Dear 2017: I'm not mad, I'm just disappointed.

EXPLORING THE GENDER GAP ISSUE IN TECHNOLOGY

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Hi, I'm Meg!

I'm Meg. I'm from Toronto, now living in Ottawa where I work for an Ottawa-based company called Shopify as the IT Lead. Shopify builds solutions to make commerce better for everyone, was voted best place to work in Canada last year, and counts companies like Canadian Tire, ADIDAS and everyones favourites..the Kardashians as some of our top merchants.

I never really planned to be in IT, to be honest, I studied design in University. Im a lifelong Mac user, and when the ARS first opened in toronto, I lined up for a few hours… walked in…was kind of meh about what I saw, and then less than 8 months later I was working there!

I was lucky to then spent 11 years at Apple in training & employee development & technical support, leadership and a few years in Cupertino doing QA for internal retail apps. My biggest project was QA testing the integration between Activation Lock and Mobile Genius, our service software. So, if you have had users with devices that you aren't able to unlock for whatever reason..I'm sorry, you have me to partially blame..unless you're using DEP, then you shouldn't have a problem in the first place and I rescind my apology.

I want to introduce you to two other people we will be talking about in this presentation: Jane & Jeff.

There are some Jane's in this room. You may be friends with Jane, may have a Jane in your family, or may be lucky enough to work with a Jane.

If you reached out to her, and asked about her experiences in the industry..you may have some responses like the following:

" The assumption is I have no idea at all what I'm talking about, so they treat me like a child and explain the whole thing from the beginning again."

" You don't look happy enough when people come by for help. You should really smile more."

" It's just this feeling I have that people think that a man will be able to get stuff done faster than me."

" I was one of only four women at the conference. I thought to myself, do I even belong here?"

" **Can you get me the *real* Technician please?**"

Some of the previous examples were from within our own MacAdmins community. I reached out to a Women's channel, and those were only just some of the responses. Some of the rest, sent in PMs…were just awful.
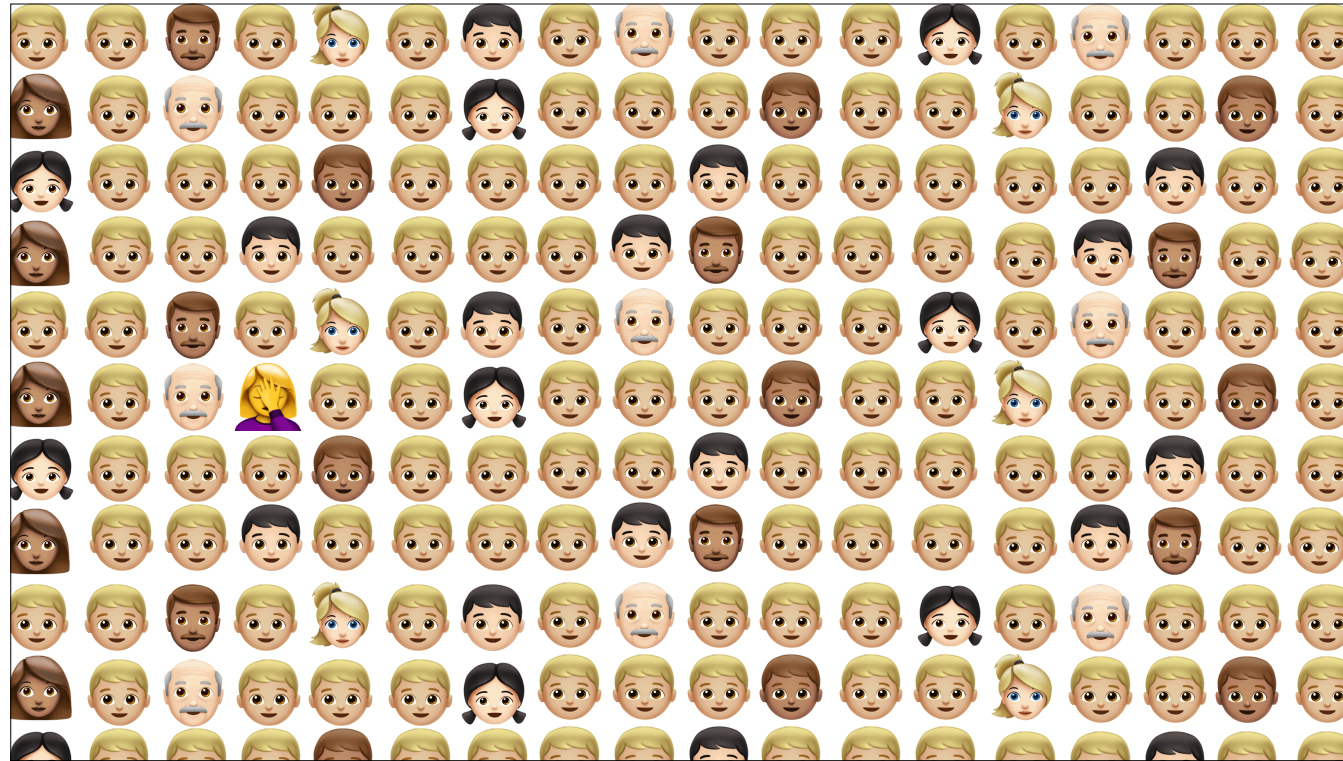
The discussion around gender balance in tech has been somewhat of an "elephant in the room". We all know about it, but it wasn't discussed as frequently as it is now.

