

# About Feminism.

The last few weeks have been very difficult for women in tech:

1. GitHub posted a sloppy 'investigations concluded' report (<https://github.com/blog/1823-results-of-the-github-investigation>) (their follow-up (<https://github.com/blog/1826-follow-up-to-the-investigation-results>) gives a better indication of what actually happened)
2. Gurbaksh Chahal - then-CEO of a startup, was allegedly video taped violently attacking a former partner 117 times in 30 mins (<http://www.businessinsider.com/radiumone-ceo-executive-assistant-lawsuit-2014-4>) (He was finally fired (<http://recode.net/2014/04/27/exclusive-ceo-gurbakh-chahal-fired-by-radiumone-board/>) some time after this was made public)
3. People seemed to think it was fine to request the video in question without caring about the consent of the woman in the video — it was all about either exonerating or condemning the man involved.
4. codebabes.com was published (with a hilarious takedown by the amazing Meggan Blake (<https://twitter.com/wewentsolar>), Simon O'Shea ([https://twitter.com/simon\\_oshea](https://twitter.com/simon_oshea)) & others through codedicks.com (<http://codedicks.com/philosophy.html>))
5. Some men made statements (<http://jacobian.org/writing/what-can-men-do/>) that made us feel unwelcome in the tech industry (<http://blog.ellenchisa.com/2014/04/22/im-angry-because-im-afraid/>).

A bunch of us - Sara, Ellen, Sabrina, Kat, Joanne, Angelina, Jessica, Jennifer, Divya - have been thinking about what this means for us.



# **This is not what we expected, we really just want to work on what we love.**

We happen to be humans who loved technology and embrace it wholeheartedly. But it was always clear things would be different if we were male.

Some of us identified as feminists before we came to this industry. Some of us only began to understand the relevance of feminism as we sought to understand what's been happening to us. Some of us felt that we didn't need the programs and events geared specifically towards women— until the bad stuff started happening to us. We thought they did more harm than help by calling attention to our gender, and we wondered what others were complaining about. It was hard to see until we suffered also.

Others, still, speak very much of feminist ideals and action but are afraid to identify with the word 'feminist' because they fear alienation from their peers, both in work and also in their social lives.

***Feminism is not a dirty word.*** Feminism is the radical notion that women are people, and that we want to be treated as equals. Don't let someone else pretend otherwise out of their own misguided notions.

The last thing we want is for people reading this to be put on the defensive. What we want most is for people to read and understand what death by a thousand cuts ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death\\_by\\_a\\_thousand\\_cuts](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_by_a_thousand_cuts)) feels like, and then understand why we feel sad and angry at the tech industry. We also want you to understand that more still needs to be done.



**Our experiences? They're just like the stories you hear about.**

But maybe you thought because we weren't as loud, that this stuff doesn't happen to us.

We've been harassed on mailing lists and called 'whore'/'cunt' without any action being taken against aggressors.

We get asked about our relationships at interviews, and we each have tales of being groped at public events. We've been put in the uncomfortable situation of having men attempt to turn business meetings into dates.

We've found casual assumptions that point at more significant issues (<https://medium.com/theli-st-medium/79643e226c6a>). We've witnessed the few female co-workers and male allies we've had get fired or bullied into leaving — at companies that had so few of them to begin with.

We're constantly asked 'if you write any code' when speaking about technical topics and giving technical presentations, despite just having given a talk on writing code. We've been harassed at these same conferences in person and online about our gender, looks, and technical expertise.

We get asked if we're the event planner or executive assistant on a regular basis.

We regularly receive creepy, rapey e-mails where men describe what a perfect wife we would be and exactly how we should expect to be subjugated. Sometimes there are angry e-mails that threaten us to leave the industry, because 'it doesn't need anymore c\*\*ts ruining it'.

We have watched companies say that diversity is of highest importance and have invited us to advise them. After we donate much of our time they change nothing, do nothing, and now wear speaking to us as a badge of honor. Stating, "We tried!".

