let’s talk about breasts: breast cancer basics and the workplace

plus

client viewpoint: results and next steps across the ages: financial planning for women
women in the canadian workplace: infographic
zero moment of truth: paid maternity leave in the u.s.
the other “f” word: why are we afraid to be feminists?
Ductal carcinoma: Cancer that begins in the breast ducts and is the most common type of breast cancer. It grows into surrounding tissues. Approximately one in ten breast cancers are of this type.

Lobular carcinoma: Cancer that begins in breast lobules and grows into surrounding tissues. Approximately one in ten breast cancers are of this type.

Factors most consistently connected with breast cancer risk:
- Being a woman - approximately 99% of breast cancers occur in women.
- Early menstruation (before age 12)
- Smoking tobacco and breathing second-hand smoke
- Being overweight after menopause, based on your BMI
- Taking hormone replacement therapy
- Having a close relative(s) with breast cancer (mother, grandmother, sister, daughter)
- Age - your risk increases as you get older, with more than eighty percent of breast cancers found in women over the age of fifty
- Having a personal breast cancer history - this means that if you have previously detected breast cancer / received treatment for breast cancer, you are more likely to be diagnosed again.
- Having a close relative(s) with breast cancer (mother, grandmother, sister, daughter)
- Early menopause (before age 12)
- Late menopause (after age 55)
- Taking hormone replacement therapy
- Delayed childbirth (having a first baby after the age of 30 or never having had a baby)
- Being overweight after menopause, based on your BMI (body mass index)

Factors which have been less consistently found to increase breast cancer risk:
- Drinking alcohol - recommendations for cancer control suggest that women drink less than one drink per day
- Being physically inactive - exercising for at least 30 minutes, five days per week may help maintain overall health
- Smoking tobacco and breathing second-hand smoke increases a woman’s chance of developing several types of cancer, including breast cancer

breast cancer basics

Cancer is an umbrella term for approximately one hundred different diseases, all characterized by the uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells in the human body. With breast cancer, the abnormal cell growth—cancer—begins in the tissues that make up the breasts. The cancer cells may form a mass called a tumor (note, not all tumors are cancer), invade nearby tissue, and spread to lymph nodes and other parts of the body.

The most common types of breast cancer are:

Factors which have been less consistently found to increase breast cancer risk:
- Drinking alcohol - recommendations for cancer control suggest that women drink less than one drink per day
- Being physically inactive - exercising for at least 30 minutes, five days per week may help maintain overall health
- Smoking tobacco and breathing second-hand smoke increases a woman’s chance of developing several types of cancer, including breast cancer

breast awareness

Breast cancer can be impossible to see or feel. As such, it is increasingly important to have proper breast awareness regardless of age or risk factors. Contact your doctor if you notice:
- a lump or dimpling of your breast tissue
- changes in your nipple or fluid leaking from the nipple
- skin changes or redness that does not go away
- swelling under the arm or below your collarbone
- unusual or persistent pain in the breast or armpit
- changes in the size or shape of one, or both breasts

Let’s talk about breasts: breast cancer basics

According to the Canadian Cancer Society (2011), twenty Canadians are diagnosed with cancer every hour, and of those twenty diagnosed, eight will die. For women specifically, breast cancer continues to be the most common cancer diagnosis in Canadian women over the age of twenty—with one in four cancer diagnoses being breast cancer. Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths in Canadian women.

So, let’s talk about breasts.

Your breast basics

A woman’s breast is made of glandular tissue, connective tissue, fatty tissue, blood vessels, lymph tissue, and nerves. Each breast contains up to twenty sections of glandular tissue called lobes and lymph vessels. Lymph vessels are thin tubes that carry lymph to small, bean-shaped glands called lymph nodes located near the breast, under the arm, and elsewhere throughout the body. The chest muscle and chest wall are located behind the breasts.