In 2011, an investigation into diversity in technology was first launched by….CNN. It took more than a year to get companies to consent to the Freedom of Information request, and at that time, only Dell, Ingram Micro and Intel disclosed their data. Apple, Amazon, Cisco, eBay, Facebook, Google, Groupon, Hewlett-Packard, Hulu, IBM, LinkedIn, LivingSocial, Netflix, Twitter, Yelp and Zynga…all of these companies that have revolutionized our daily lives flat out refused..claiming that the data would infringe upon "trade secrets" and create an uneven playing field amongst their competitors.

Now, majority of tech companies release their diversity data both annually & willingly.

No one in here works for Uber, right? Uber is an example of a company who released data *somewhat* unwillingly.

-Recently released their first diversity report only after allegations of sexual harassment and sexism surfaced.
-Released their data saying that they were so proud it was on par with the rest of the industry.
-Most tech companies fluctuate between a 70/30 split in gender…which is not really that great, nor is being the status quo something to be proud of.

One company that is making great strides is Slack, who's workforce is almost equally split male/female, including its leadership - a huge key. Studies have shown that if you have a more diverse leadership team (this goes for any career, not just tech) that the pattern will flow throughout the org.

Sometimes, while the reports highlight some not great stuff, or are released for face-palm worthy reasons…The good thing is, people are beginning to be transparent, and it is encouraging discussion. And as we all know, when people start talking about things…thats how change starts.

The Problem with the Pipeline

When reading articles about the issue of diversity in tech, you will see the word "pipeline" coming up time and time again. The path towards education & a career in sci, tech, engineer, math or STEM for short, begins early in life. Programs like Kids learning Code, Hour of Code, and even computers courses at school, are exposing children today to new concepts and ideas that are helping to open up that pipeline. Its not uncommon to see kids wanting to build apps these days. WWDC was this past Monday. This year, we had a 10 year old and an 82 year old. , and if anyone remembers back to 2016's WWDC..the youngest dev there was….9. I don't even know what I was doing at 9!

The truth is that from a young age, girls learn through media that a path towards STEM is not a path they are expected to be on. From the very same media, boys are taught to not see girls who are interested as tech as normal, and are simply taught to enforce existing stereotypes.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was present on my first day at Shopify for an AMA. I decided to ask him how we could encourage more women and girls to get involved in tech at a younger age. He said that we need to take a dual approach: encourage our girls and young women to get involved in & study it but encourage our boys and young men that is okay and acceptable as well.

