

“Addressing the Gaps in Silicon Valley”

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“So do *you* want to be an entrepreneur?” my boss asked, as we sat in a high-end co-working space called The Battery Club in San Francisco. For the first day on the job as intern to Rebeca Hwang, co-founder of the startup YouNoodle and now partner at the venture capital firm Rivet Ventures, the question posed was nerve-racking. I still wasn’t close to finding out what I wanted to do in my career and in my life.

My role as executive intern in the summer of 2014 solidified my passions for an entrepreneurial career in areas focused on helping bridge gaps for individuals disadvantaged from such opportunities. My role combined research, analytics and project management for Rivet Ventures and logistical support for a Technology Entrepreneurship course co-taught by Hwang at Stanford University. To support Rivet Ventures, a venture capital firm that invests in companies focused on the female demographic, I researched Silicon Valley trends on emerging startups targeting the women consumer. I synthesized anecdotal data on women founders and quantitative data such as company valuations and yearly revenue in a white paper. I delivered a lecture on this white paper to 65 international students enrolled in the Technology Entrepreneurship course, where I also supported the coordination and logistics, such as organizing site visits to Google, Facebook and other startups. This experience provided me valuable insight into Silicon Valley’s entrepreneurial ecosystem, which even a few years ago seemed like a distant, unknown environment.

As a liberal arts student studying Economics at a small institution, I did not identify with tech-nerds or entrepreneurs who seemed to make millions before twenty. As an Indian-American female, there were fewer role models who I identified with as well.

My experiences in college shifted my perception of entrepreneurship, as I started to see it not only as starting a company, but also as creative problem-solving in addressing important gaps in the world. I explored these themes further as Co-coordinator for our entrepreneurship hub, Oxypreneurship, which aims to provide students with the resources and skills to pursue their entrepreneurial ambitions. The most rewarding experience in the process was witnessing students who might not have identified as an entrepreneur, or even seen themselves start a company, gain the motivation and inspiration to start a project or initiative on their own. My experience over the summer helped me similarly make the shift.

As I researched more about the state of women entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley, I realized the wide disparities and systemic biases that exist in the field. The paucity of women engineers, designers, founders and investors causes a lack of female perspective in innovation around new startups, and the problems they seek to address. Less than four percent of venture capitalists are female, and women founders have made many testimonies at the challenges in having to enter a boys club in order to gain funding for their company.

Working with Rebeca Hwang, a Korean-born immigrant who grew up in Argentina, was a refreshing and inspiring twist to the traditional entrepreneurship story. With a similarly diverse and all female venture capital team at Rivet Ventures, Hwang demonstrates that high-growth and profitable enterprises exist when focusing on the female demographic. Understanding the gaps in entrepreneurship was further reinforced to me when considering the experiences of international entrepreneurs in Silicon Valley, such as the many students taking the summer course at Stanford. These eager

international students were often start-stuck in the tech entrepreneurship world, but sometimes doubted their confidence to gain success in the United States because of the lack of role-models or support.

Entrepreneurs are the future problem-solvers for the world, but the questions and problems they seek to address reflect their unique life experiences. Gender parity and diversity expands the breadth of innovation and depth of the problems that we can seek to solve in the community. I learned this through the stories of the entrepreneurs I met this summer. The bright students who came from around the world, the single-moms at late-night tech meet-ups in San Francisco, in the own boss's journey from Argentina. It is this resolve to address the gaps to support diversity in entrepreneurship that has attracted me to a definite answer to an important question. Yes, one day I do want to be an entrepreneur.