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The most common types of breast cancer are:

Factors most consistently connected with breast cancer risk:
- Being a woman - approximately 99% of breast cancers occur in women. But it should be noted that men are diagnosed with breast cancer as well.
- Age - your risk increases as you get older, with more than eighty percent of breast cancers found in women over the age of fifty
- Having a personal breast cancer history - this means that if you have previously detected breast cancer / received treatment for breast cancer, you are more likely to be diagnosed again.
- Having a close relative(s) with breast cancer (mother, grandmother, sister, daughter)
- Early menstruation (before age 12)
- Late menopause (after age 55)
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As our workforce ages, employers are seeing more working-age women being diagnosed with cancer. However, at the same time, early detection and treatment methods for breast cancer have improved greatly over the years, and the number of people surviving breast cancer has increased. Indeed, for many individuals, breast cancer has become more like a chronic disease. This is good news for the cancer patients and their families. It also bodes well for employers, since increased survivorship means they are able to retain valuable employees in the workplace for longer periods of time.

However, this scenario has its challenges, too. Increased survivorship means that both employers and employees must bear the emotional and financial burden of cancer treatment for a greater length of time. One study estimates that over the next thirty years, 2.4 million Canadian workers will get cancer and 872,000 will die from the disease. Meanwhile, cancer will cost the Canadian economy an estimated $177.5 billion in direct health care costs, $199 billion in corporate profits, $250 billion in taxation revenues, and $543 billion in wage-based productivity.

Workplace burden

Employees with breast cancer face great physical and emotional challenges, not to mention the financial burden that may arise. These factors frequently result in high rates of absenteeism, lost productivity, and disability. What’s more, these challenges are not only faced by the cancer patient, but also a toll on those close to the patient such as family and friends, who are often in the role of caregiver.

Employees need to recognize the potential workplace issues for employees facing cancer or caring for someone with cancer. The National Alliance for Caregiving reports that seven out of ten caregivers cut back their working hours, leave their job completely, or take an extended leave of absence as a result of caring for someone with cancer. In addition, caregivers have been found to experience more workplace anxiety and depression than those who are not caring for patients with cancer.

absenteeism and productivity

Patients with cancer often have high rates of absenteeism resulting from treatment schedules. Treatments may also create side effects that compromise a patient’s ability to perform their regular workplace duties. Even when an employee with breast cancer (or any form of cancer) is at work, they may not be as productive as they would be under normal circumstances. According to a 2008 study, breast cancer survivors reported an average reduction of productivity of 3.1 percent below their healthy norm. This amounts to a loss of 2.48 hours of work over two weeks of full-time employment.

This reduced productivity at work most often results not from the cancer itself, but from issues associated with cancer treatment and mental health. Patients are often distracted or preoccupied with nausea, fatigue, difficulties with memory, feelings of depression, fear of death, changes in body image and self-esteem, money or legal concerns, and fears concerning the impact that their illness may have on their family.

short-term disability (STD) and long-term disability (LTD)

Workplace absenteeism and disability are common for people dealing with breast cancer in the first six to twelve months after diagnosis. Absenteeism rates for breast cancer patients are seventy percent higher, while STD rates are approximately twelve times higher among cancer patients in their first year of treatment when compared to individuals without breast cancer.

Cancer (all cancers, not just breast cancer) is still the leading cause of LTD claims in North America. However, as detection and treatments for cancer have become more effective, return-to-work rates for people diagnosed with cancer have improved substantially. The Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology (2008) reports that for breast cancer patients specifically, the percentage of employees returning to work after a cancer diagnosis and treatment was as high as fifty-three percent.

As employers, it’s easy to look at the financial numbers to build a case for this type of education and support, but sensitivity to this subject is key. Recognize the impact that a cancer diagnosis has on a single employee, on their family and friends, and on your entire workplace as a whole—yes, financially, but also physically and emotionally.

Cancer continues to exact a huge toll on the lives of Canadians, and the Canadian workplace. While you can never remove the risk of cancer, you can work to improve your workplace odits in the "lottery" by educating staff, promizzling common cancer screenings, and creating a culture that supports healthy behaviours and supports staff should they be diagnosed. Most local health units are happy to provide free educational sessions in the workplace and are a great place to start your organization’s journey to cancer awareness.

This is the first issue of 2016 that takes women as its focus, and writing the introduction has felt like a daunting task. Can I adequately express the impact that women have had on our business and on our world—let alone on my own personal and professional life? How can I gesture towards such awe-inspiring contributions without my words sounding trite or inconsequential?