As we await Canadian census results, I will refer to some statistics out of the United States. 57% of bachelors degrees recipients in 2016 in the were held by Women, but just over 18% of those were comp-sci or related degrees.

Clearly theres a roadblock that is preventing women from wanting to study STEM & pursue careers. One of those roadblocks is recruiting.

Adapting recruiting techniques for everything from post-sec to companies even to our own Mac Admin communities needs to be more thoughtful. I'll give you an example on how you can do this.

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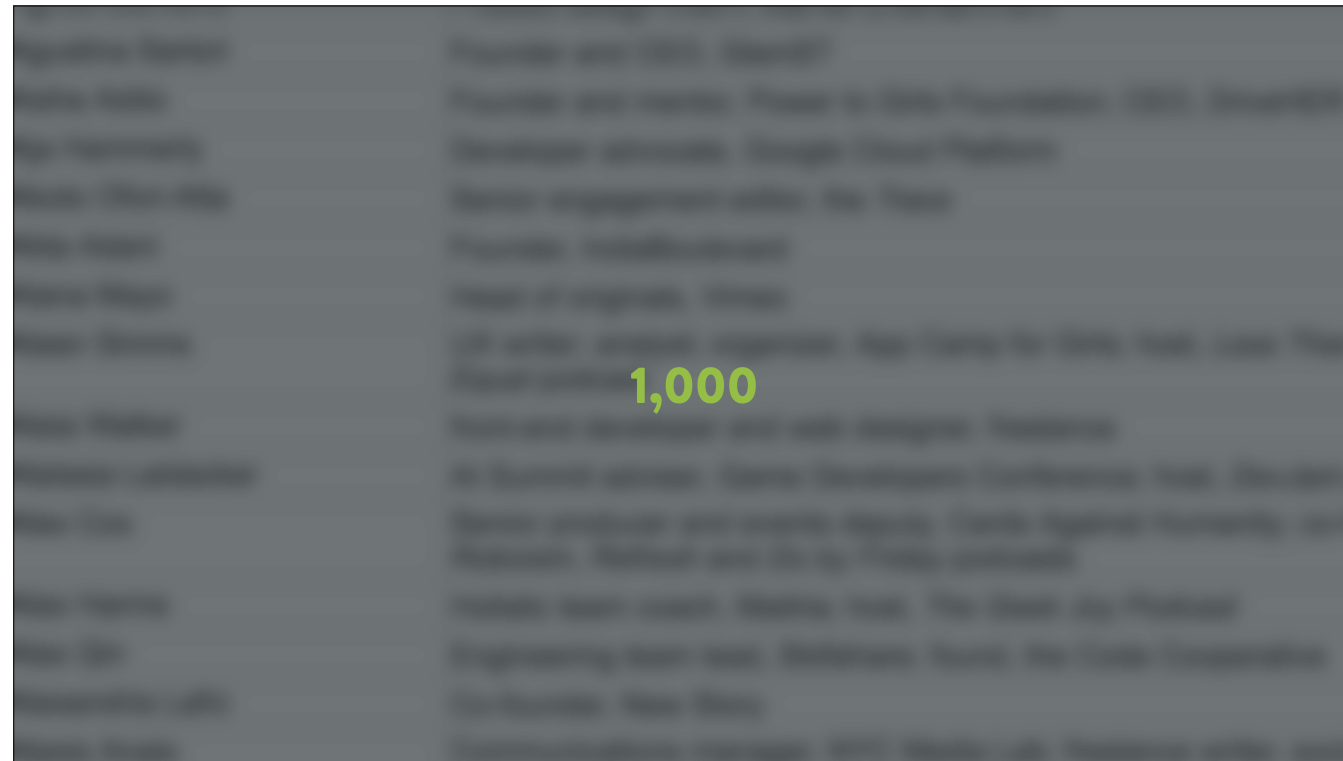
Writer Melanie Erhenkranz recently wrote about this pipeline, and said that often, women can be victim to the "wheres waldo" effect of being the odd one out, especially at conferences. She set out to see if it was truly that difficult to find women that would be willing to speak at events, if asked. The result? After a call to action on twitter… Melanie had a list of 1000 names. In less than 24 hours.

