

Fired Google memo writer draws scorn, cheers and a job offer from WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange

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The male Google engineer fired for circulating a memo decrying the company's diversity hiring program became the center of a heated debate on sexism, drawing scorn, cheers and even a job offer on Tuesday from WikiLeaks publisher Julian Assange.

James Damore confirmed his dismissal from Alphabet Inc's Google on Monday, after he wrote a 10-page memo that the company was hostile to conservative viewpoints shaped by a flawed left-wing ideology.

The manifesto was quickly embraced by some, particularly on the political right, branding him a brave truth-teller. Others found his views, which argued that men in general may be biologically more suited to coding jobs than women, offensive.

Assange, who is praised in some circles for exposing government secrets and castigated by others as an underminer of some nations' security, offered Damore a job.

"Censorship is for losers," Assange wrote on Twitter. "Women & men deserve respect. That includes not firing them for politely expressing ideas but rather arguing back."

Legal and employment experts noted, however, that companies have broad latitude to restrict the speech of employees. Some argued that Damore's views left Google little to no choice but to terminate his employment, since he had effectively created a hostile work environment for women.

The world's tech capital, Silicon Valley has long been criticized for not doing enough to encourage gender equality. Most headlines have centered on powerful female executives hitting the glass ceiling or sexual harassment lawsuits.

Many women in the industry say that less visible day-to-day bias often impedes their careers.

Industry experts note that in the early days of tech it was mostly women who held the then-unglamorous jobs of coding. But as the value of top-notch programming became clear, it became a mostly male domain and the vast majority of programmers in the tech industry are now men.

Some argued that although they may not agree with Damore, the company had gone too far in firing him.

"The memo was pure drek but this isn't the proper response," Jeet Heer, an editor at the New Republic, wrote on Twitter. "Firing people for their ideas should be opposed."

Elizabeth Spiers, a journalist, replied that it was about more than free speech. The problem, she wrote, was that "he'll discriminate against his female colleagues in peer review."

Damore wrote in an email to Reuters he was fired for "perpetuating gender stereotypes." His memo

had said that he sought the opposite.

“I’m also not saying that we should restrict people to certain gender roles,” Damore wrote in his memo. “I’m advocating for quite the opposite: treat people as individuals, not as just another member of their group (tribalism).”

His arguments were praised by those who view so-called “political correctness” as a left-wing device to suppress conservative speech.

John Hawkins, the owner of the Right Wing News website, summed up his take in a Twitter post: “James Damore: Writes memo respectfully saying Google suppresses conservative views. Google: You’re fired for having conservative views.”

Damore said he would fight the dismissal, noting that he had filed a complaint with the U.S. National Labor Relations Board before the firing.

Google is based in Mountain View, Calif. The company said it could not talk about individual employee cases.

(Reporting by Jonathan Allen and Taylor Harris in New York; Additional reporting Jonathan Weber in San Francisco and Gabriella Borter in New York; Writing by Jonathan Allen, editing by Bernard Orr)

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