Too often when we speak to the contributions of women we sound as though we are simply trying to placate something, or even worse, someone. And so I hope that by speaking of my own experiences to offer some honest thoughts about the importance of women; thoughts that will offer the opposite of the disingenuous script frequently provided by men championing women in the workplace, and that will reveal my own experience of a workplace, and indeed a life, full of influential and inspiring women.

Here we go.

First things first, it's important for all of us to acknowledge the impact, and the inspiration, that women offer on a daily basis. First to my mind is my mother, who worked as a registered nurse at Sick Kids Hospital in Toronto in the 1960s. Her ward was the burn ward, and, as a father myself, I can't imagine how hard her work must have been. But she managed, and she excelled. She was able to confront death, abuse, and other horrific images on a daily basis, and still come home every day to shower those around her with warmth and attention. The strength she revealed was awesome, and though I was never fully able to understand from where she drew it, it continues to inspire me to be a caring, compassionate, and dedicated person. I am forever indebted to her for these—or at least what I think are these—good qualities. As luck would have it (if lady luck were a man named Sigmund Freud), I am now married to an equally strong, loving, and determined RN—my wife Lori. I am far from perfect, but as I strive to bring these values to my daily work and family life, I feel my mother and wife help me be this better person, and have helped me embed these same values in The Williamson Group culture.

Of course, I now have my own family, and am a proud husband and father. I hope to raise a son that is eager to learn the same values as I have, and a daughter who excels at teaching them. I am also thrilled at the opportunities my family now has. Today, workplaces are more progressive and inclusive. While I can’t say I’ve watched Mad Men, I think it’s safe to say we all know the period and the premise, and as glamorous as a studio may try to make it appear, I am happy that my daughter will not have to endure that same fight. Those who have come before her have worked hard to create not just a place for women in the workforce, but a balance and necessity. For some people, things come easily. Others have to work at it (like this message). Others still choose to work hard. My daughter is the latter. She consistently chooses to work hard at making things better—her school work, her family (she is constantly improving me), her community. Her future is bright—could she be writing this President’s Perspective for The Williamson Group in 2040?—but I must stop and thank all of the hard-working women who have laid the ground work for her, and who are currently still working to change our world and workplaces for the better.

Speaking of workplaces, at The Williamson Group, we say it over and over again—our staff is our biggest asset. They make us who we are, and are the key component to our success. As President, when I think of the key differentiators in our workplace, inspiring, insightful, powerful, and passionate women spring to mind. They are everywhere we turn at TWG. We pride ourselves on listening to our clients, understanding their unique needs, developing strong and lasting relationships, and communicating effectively—all skills at which women have proven to be more effective than men. Too often when we speak to the contributions of women we sound as though we are simply trying to placate something, or even worse, someone. And so I hope that by speaking of my own experiences to offer some honest thoughts about the importance of women; thoughts that will offer the opposite of the disingenuous script frequently provided by men championing women in the workplace, and that will reveal my own experience of a workplace, and indeed a life, full of influential and inspiring women.

I think that men have to be more open to supporting women—and women have to be more open to supporting each other—to bring balance to the world and society in which we live. If we open our eyes, just a little, we’ll see that equality is nothing to be afraid of, it benefits everyone. Having strong female leaders in our society is not a threat to men, and is not a threat to other women, but will only improve the world we live in by adding diversity, different perspectives, drive, and passion.

We all need to stand beside women as equals, not as inhibitors. I don’t think I could consider myself a real man or good father if I couldn’t stand up for women’s—my mother’s, my wife’s, my daughter’s—rights. I know I continue to learn so much from the women I meet and work with, so let’s all take a cue from their skills and abilities.

Soon women will be taking over the professional sphere, and I want to be leading a workplace that celebrates this diversity and doesn’t shy away from confronting change. I suppose the only question left is, where do you want your organizational values to lie?

For someone who struggled with how to grapple with such a sensitive subject, it turns out I actually had a lot to say—perhaps I’m learning to be more communicative from the women in my life. Or, at least practice makes perfect.

Don Williamson
President
client viewpoint survey: results and next steps

If The Williamson Group experience is the difference between being listened to and being heard, then our Client ViewPoint survey helps to serve as a mouthpiece for clients from all service areas—ensuring we get well rounded feedback with which we can take action.