For those of you in the room who are responsible for recruiting or hiring?

Scour conference speaker & attendee lists. Look at who is writing about this stuff, look at who is tweeting, blogging, podcasting about this stuff…and you'll find that pipeline is not nearly as narrow as it seems.

Unconscious bias

Return to Jeff:
Lets imagine Jeff is a hiring manager for a startup. Jeff has got to a few roles to fill..so he sits down to start searching for candidates.

It has been suggested that the gender gap in tech is largely due to hiring managers like Jeff seeking & hiring candidates that they relate to. But is this a bad thing? Who doesn't want to work with people that are just like them?

THAT is "the unconscious bias". In short, its a tool that our brain developed for us in the early stages of humanity that is essentially an "auto pilot" to help make rapid decisions. Our brains take in millions of pieces of information at any given moment, yet can only truly focus on roughly 40 of those consciously. The unconscious bias can determine who gets hired, promoted and fired.

Joelle Emerson, CEO of Paradigm ran a seminar at a startup on UB that revealed some fantastic findings. She started by having everyone raise their left hand and repeating LEFT, and then their right hand and repeating RIGHT. She then flashed a series of words such as mother/father or son/daughter, and then word such as science (right hand) or liberal arts (left hand).

As if it wasn't confusing enough, she then asked participants to raise their right hand if the word pertained to a MAN or SCIENCE, and left for WOMAN or LIBERAL ARTS. Slowly, she begun to mix up the words that were previously assoc. with male or female…and the group just couldn't keep up! Emerson went on to explain that 3/4 of people who take this test are slower to respond when linking women with STEM - even women!

Everyone in this room has an unconscious bias. And thats okay, because the goal of exposing them is not to make people feel guilty or bad at all. The goal is to turn the unconscious into the conscious, and be more aware of what biases you may have.

https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html

Link to Harvard Quizzes on different types of bias, including Gender.

Women actually don't want "equality"

Justin Trudeau example: "Are we creating environments that are welcoming to all, or are we unknowingly creating ones that are uncomfortable?"

Ambition is directly tied to company culture.
Company culture is **directly** tied to employee retention, especially in the case of women.

Are we simply saying "well, good job, we hit the quota for the month" when hiring, and simply shake hands and move on? No. The problem continues beyond the pipeline, and into the workplace.

Women are hired in lower numbers than men, and leave at twice the rate that men do.

So what can we do?

