

Open Letter to Apple

I've interned at the Apple Special Projects Group for roughly 6 months now, through this process I have become increasingly disenchanted by the political environment within the company. In this open letter, I hope to air out some of these qualms and incite some level of change.

☞ **Political Landscape**

Just like every other company I've worked at, I hoped that at Apple I would be able to bring my whole self to work, be able to freely express my point of view on issues and hope to be heard as respectfully as I hear others.

Unfortunately, the reality was far detached from this ideal viewpoint in my head. There was a significant emphasis on undergoing hidden bias and microaggression training. I went through these trainings with an open mind and afterwards I wanted to express to my coworkers how I found them to be silly and mostly just classes on common sense.

This was met with terrible backlash, I was told that I was extremely privileged and my opinion was completely invalid because of it. I was told that just talking about my thoughts was making others uncomfortable which was absolutely appalling to me.

I go to school at Purdue University, which is an incredibly diverse school, it has a massive international student population and never have I experienced the level of aversion from discussion that I see at Apple.

☞ **Censorship and Fear**

If there's something that James Damore's memo showed us, it is that there is a massive fear amongst like-minded conservatives with voicing our opinion or even just trying to have a conversation about our viewpoint. Despite numerous times in his memo acknowledging both sides of the argument and repeatedly stating that he's not fundamentally against the idea of encouraging and increasing minorities, he was still fired.

The fact is, when we make diversity a "with or without us" issue, it is incredibly hard to even begin to talk about it. This is not a black and white issue, anyone who wants to talk about the opposite side of diversity should not have a target painted on their back.

☞ **Diversity and Affirmative Action**

It is no secret that Apple's intern program is one of the most competitive and well paying amongst the industry. As such, one would expect that with such a broad talent pool, Apple interns would be absolutely the best in their class.

Unfortunately, I have personally experienced this to not be the case: Apple covets its [50% under-represented new hire rate](#) but this diversity doesn't come without a cost. In order to actually overcome my bias, I began noting down when a colleague demonstrated lack of knowledge on basic CS topics and especially when they made no effort to learn the topic.

While I won't post the raw statistics here because they are actually fairly disheartening, I would summarize it as follows. There is a significant correlation between whether a person was in an under-represented group and their lack of knowledge. While I admit there might be some causation-correlation fallacy going here (i.e new hires might be from more under-represented groups and new hires might be lacking in knowledge) this trend is far too alarming to ignore.

☞ **Alternatives to Affirmative Action**

Fundamentally, I believe that change in the distribution of people at the final level, that is, careers needs to come from a grassroots level. By encouraging more minorities and women to join CS at the school level, there will be a larger selection of talented under-represented people to choose from.

With affirmative action, we only strive to strengthen the imposter syndrome that so many women and people of color already have. They have to second-guess themselves at every step, wondering if they are a diversity hire or actually earned their way through to their job.

☞ **Disparity in Distribution and its Causes**

The distribution of the general population doesn't necessarily say anything about the qualities and interests of those people. A simple example is the over-representation of African Americans in basketball, just because the general population is 13% doesn't necessarily mean that 13% of NBA players will be black.

In a similar light, it is important to consider that this industry might be facing a similar situation. It could just be that the interests and goals of the general population align themselves to create the distributions we see in companies today. As [numerous](#) · [scientific studies](#) have shown, men and women do not necessarily have the same interests. Thus, it is very strange to assume that the distribution of men and women in companies will end up exactly the same as the general population.

I'd argue that there might be some level of systematic oppression going on because the numbers are way too off but it doesn't mean that every waking moment of our careers have to involve supporting and shrinking the gap.

☞ **The Abundance of Wealth in Tech**

The tech industry is incredibly profitable to the point where its easy enough to lose sight of the fact that it is a business at the lowest level. While we can afford to splurge on diversity hiring and needless training at the moment, this will not necessarily always be the case. When the going gets tough, businesses have to do what it takes to keep afloat, and it is at that point that I truly think these decisions will come to bite us in the back.

When companies have to lay off large droves of people and they risk being seen as discriminatory in their firings or go bankrupt because they fired their more talented staff will they truly learn the cost of diversity.

🔗 **Discourse**

This letter is not just meant to be put out to the world, I hope to start an honest conversation from it. If you have any questions or concerns please open up an issue on this repo and I would love to have a civil discussion.

🔗-- **Avi Agarwal**

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