In 2011 we began the process of annual client service reviews, and in late 2013, our third Client ViewPoint survey was launched and sent out to over 500 clients. With this feedback, our clients are lending a hand to the growth of TWG as we are able to better our service to each client, target areas that may need improvement, and develop analytics for future tracking.

As our approach to these surveys becomes more straightforward we will, with these responses, only improve in each and every one of our business areas to help provide our clients with the first-rate service they deserve.

how well do you think TWG understands your company’s needs?

To be a successful company, you need a culture based on a unified vision and concrete values. Here at TWG, we strongly believe that our clients and their businesses are some of the most important assets to our company. In order to serve clients to the best of our ability, our employees strive to understand all aspects of each individual business. Adequately understanding a client’s organizational needs allows for TWG to find the most suitable plan, while creating a valuable relationship with each client.

highly-valued business characteristics:

We asked clients to rank the business characteristics they valued most when working with TWG, and they responded:

- Knowledge and advice
- Relationship with TWG employees
- Ease of doing business
- Exceptional customer service
- Willingness to accommodate

Many organizations purport to create the business culture described above, but The Williamson Group realizes it both internally and externally—delivering our brand promise through every client interaction and relationship.

how satisfied are you with the level of service and the programs TWG provided for you and your company?

Based on recent experiences with your TWG service team, how would you classify the following statements?

client feedback

“I value the trust and confidence that the TWG team demonstrate each and every day. They always have the best interest of their client in mind when making critical strategic decisions.”

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“Everyone we have worked with so far at TWG has been awesome! All very helpful & accommodating to our needs and many questions as we move forward in this new partnership.”

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across the ages: financial planning for women

Times are definitely changing for women. Just sixty short years ago, the most common scene was the classic nuclear family—men went to work and were the breadwinners, and women’s duties were in the home raising children and making bread from scratch.

Fast forward to today and women have unlimited freedom in North America to become anything they would like. The choices are limitless, although anything but simple.

Let this sink in a little: just a few short decades ago, women did not have the choice to manage the household finances, and in some homes, had no say in money matters at all. Historically speaking, men have had at least a thousand years of financial education backing them and have been conditioned to handle money. Women have had just those few short decades.

However, despite these short decades, women are taking the financial world by storm. Most financial services companies (banks, insurance companies, investment firms, etc.) admit that, in the past, they have not done a good job of attracting women as customers, but with women rising fast in the income and managerial ranks, everyone is starting to pay more attention. Still, even with the numbers behind them, it is safe to say that women are still at odds with their financial planning. Some will indeed take a proactive approach and even lead their household in all matters of finance. Others, unfortunately, will take a passive role their entire life, only to be forced into action by a critical moment such as a divorce, critical injury, or the death of a spouse/partner. Either way, matters of money cannot and should not be ignored.

Recognizing that priorities and habits change as one matures, the following is a guideline for considerations to be made at the various stages of a woman’s life.

you’re single, employed, and loving life
You probably feel like you do not have a care in the world at this stage of life, and yet, you should be enjoying the freedom that being gainfully employed with few outward responsibilities offers. However, the obvious consideration for anyone in this group is the need to sustain this income for both short- and long-term financial goals.

Critical illness insurance, disability insurance, long term care insurance
Without any dependents, life insurance may not be an immediate need, but consider what would happen to your well-planned single life should you be injured or experience a serious illness that could take you away from work for an extended period of time— or permanently. No matter your age, at this stage of life you need to consider critical illness insurance, disability insurance, and long term care insurance. These policies are paramount to the single woman’s lifestyle. With only your income to rely on, should a major illness or disability occur, the results could be financially devastating.

It is important to note that the cost of these insurance policies increases with age, so you need to shop around and consider the importance for each individual situation. When it comes to critical illness and disability, unless you have a hidden trust fund, you should consider your emergency fund sufficient to manage these situations. In addition, depending on your age and life goals, as a single working woman with no children or spouse/ partner to offer support in later years, a long-term care policy could rate high on the importance scale in the maintenance of your lifestyle.

Emergency savings
This should be fairly self-explanatory, and the advice remains consistent across the ages. As a single income woman, you should have at least three-months income in a safe, yet high-interest account, that is not easily accessed on a day-to-day basis, but remains accessible for times of need.