We've grown cynical (<https://medium.com/technology-invention-and-more/e2f7619e0c9>) of companies creating corporate programs and paying lip service to focusing on women's issues in the tech industry without understanding the underlying reality. We've experienced a staggering earnings gap in our field,

which, being freelance and project-based, makes it challenging to ascribe blame. We've been told repeatedly that accomplishments were due to our gender and our role as the "token woman".



## Why we're writing this thing:

We love working in this industry.

We love collaborating with like-minded colleagues.

We can't give up and leave.

We'd rather be writing blog posts about best practices for development, design, and tech management instead of the one we're writing now.

We are tired of pretending this stuff doesn't happen and continue to keep having these experiences again and again. We keep our heads down working at our jobs hoping that if we just work hard at what we do, maybe somehow the problem will go away.



## Okay! I know it's bad but I don't do any bad things.

We are tired of our male peers pretending that because they do not participate in bad behavior, that it is not their problem to solve. If you see someone engage in bad behavior and you do nothing, you've chosen to let that person think that what they did is okay. This leaves us feeling like we're fighting this alone. We can't work on what we can't see, but if you're there when it happens, you can help. It is absolutely imperative that **men work with other men** to combat bad attitudes and behavior.



## You might be surprised how few people want to help or engage on this still.

Imagine if you were the only person like you on your team and when you left your computer and came back there was very graphic porn on your screen (a specific example that we have experienced). Knowing that saying you were uncomfortable would alienate you from the rest of your team even more than you already were; knowing that you would no longer get the mentorship from the senior staff that was involved in these disgusting pranks, would you dare to talk about how it made you feel?

We feel powerless as we have no recourse when these things happen to us. Power dynamics in the workplace are a real thing, and we all know it.

This (<http://www.theverge.com/2013/9/12/4693710/the-end-of-kindness-weev-and-the-cult-of-the-angry-young-man>) is  
(<http://archive.today/20130110113908/jolieodell.wordpress.com/2010/03/16/why-sxsw-sucks/%23comment-1391>) what (<http://blog.nerdchic.net/archives/705/>)  
happens (<https://medium.com/p/d96f431f4e8e>) to  
(<http://borderhouseblog.com/?p=5698>) people  
(<http://www.feministfrequency.com/2012/07/image-based-harassment-and-visual-misogyny/>) that (<http://kateharding.net/2007/04/14/on-being-a-no-name-blogger-using-her-real-name/>) are  
(<http://www.buzzfeed.com/rachelzarrell/blogger-writes-about-being-called-a-whore-scientific-america>) uncomfortable  
(<http://www.feministfrequency.com/2012/07/image-based-harassment-and-visual-misogyny/>) and (<https://medium.com/@geekcore1/d96f431f4e8e>) speak  
(<http://blog.nerdchic.net/archives/705/>) up  
(<http://www.theverge.com/2013/9/12/4693710/the-end-of-kindness-weev-and-the-cult-of-the-angry-young-man>).

Our industry is filled with very smart people. We know that you know how to find the answers to questions you have and also how to challenge an opinion or action you disagree with. Take that same passion that you would apply to technical problems, and apply it to social ones.



## **We are not the 'nice feminists' of this community.**

Being nice doesn't work. We've been nice. Some of us that wrote these have even been paraded around by men in the industry for how nice we've been in trying to address the social problems in tech as a way to discredit more vocal, astutely firm feminist voices. We don't like this, we've never liked it, and it needs to stop.

Being nice and talking politely about injustice does not compel the group in power to do anything that unseats their power.

We will call out injustice when we see it. We will speak up when we get private abusive emails from prominent males in tech (who sound sincere online to help the cause of women in tech), indulging in 'harmless' sexist jokes. We will speak up when people on forums or GitHub make remarks that prevent us from forwarding the conversation just because we happen to identify as women.

While not all of us might use the type of language and rhetoric that is often maligned as 'too angry' in our community, we are just as angry. There are people in our community who are speaking hard truths, and we need to listen - that means you too. There is work to be done.



**Does this mean we're going to get angry at you if you try to help and get it wrong?**

This is a fear that has come to light through side channels. Men know there is a problem, and they're worried the women they know are on the defensive - especially when reading a direct call to action like this one.

