



**Episode 1,014: James Damore, Formerly of Google, on Diversity of Thought**

**Guest: James Damore**

**WOODS:** You've had quite an eventful I guess six, seven weeks, and one of the things I do when I have a person who's recently well-known on here is I do my best not to ask the same darn questions this person has had to slog through week after week. No, no, no, we're going to ask you more interesting things. But for the sake of setting the stage, I'm afraid I do have to ask you, if you could take just a minute to summarize what it was you said that got you into trouble. I know you've done – this you've probably got down pat, but my other ones I promise you will be a surprise. So let's at least start there.

**DAMORE:** Yeah, so my document was talking about Google ideological echo chamber, so how only progressive beliefs were allowed basically at Google, and there was a politically correct monoculture that shamed dissenting views. And this was silencing any other perspective on our diversity efforts. And so the prevailing perspective at Google is that the only cause for the gender gap is sexism against women. And so in the document, I provided other explanations that could contribute to the gender gap, like women's differing interests in people versus things and how this is actually linked to biology, specifically prenatal testosterone, so it's not all just socially constructed differences between men and women. And then I go on to make some suggestions on how we could actually address the gender gap in tech without resorting to just discriminating against people and making programs that are only for specific genders or races. And they felt like this document perpetuated gender stereotypes, and so they fired me, even though everything that I said was accurate. It's really unfortunate that they're just binding themselves to this.

**WOODS:** Didn't you also get the sense that some of your critics outside of Google probably hadn't even read a word you'd said? They just assumed they knew?

**DAMORE:** Yeah, definitely most people haven't read it, I think.

**WOODS:** And yet they feel like they can go on Facebook and tell the whole world how they feel about it. Well, now that this time has passed, can you tell us about where your career is going, where you want it to go, what's next for you?

**DAMORE:** Yeah, I'm still figuring that out, because coding wasn't necessarily my life passion, so I feel like I can try to understand multiple different systems and maybe write a book. I've gotten offers to write a book and also speak at different universities

and stuff. So I might pursue that, at least for the time being until I really figure out a stable career that I would be passionate about.

**WOODS:** Smart, smart. Now, what do you think is a decent strategy for people who, let's just say, have views that are somewhat at odds with the mainstream views in Silicon Valley? Should they stick it out and try to bring about change from within, or is that totally hopeless and they should just maybe try to create some parallel structure somehow?

**DAMORE:** Yeah, it's a really hard problem and I don't feel like any one solution is best for everyone. I think if you still don't have a job and you're looking who to work for, I think the smaller companies are less dogmatic about this, and so that would be one place to start. But if you want to at least be able to speak your mind with your coworkers, I think just starting slow and making people realize that people with differing views aren't evil, then that will help, I think.

**WOODS:** Yeah, it's amazing how people seem to assume that to be the case. If somebody disagrees with me, the person belongs to the Nazi Party or something. That escalated quickly. How'd that happen. In my private Facebook group, I have a number of questions from listeners, and one of them is: who has influenced your thinking? In fact, let's even go – I don't know if you would describe yourself as a libertarian and I don't really necessarily need to pin you down on that if you're not comfortable talking about it, but at the very least, who would you say are people who have influenced the way you look at the world?

**DAMORE:** Yeah, so I guess I would characterize at least my leanings as libertarian, although I definitely see a role for government in maybe even more places than the average libertarian. So I guess on these issues, I think Jordan Peterson and Steven Pinker have produced some influential content on this, and I guess in general, there's a lot of people that I listen to that have influenced my thinking. I like Sam Harris' podcast and Russ Roberts' *EconTalk*. Those are both really nice.

**WOODS:** Were you familiar with Jordan Peterson before he interviewed you?

**DAMORE:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** Okay, so you knew about him, because I've talked to him too and he is quite an extraordinary person. Now let me ask you a few things about Google itself. There's been some talk about, in the same way that Facebook is saying that it will crack down on fake news somehow – which never means propaganda coming from governments. That's never fake news. "Saddam has weapons of mass destruction" would never be flagged as fake news, even though it is fake, so there's a bias running through it already. But there's concern among the public that Google through its search engine results and its algorithms can also punish, let's say, unconventional views. Is that an exaggerated fear or a legitimate fear?