Life insurance
As previously mentioned, this may not be of prime importance. Without children or a significant other, your estate is less of a consideration than critical illness/disability insurance and your emergency savings. However, you should keep in mind that similar to other types of insurance, life insurance premiums do increase with age. Also, with age, the risk of developing or being diagnosed with an illness that creates costly pre-existing conditions, or renders you uninsurable increases and should be evaluated regardless of a present need.

RRSP savings
Depending on your employer’s pension plan, RRSPs should be taken advantage of fully when cash flow is available. The earlier you start investing in your retirement, the better prepared you will be. In addition, investing and becoming familiar with your saving options and management early years will be more financially literate when it comes time to focus more fully on retirement preparedness.

You’re a better half with no “kidlets”
So you have settled down with a very important person—a significant other—and are planning on spending the rest of your life with this amazing individual. However, as someone’s better half, it is important to ensure that you are building a healthy financial future, and protecting both the “yours” and “ours” of this situation.

Financial planning for two
Set up a financial planning meeting with your partner to discuss the importance of critical illness insurance and to review each other’s work benefits, including disability insurance and long-term care insurance. Obviously, you set yourself up when you were single (see above), but it is now time to ensure that your insurance will meet the needs of both parties should something happen to you. Plus, your partner may need to coordinate their insurance needs as well. Make sure you review and update any beneficiary information on an annual basis to maintain accuracy.

Depending on your debts, and that of your partner, it is now time to discuss life insurance with a knowledgeable advisor. In addition, emergency funds should now factor in both incomes for the minimum three-month period.

Life hacks
You are no longer simply answering to yourself, so you need to engage your partner in a dialogue regarding major life shifts that might occur in the future. Will one of you consider changing careers? Will either of you go back to school? Are you planning on having children in the future? What do each of you hope to do in retirement? Are there any big location moves on the horizon? What are your transportation needs now, and what will they be in the future? You can’t plan for every curve life throws at you, but by discussing your goals, hopes and dreams as a couple, you can avoid surprises that could affect your short-term and long-term financial plans.
marriage with children
No doubt about it, those children/kidlets are your most costly investment in both time and money. Although no parent would associate or justify having children based on a dollar amount, this expense is one that should be planned for. With Canadians facing record high debt loads, and record low savings patterns, affording children requires somewhat of a juggling act.

Consider the following with your partner:

Unless cash flow is not an issue (so you did have a hidden trust fund after all), retiring as planned and enjoying the luxuries of life while also paying for the kids’ extracurricular activities and supporting them through university, will require a sustained and probably creative strategy.

Educating the young
Will you provide for your children’s post-secondary education? A four-year university education costs an average of $44,000, and by the year 2019, that amount could increase to $74,000 in Canada. Even if cost is not a barrier for your family, there is a current trend among affluent individuals to limit the offering of resources to children. Children need to be taught about financial responsibility. Start young, and consider making them accountable for at least a portion of their education fund.

Insurance and estates
It is a recurring theme across all ages and stages of life, but when kids are involved, life insurance is likely paramount. If something were to happen to both parents, your life insurance should ensure that all debts are covered and indexed for inflation. Seek the council of an experienced financial and insurance advisor and lawyer to walk you through proper estate planning, insurance planning, and will preparation.

Now is also not the time to ignore the other types of insurance either, as they become increasingly important with the addition of family members to support through illness and disability. However, if cash flow is tight, younger couples in this category should allocate insurance premiums to life insurance policies.

Retirement
Do you and your partner have employer-sponsored pension plans, or RRSPs? If so, ensure that they are topped up annually and that investment options are reviewed regularly. As you get older, work at switching your investment strategy from growth to stability. If your partner is male, remember that as a woman, your life expectancy is significantly greater than your spouse’s, and that means that your retirement savings plans need to be adjusted accordingly. You need to be familiar with your husband’s financial affairs, will, and estate plan. If you are in a same-sex relationship, consider the fact that you will potentially have to support two lifestyles for a longer period of time. With an average retirement age of 65, your average retirement length has the potential to be as long as your working career.