They want to help but they're worried if they don't get everything just right, someone will chastise them into oblivion.

The people signing this document are patient when they see someone trying to make a difference. We might offer feedback but we're not going to make someone feel bad because they didn't get it right. If you're listening to and doing what women suggest to help solve the problems, it's pretty hard to get someone angry at you for 'doing it wrong'. If you come up with your own interpretation of how to fix things ***and you're not a woman in tech with these problems***, you are way more likely to mess it up.



## **Promote the fuck out of diversity: and go beyond women, too.**

Encouraging greater diversity in the workspace is not lip-service to morality. It leads to a better work environment (<http://99u.com/articles/16850/everything-youve-ever-wanted-to-know-about-teams>). With time, the benefits of building a diverse team will become increasingly obvious. We want to give voice to the people and organizations that are making change today instead of waiting for it to happen tomorrow.

Kat has started organizing casual lightning talks (<https://stripe.com/events/lightningpies>) featuring female speakers. The talks have now taken place in both San Francisco and New York.

Julie Ann Horvath started Passions Projects (<http://passion-projects.github.io/>), a series of longer talks showcasing one female technologist at a time.

Allison House, Laura Brunow Miner, Alice Lee, Carrie Paton, and The Designer Fund organize “Origins” (<https://www.dropbox.com/origins>) — a series of events celebrating women in design.

Jen Myers (<http://ohours.org/jenmyers>) hosts virtual office hours to mentor women in public speaking.

Square recently organized College Code Camp (<https://squareup.com/code-camp/college>), a four-day immersion program for women pursuing a technical degree at a U.S. or Canadian university. If you know a currently enrolled student, encourage her to apply.

Allison House (<http://allison.house/>) and Brian Bailey (<http://brianbailey.me/is-there-anybody-else-out-there>) both wrote about and recognized talented minority designers that are typically overlooked.

Model View Culture (<http://modelviewculture.com/>) is a women owned and operated publication that elevates the voices of underrepresented groups in technology.

TheLi.st (<http://theli.st/>) and Change the Ratio (<http://changetheratio.com/>) aim to increase visibility and access for women and underrepresented groups in technology.

Hackbright (<http://www.hackbrightacademy.com/>), Girls Who Code (<http://girlswhocode.com/>), Girl Develop It (<http://girldevelopit.com>) , and Black Girls Code (<http://www.blackgirlscode.com/>) are all organizations dedicated to educating and preparing young girls, women, and minority women for jobs in the tech industry. Coder Dojo (<http://coderdojo.com/>) is a free and accessible coding club for kids that runs 412 programs on an annual budget of \$2,000.

Donate your time and volunteer at one of these organizations. If you don't have time then donate your money, and if you don't have money then donate your influence by promoting these institutions and their students.



We want you to know it is cool to strive to work towards diversity in general. We want you to know there are amazing folks taking brave actions that are leading to striking results. If you have experienced differences because of efforts to get diverse folks be part of your team, reach out to us— We would love to hear more and get others to hear about your experience.

While this letter speaks specifically about our experiences as women in tech, to build true diversity in tech we must address more than one aspect of gender, more than any one aspect of our identities. Our efforts must address, and be inclusive of, race, class, sexuality, gender identity and expression, and their intersections. We need to be here for everybody.



## **To others in our industry:**

We encourage you to talk to us. All of us are here to support you if you feel held back because of who you identify yourself as, rather than what you do. While we encourage you to speak out, if you want someone to talk to about the how and what and whys of doing so, we will help you. If you don't want to speak out but you need to relate and have some support in your network, nobody will judge you poorly for that and we are here for that too.

If you feel like you are an exception and you don't understand these issues, *this does not mean there are no problems*. Nobody should have to 'tough it out', either. If you feel unaffected then use your position and energy to help others that are affected.

Sharing these stories helped us see we were not alone and our experiences were valid. It is perfectly reasonable to ask for safe, respectful working environments. We have a network in each other.

We are your community leaders, your open source contributors, your keynote speakers, and many call us role models.

We choose to speak now.

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