Original illustration by Craig Froehle

Equity   Equality
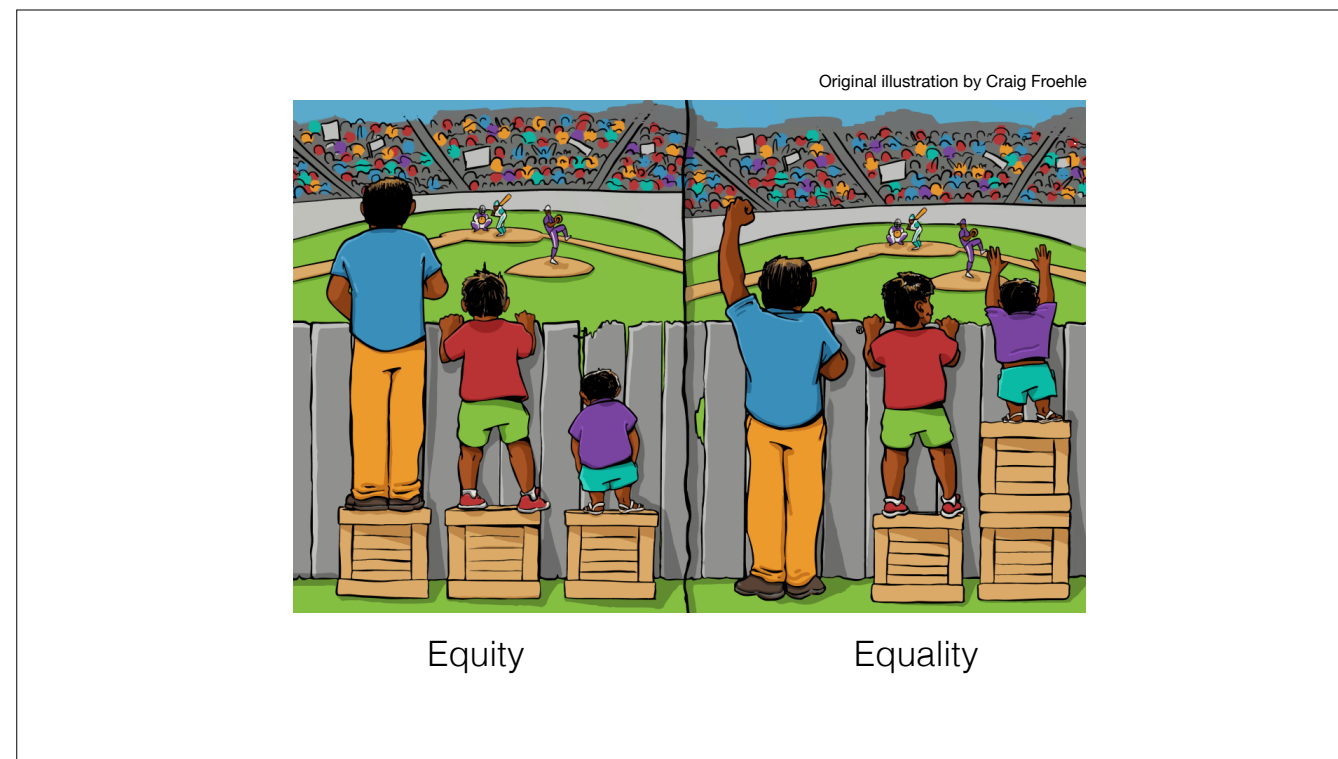
This illustration from Craig Froehle perfectly demonstrates *why* just treating all genders the same in the workplace isn't really what will fix the problem. In the picture, as you can see, you have people of varying height all trying to watch a baseball game. If we give the same solution to each one..more often than not, this will not solve the problem. I empathize with the shorter person with this podium. Thats giving equity, NOT equality.

Now, if we give each person an experience thats tailored to the individual….THAT is how we can achieve the type of equality that *everyone* is looking for.

Because here's the thing: Treating everyone exactly the same actually is not fair. What equal treatment does do is erase our differences…which goes against the very thing we're trying to fix.

The $1 Million Dollar Question

We learned that getting women and girls into programs that will help open up that pipeline can be done with thoughtful recruiting techniques and erasing gender stereotypes earlier life.

We learned that having an unconscious bias - not a bad thing in nature - can be a major roadblock to finding the best candidates for the job, and a major reason why women aren't breaking through as much as they should.

We learned that true equality comes in the form of not actually taking a "one size fits all" approach when considering the experience women have once their in the industry.

Now that we know these things, its time to answer the $1 million dollar question. How do we close the gender gap? The truth is..I don't have the answer.

But finding that answer, begins with awareness. Awareness of problems that exist in every facet of our community/industry. We have to change mindsets and stereotypes that exist. The irony of being in a room full of people who love to break and fix things and not being able to fix this..is not lost on me.

When it comes down to it..we have to disrupt the thought processes that exist in our community, and show that the gains & success of women do not come at the expense of men.

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