**DAMORE:** It's definitely possible, and Google does have some fake news efforts. I think that there's also a lot of room for bias going into these algorithms, because it's employees that determine what fake news is for the training data of the algorithm,

and then the fake news is only pro-Trump, for example, and they don't have any fake news that's pro-Hillary, then you'll naturally get a bias in the algorithm.

**WOODS:** You know, I know a guy — I'm not going to mention his name — but who went through a really horrific ordeal, where it came out that he had said some controversial things and he was in the public eye and it was all over national news and headlines. I mean, these reviews he had moved past for years, but it was headlines and he was in a prominent position and he had to resign. And I know his roommate very well, his roommate at the time, and I know that this person was not eating for days on end. He just was beside himself because he was being treated like something he wasn't. People were saying horrifying things about him. So I bet a lot of people have asked you things like, *Did you know this would happen to you, that Google would let you go?* and this and that. But what I want to know is, on a personal level, you were subject to really vicious attacks. What was that like?

**DAMORE:** It was definitely really stressful, and for maybe a whole week, I had like this heightened stress and threat awareness. So if anyone approached me, I would immediately assume they were going to attack me or something. So I was definitely losing a lot of sleep and not eating much. And even now, it is really harmful to just read so much negative things about you, and you have this urge to just respond to every single one —

**WOODS:** Yeah.

**DAMORE:** — but it's impossible.

**WOODS:** Yeah. Yeah, exactly. And I mean, on a much, much smaller scale, I had something similar happen years ago, where a lot of people were criticizing me. And initially I was a young — you know, I was in my early 30s and I thought I have to answer everybody. *I do have to answer everybody. I've got to clear my name.* And I'd run around to these blogs that no one in his right mind was reading. In your case, it's much more high-profile outlets, but the thing is — two things. In the comments section, you have a lot of supporters. And secondly, people who don't like you, they're not going to change their minds.

**DAMORE:** Right.

**WOODS:** There's nothing you can say. You can't say, "Look, I also want diversity." That means nothing to them. They feel like they can read your mind, they can read your heart, they already know what you secretly believe. So there's really nothing you can do, so one of my friends once said, "Where there is no solution, there is no problem." You've got to just move on. Of course, a great thing to do — I would take that book offer. Absolutely. I would rush that thing out, try and keep the iron still hot, and see what you can do with it, because we need to have these conversations and there are a lot of people who don't want them. Just don't want them.

**DAMORE:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** So I would urge you to, for what my opinion is worth, give that some serious thought. Because then that opens a lot of exciting doors for you. When you have a bestselling book, which yours would be I feel certain, a lot of interesting doors open and you can really choose your own future at that point. So anyway, for what that's worth. Well, as a matter of fact, going back to something I said before, I will ask something that probably people have asked you, which is: did you think that your job was in danger by doing this? And if so, why didn't you line something up for yourself as a backup just in case that happened?

**DAMORE:** Yeah, I really didn't think that my job was in danger. And even after it went viral in the company and after it was leaked, I still didn't think that my job was in danger, because I did feel like this was normal for Google culture to make a document and try to point out problems in the culture to fix. And I don't know. I had never even applied to a different job besides Google, so it was never on my mind to have another job offer from Facebook at the same time or something. I don't know.

**WOODS:** Oh. How old were you when you started working for Google, and when was that?

**DAMORE:** Yeah, I was in a grad program in 2013, and then I interned and then left the PhD program with a Master's. So that was when I was 24, I think.

**WOODS:** Yeah, okay. Geez, yeah, man, you are a youngster.

**DAMORE:** [laughing]

**WOODS:** Well, compared to me at least you're a youngster. But back in 2008, Ron Paul spoke at Google when he was running for president. That's obviously before your time. But he had a full house and there was much sympathy for him. Now he was not talking about the things you were talking about, but he was saying unfashionable things, and I mean, no doubt there may have been some sympathy for his antiwar position or whatever. But did you – you're a busy guy, you're doing real work. But did you sense when you were at Google that there was any kind, at least among a minority of people there, underlying sympathy for libertarianism? I mean, that generous reception that Ron Paul got couldn't have come from nowhere.

**DAMORE:** Yeah, I think that there's definitely libertarian elements in Silicon Valley, and I feel like that's what created a lot of the companies. But I think there's sort of been a progressive move, especially with these diversity programs, that has sought to silence a lot of the libertarian ideals. And so there's still a decent number of libertarians, but they just don't feel like they can speak. And then anyone that's socially conservative really doesn't think that they can speak at all.

