

NATIONAL REVIEW

Google and Debate

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Writing in *New York Magazine* (you'll have to scroll down a bit), Andrew Sullivan discusses the Google mess. His comments on what James Damore wrote deserve to be read in full, and it's worth following some of the links Sullivan provides to studies on the differences between the sexes, studies that Damore's critics seem curiously unwilling to address.

Sullivan (my emphasis added):

In many rigorous, peer-reviewed studies, scholars — many of them women — have presented evidence that the genders do indeed differ on major personality traits, that men in general tend to prefer dealing with things and women in general prefer dealing with people, and that these differing traits may well lead to different distributions of men and women in certain professions. This does not mean that sexism isn't also a big factor in these differentials. It posits merely that sexism is not the only factor. This was intriguing, and (to me) a little surprising: More interesting, as Damore noted, is that in more egalitarian societies like ours, gender differences in personality become progressively greater than in less egalitarian and developed societies — because men and women have more freedom in their careers and lives. Give men and women real choices, in other words, and they will become less — not more — interchangeable. True equality of opportunity will not render us all equivalent to, or interchangeable with, one another. It will render our differences more unmissable. And what will the diversity czars do then?

And:

Perhaps the problem is that people have a hard time holding two separate thoughts in their head at the same time. In this case, you have to accept both that there are gender differences in the aggregate and that, nonetheless, you cannot infer anything from that fact when encountering any individual man or woman. That is not easy — and there is a very human temptation to discriminate against an individual based on aggregate group characteristics. But overall, different distributions exist, and they surely have some impact on gender disparities in various professions alongside sexism or general cultural influences.

Why, for example, do “men make up only 10 percent of nurses, only 20 percent of new veterinarians, only 25 percent of new psychologists, about 25 percent of new pediatricians, about 26 percent of forensic scientists, about 28 percent of medical

managers, and 42 percent of new biologists”)? (Note that “the average computer programmer only makes about \$80,000; the average veterinarian makes about \$88,000, and the average pediatrician makes a whopping \$170,000.”) Do we really have to assume it’s entirely sexism? Why, in college majors, do women dominate men in music pedagogy, but are overwhelmed by men in music technology? Why do women vastly outnumber men in bachelor’s degrees in English, foreign languages, and health professions? No doubt culture and sexism play a role. All Damore is arguing is that biology may have a role as well.

#Science?

When all else fails, the diversity promoters argue that science is not salient because it is also merely a function of sexism, racism, ableism, etc. There is no objective truth — just systems of power and oppression. The mob at Middlebury had been properly educated and chanted that science was simply a cloak for white male supremacy. At Slate, you can read a piece directly dismissing any scientific data that complicates the most extreme version of left-feminist ideology.

There is also the little matter of the power that Google now enjoys.

Assuming that Damore’s firing did not break any applicable laws, Google had, of course, the right to fire him. Damore is still free to express his views, just not at Google. I understand the argument that companies are now doing much of the government’s dirty work for it (see Walter Olson’s typically fine piece for USA Today on that topic here) but nevertheless this is not a First Amendment case.

But, as Sullivan notes:

[T]he deeper issue is this: A man has been demonized and fired solely for expressing his views in civil language backed up by facts. He used no slurs. He discriminated against no one in the workplace. He was great at his job. Worse, anyone who might share these views now knows they have to keep silent at Google or be terminated. This atmosphere in the American workplace — now backed by some of the most powerful companies on Earth — is thereby increasingly totalitarian. It monitors people’s minds and thoughts — and will fire them for incorrect ones, without any explanation. And it aims to suppress the truth about the world — that humans are a diverse and complex species, that evolution has played a part in who we are, that aggregate differences between groups of people are, in fact, a wonderful aspect of actual human diversity.

That’s bad enough, but given the power—the dominance in antitrust speak—that Google has outside its own workplace, the way it behaves in that workplace is of legitimate concern. I have always been somewhat suspicious of the ideology behind antitrust law and I have also (FWIW) written in the past against the EU’s attempts to use antitrust as a protectionist ploy against Google. Nevertheless, I’m just beginning to wonder if Google is not getting too big for our own good, and if even I am starting to think in this way, well...