia—people who I am excited to see grow personally as their perspectives and creativity transform their institutions and their fields.