**WOODS:** Yeah. Now, see, if it were reversed, if it were progressives who didn't feel like they could speak, we would never hear the end of this. This would be just constant headlines all the time about the oppression, the fascist system we live in. But when people like you are silenced, it's, *Well, of course we have to silence him. We have to be respectable.* It's almost like there's a double standard here.

**DAMORE:** [laughing] Definitely.

**WOODS:** If you had it to do over again, would you bite your tongue?

**DAMORE:** [laughing] Yeah, I would definitely think twice, and I would try to push more on the diversity programs independently rather than trying – I sent it to one email list after sending it to the diversity programs multiple times and having in-depth discussions, and after it went to the email list, then it exploded. So maybe I would just avoid that email list. I'm not sure.

**WOODS:** Huh, interesting. That's interesting to hear you say that. Is there, given that, as you say, people feel like they better not speak out and some people really feel like they'd better not speak out – somebody wants to know, "Can he say something about whether there's a case for optimism?" Are there any silver linings in the recent storm you just endured?

**DAMORE:** I think it's opened a lot of people's eyes, at least, and that's the good thing. And I don't think that my event is necessarily over. There's still a legal case to be had too, which really change the dynamics I think, because if it's found that Google was in the wrong for firing me, then that empowers a lot of other people to be able to speak up, and it also changes the incentives that these large companies have, is they can no longer just silence anyone that's not a progressive.

**WOODS:** So you're actively pursuing that? Are you able to speak about that?

**DAMORE:** Yeah, we're pursuing it. I can't speak much to it, though.

**WOODS:** Okay, okay, that's interesting. Is there anything in the employment contract you have with Google that lays out what cause for termination would be so that you can say, clearly, writing a memo is not cause for termination?

**DAMORE:** Yeah, I just can't speak to that at the moment, but there's definitely grounds for the suit.

**WOODS:** All right, that will be interesting to watch unfold. So again, all the more reason – would that interfere with your release of a book? Would that somehow complicate the case in any way if you were talking about it publicly?

**DAMORE:** Yeah, it might.

**WOODS:** All right, because you're going to – all right, but you've still got to write that – be writing it secretly and be ready to release it as soon as you're allowed to do it [laughing].

Somebody wants to know, is there any way you can speculate on where the progressive dominance in Silicon Valley comes from in the first place?

**DAMORE:** I think that there's at least a lot of external pressure to fix the gender gap, and that itself has pushed a lot of progressive elements onto Silicon Valley. I don't know if it has any roots earlier than that, though.

**WOODS:** More with James Damore after we thank our sponsor.

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As somebody who has libertarian sympathies, how concerned are you about, let's say, government surveillance practices or the government use of or let's say demanding information from supposedly private firms in order to assist in its data gathering?

**DAMORE:** It's definitely scary, and I think people often don't realize that this is happening, where the government is demanding information on something like 40,000 people a year and Google is giving it to them. They're abiding by a law, so maybe we need to just change the law.

**WOODS:** Yeah, exactly. What kind of advice would you give people then? Basically, is the advice that if you have unorthodox views, either be quiet about them or make sure that you're in one of these smaller firms that you mentioned where they're not going to be as ideologically rigid?

**DAMORE:** Yeah, that would definitely help. And within Silicon Valley, there are social groups that cater towards these differing viewpoints, but it's definitely unfortunate that you have to be subject to basically brainwashing during work, and hopefully some of that will change. I think just trying to have meaningful, one-on-one conversations can help, because what caused so much of the problem was that this became viral and so there was so much public virtue signaling and online shaming that was happening, which just wouldn't really happen if it were a one-on-one conversation.

**WOODS:** Right, because once that starts happening, there's no way anybody's going to be rational anymore. Everybody just has to let everybody else know, *I have the officially approved opinion on everything. Don't worry, everybody. I'm not like that guy.*

**DAMORE:** Yeah.

**WOODS:** Ah, man, that is just the worst. So you've dealt with it about as well as anybody could possibly be expected to, and I hope to hear some good news in terms of – I mean, I'd love to see that James Damore book. I'd like to see you stick it to Google. All these great things, we'll definitely be following you, and my listeners and I certainly wish you all the best. Thanks so much for your time today.

**DAMORE:** Yeah, thanks a lot.