

The Blue Banner's View

Gender pay gap robs women of half a million dollars

Penis envy is appropriate if having one means earning an extra half a million dollars in a lifetime.

In 2009, the Department of Labor found the average woman earned 77 cents for every dollar a man earned.

Men can buy an extra gumball an hour. Over time, those quarters add up.

According to the Center for American Progress, women lose \$434,000 on average in 40 years because of the gender pay gap.

Sexual discrimination in the workplace seems like a problem of the past. Didn't women solve that problem when they burned their bras in the 1960s? Isn't that what all the fist shaking and hairy armpits were about?

It's the 21st century, but executives still promote men more than women and women still have to work more hours for the same amount of money.

On Feb. 1, 8,000 female employees filed a \$100 million lawsuit against Toshiba's U.S. business for alleged discrimination against women. The lawsuit said Toshiba underpays females, slows or stops their promotions, punishes them more harshly and ignores their complaints.

All of Toshiba's board of directors

and executive officers are male. They said they are not discriminating, but simply have not found the proper female candidates.

The Equal Pay Act should protect women from discrimination, but it is difficult to police such an abstract idea. Promotions are subjective, and CEOs can promote as many men as they want and say the men were simply more qualified.

Diversity quotas or government incentives for hiring women create tension because they undermine women's value. Women want to be hired based on performance, not because Uncle Sam says to put more ladies around the office.

However, when women's merit is overlooked and undervalued, it is a vicious cycle of unregulated discrimination.

The women studying in college today expect to graduate and enter a workplace of equal opportunity. Unfortunately, the progress we've actually made is less impressive than what we project.

Armed with an education, we don't anticipate that our gender affects our pay, but the wage gap only increases

with education. Women with a bachelor's degree or higher lose about \$713,000 in their lifetime. According to the U.S. 2010 Census, that is enough to buy almost three houses at the median price for houses in the U.S.

The problem comes from the people in power. We are waiting for the paradigm to truly shift instead of projecting an illusion of progress.

Men and women are equal. Most of us would readily admit gender has no effect on worth or performance in a workplace. Yet, women are still undervalued.

They are paid less, restricted to low-paying positions with little chance of promotion. Women are more concentrated than men in part-time positions, which do not qualify for health care benefits and often offer inconsistent hours.

In retail, women, on average, make 64 cents per dollar that a man makes. This is equivalent to the wage gap of 30 years ago. Now, that is progress.

In 2001, a group of women filed a lawsuit for general sexual discrimination against the retail supervillain Wal-Mart. They accused Wal-Mart of paying women less and promoting

fewer women, more slowly, to management positions than men.

In December, the U.S. Supreme Court agreed to take the case. It will decide if Wal-Mart is too large to be held accountable for the company-wide discrimination.

The women prepared statistical evidence of the large pay gap and the higher concentration of men in management positions and anecdotal evidence of male managers making snide comments, including telling a woman that she belonged in the kitchen, barefoot and pregnant.

If the Supreme Court sides with Wal-Mart, the women will not receive any compensation for the discrimination. This is the opportunity for the Supreme Court to acknowledge the inequality, compensate the employees and take preventative measures to limit future discrimination.

Each person has their own strengths and weaknesses.

A certain woman may be an assertive leader. A particular man may have excellent people skills. These traits come from their individuality, not their gender.

A vagina should not be a set back.

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The Blue Banner is a designated forum for free speech and welcomes letters to the editor, considering them on basis of interest, space and timeliness. Letters and articles should be e-mailed to the editor-in-chief or the appropriate section editor.

Letters should include the writer's name, year in school, and major or other relationship to UNCA. Include a telephone number to aid in verification. All articles are subject to editing.