Today’s woman has opportunities available to her that generations past could not have imagined. However, such freedoms require education and research. Don’t be afraid to ask tough questions of yourself and your partner. Don’t be afraid to ask the seemingly silly questions of an advisor (they have heard it all before and want you to be prepared for any situation). Empower yourself through financial literacy in every age and stage of life.

are you seeking financial planning advice?
speak with a woman of influence at the williamson group:

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women in the canadian workplace: infographic

should organizations increase the number of women in senior ranks?

90% of female senior executives agree

while only 42% of male senior executives agree

what challenges have you had to overcome in progression to a management or executive role?

managing work and family: 61%

external factors: 56%

limited opportunities: 53%

outdated perceptions of women: 48%

lack of trust from senior management: 48%

lack of female mentors and training: 47%

research shows that having a higher proportion of women in executive positions increases:

the glass ceiling does not hinder women’s career aspirations

ceos feel women’s advancement is hindered by a lack of management opportunities

the percentage of women respondents:

highlights from randstad’s 2012 survey of canadian women in leadership positions (managerial/executives)
zero moment of truth: paid maternity leave in the u.s.

Google first coined the phrase zero moment of truth to refer to the decision-making moment that occurs in today’s consumer—that miniscule point in time when a brand, product, or service makes a favourable impression and causes affirmative action.

This article purports to offer a different slant on the zero moment of truth concept with a look at paid maternity leave and the disjointed realization that the United States, a leading world power, does not legislate any weeks of paid leave for new working mothers—zero.

According to a United Nations survey of 185 countries, the United States is the only industrialized country in the world that does not guarantee or require paid maternity leave for working mothers. It should be noted that this does not mean that women never receive a paid maternity leave in the U.S. Highly-paid women working in corporate or specialized jobs may enjoy up to twelve weeks’ paid maternity leave at their employer’s discretion. However, middle- and lower-income women’s options are limited to taking unpaid time off work, requesting disability pay, going right back to work after their child is born in order to earn money for the often-expensive childcare, or leaving the workforce entirely. If a woman is a single mother, expectations are even more limited, and the stakes are even higher.

A few individual states have mandated paid family leave insurance programs—New Jersey, California, and Rhode Island. However, these leaves are short and include minimal pay. In 1993, the United States passed the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) that provided for a total of twelve work weeks of unpaid leave during any twelve-month period for the birth of a child and the care of the newborn. However, FMLA applies only to workers in companies with fifty or more staff. This means that women, who work at smaller businesses in the U.S., are not eligible to take time off during pregnancy or after the birth of a child, nor will their jobs be protected should they require unpaid time off.

In many countries, a woman’s employment income is vital for the survival of the family. The International Labour Office reports that women provide the main source of income in some thirty percent of all households worldwide. In the United States, the figure is actually significantly higher, with fifty-five percent of working women providing half—or more than half—of their family’s household income.

An essential element in maternity protection is a legal guarantee to pregnant women and young mothers that they will not lose their jobs as a result of pregnancy, absence on maternity leave, or the birth of a child. This guarantee is an essential means of preventing maternity from becoming a source of discrimination against women in employment. A loss of continuity in employment is a major handicap in women’s career advancement. It leads to a loss of seniority in the workplace, and is also costly as it results in reduced pensions, and reductions in paid annual leave or other employment-related benefits. In the United States, discrimination is prohibited against pregnant women, women at childbirth, and women who are affected by a related medical condition, but only in companies with fifteen or more workers.

A 2012 study by CareerBuilder found that one-in-three working women in the United States who had a child between 2009 and 2012 cut their maternity leaves short. Indeed, twelve percent of women went back to work after taking a leave of just two weeks or less. The study speculated that competitive work environments and demanding positions are discouraging women from taking full advantage of maternity leave. Other studies have shown similar findings, with women workers justifying their partial maternity leaves with fear of making their employers unhappy or risking job loss due to absence.

Unfortunately, such fears may be warranted. The Institute for Women’s Policy Research reports that there is still a perception that working mothers are not fully committed to their jobs if they take a long maternity leave. Women are supposed to go to the hospital, properly care for themselves or their family simply because they want to have children and work, one is forced to ask, when will the United States catch up with the rest of the world?

Will this call to action for working women’s rights be their zero moment of truth?

As women are forced to put their careers and financial future at risk, face being fired unfairly, and worry about not being able to properly care for themselves or their family simply because they want to have children and work, one is forced to ask, when will the United States catch up with the rest of the world?

Data in Infographic: International Labour Organization

*for six weeks, flat rate after
**at the federal minimum wage


United States
0 days
0% pay

Spain
112 days
67% pay

Turkey
126 days
Flat rate**

Australia
120 days
100% pay

Brazil
120 days
100% pay

China
90 days
100% pay

France
112 days
100% pay

Germany
98 days
100% pay

India
84 days
100% pay

Indonesia
84 days
100% pay

Japan
100% pay

Italy
100% pay

Mexico
84 days
100% pay

Netherlands
112 days
100% pay

South Korea
90 days
100% pay

Saudi Arabia
70 days
50% pay

Spain
112 days
67% pay

Turkey
126 days
Flat rate**

United Kingdom
280 days
90% pay*

United States
15
Raise your hand if you’re a feminist.

Years ago I was in a university classroom where a professor asked the large group of attending students to do the same thing—I was the only student who raised their hand. Talk about a moment of otherness and alienation. But why did this happen? Why, in an institution of higher learning where we seek to explore independent thought and individuality, and encourage equality, was I the only person to step up? Why were people afraid to be feminists?

I am a feminist. I also don’t hate men, I like nice clothes, styling my hair, and I can even be funny at times. Yet, for some reason, many people don’t think these two concepts can co-exist. I have always considered myself a feminist, but I am surprised to find myself amongst such a minority. Indeed, it seems like a glorious time to be a declared non-feminist. In 2012, when Katy Perry accepted the Billboard Woman of the Year award, she announced to the world, “I am not a feminist, but I do believe in the strength of women.” Later that year, the former first lady of France, Carla Bruni-Sarkozy, declared that she was not an active feminist because she loves family life and doing the same thing every day. Since when did a love of family or stability in your day-to-day life mean that you did not—or could not—believe in women’s rights?

Maybe I’m getting ahead of myself here. What is feminism? In loose terms, feminism is the advocacy of women’s rights. This includes seeking to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment on the grounds of political, social, and economic equality to men. With what exactly, in that definition, do people have a problem? Do Katy Perry and Carla Bruni-Sarkozy not believe they deserve equal rights to men? Do they—or you—believe that women shouldn’t enjoy the same freedoms?

Today feminism is about creating the ideal environment for the changes that our predecessors made possible. We’ve got the vote, we’re sexually liberated, and we’re taking over the workplace. Although there will always be some who still dispute these changes, these wins are here to stay.

We have come a long way in the fight for equality. Perhaps we find feminism lacking a presence in our society today because in the past there was such a clear opponent in each battle—the men who denied our right to vote, or our access to birth control. Fat cats sitting in offices around the world determining and celebrating patriarchy. But the fact still remains that men seem to be more equal to women. Women may not be faced with the same sense of opposition that existed several years ago, but as feminism evolves, so do the enemies. Not only do we need to not only defend against men/patriarchy, but when finding the need to defend feminism against other women. Yes, our opponent is smart; he—and now she—has wised up to the cause and knows how to fight back. They utilize new technologies and create new discourses. They ensure that their agenda pervades the media, tell us how to look, cause rifts amongst friends, and ultimately seek to give feminism a bad name.

Think about the struggles of being a woman for a second. Think about weight, and hair, and make-up, the length of one’s skirt, and doing the same thing every day. Since when did a love of family or stability in your day-to-day life mean that you did not—or could not—believe in women’s rights?

We should all be feminists, men and women. Everyone should want to eradicate any remaining imbalance between the sexes in the workplace, in education, and in the home. Women are scared to identify as feminists because admitting to actively fighting for feminism says something loud about them. Feminism has become saturated with cultural myths that make many women shy away. You don’t have to love your body, or go against anyone’s face. Yes it frightens us because it puts concerns about our character on the table, connotations that are less than preferable in a world where patriarchy still lingers around every corner of our lives.

In the end, my message is simple: don’t be afraid of feminism. Instead, stand shoulder to shoulder with like-minded women, and men who wish to see equality come to fruition. Feel free to call yourself whatever you want, I certainly won’t pressure you to be anything more than who you are. But I hope that you will consider this: when a woman says she is not a feminist, nobody enjoys it more than a misogynist.

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