# LISTENING

# A GENDER DISCRIMINATION TRIAL ROCKS SILICON VALLEY

**Pre-listening activities**

*Read the following sentences and use the context to work out the meaning of the underlined words. Then complete the matching exercise below.*

David quit his job because he was upset about being **passed over** for a promotion again.

The man injured in the accident decided to get a lawyer and **seek damages** from the factory owners.

It was a great party until Tom arrived. His sad stories completely **killed the buzz**.

I don’t really like **raunchy** teen comedies like *American Pie* and *Road Trip*.

We had to formulate a new plan, because the old one wasn’t **cutting it**.

Societies with large **disparities** between rich and poor are often violent and unstable.

The Civil War was a **watershed** in American history. Nothing was the same afterwards.

When John started his business it was hard to find investors, but finally a firm specializing in **venture capitalism** agreed to invest in his radical idea.

Nothing is more **emblematic** of Czech cuisine than the dumpling.

English language learners often don’t recognize the **subtleties** in meaning that synonyms often have.

1 Pass over \_\_\_\_ a) kind of business that invests in risky new ideas

2 Seek damages \_\_\_\_ b) a fine distinction or difference

3 Kill the buzz \_\_\_\_ c) inequality; difference

4 Raunchy \_\_\_\_ d) depress the mood of a group; stop the fun

5 To not cut it \_\_\_\_ e) to function properly; to perform according to standards and expectations

6 Disparity \_\_\_\_ f) ignore; disregard

7 Watershed \_\_\_\_ g) an event or factor which marks a division or

change

8 Venture capitalism \_\_\_\_ h) vulgar; obscene; dirty

9 Emblematic \_\_\_\_ i). ask a court of law for compensation

10 Subtlety \_\_\_\_ j) symbolic; providing an example

**Listening activities**

[http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=393031791&m=3930317 92](http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=393031791&m=3930317%2092)

# Listening for Main Idea

*Listen to the recording and choose the best answer.*

1. Ellen Pao is seeking damages from her former employer because...
2. They fired her unjustly
3. They didn’t promote her because she was a woman
4. Working there damaged her heart
5. According to Pao, the environment at Kleiner Perkins can be described as:
6. Fun and hot
7. Fast-paced and aggressive
8. Hostile and toxic
9. What does the company say in their defense?
10. They have made changes in their structure to be more accomodating to women
11. Pao was not a good employee
12. Other women enjoy working there
13. Why do some think this trial could be a watershed?
    1. It could change the way gender issues are dealt with in the industry
    2. It could result in higher percentages of women in venture capitalism firms
    3. It could result in higher salaries for women

# Listening for Details

*Listen to the recording again and choose the best answer.*

1. The trial is primarily about gender discrimination in...
   * 1. Capitalism
     2. Fashion shows
     3. The tech industry
2. Which of these did Pao not mention as being emblematic of the misogynistic environment at Kleiner Perkins?
   1. Discussing Victoria’s Secret fashion shows
   2. Sexual harassment of female employees
   3. Men-only ski trips
3. The percentage of women at Kleiner Perkins is..
4. Roughly the same as the industry average
5. Below the industry average
6. Above the industry average
7. Which part of the trial has already taken place?
8. Ellen Pao’s testimony
9. The closing arguments
10. Deliberations

**Post-listening activities**

**Discussion**

1. *Divide into two groups. The first group will make a list of the ways they believe women may be discriminated against or marginalized at work or at social events. The other group will put down ways in which they believe women are put on the same level, or even “positively discriminated” over men. Then both groups discuss their findings and come to a conclusion. Be prepared to support your conclusions with persuasive arguments.*

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Discrimination against women** | **Positive discrimination in favour of women** |
|  |  |

*2. Discuss these questions in pairs/groups.*

a) Do you think gender discrimination exists in our country? Is the situation very different from that of other western countries? Are there countries with much more gender discrimination?

b) Do you think women are as competent in the IT world as men? Are there any differences? Should they be treated the same way?

c) Do you think it is acceptable to exclude women from certain social occasions? Is it acceptable to exclude men?

d) Do we need to balance work opportunities for women? Should we have quotas for women? If so, how high should they be?

e) Is there positive discrimination in our country which favors women over men in certain positions?

f) Do you think Ellen Pao should get the compensation she claims?

1. *Read the following scenarios involving discrimination with a partner. In each case,*

*decide if it is racial, sex, religious, or other kind of discrimination. Does the victim have the right to seek damages? What should be done in each case?*

A man in Japan wanted to attend a university near his home to study nutrition. Unfortunately, the university rejected his application because they are an all women’s school. He claims he cannot afford to study at a university farther away from home and would like to seek damages from the university for discrimination.

Robert and Cynthia Gifford own a farm in New York state which they offer to the public to book for private parties. Lesbian couple Jennie McCarthy and Melissa Erwin tried to book the farm as a venue for their same-sex wedding. The Giffords refused, stating that as Catholics they held to a different definition of marriage and could not in good conscience allow their property to be used in this way. McCarthy and Erwin are seeking damages for discrimination and mental pain and suffering.

A woman walked into a Victoria’s Secret shop at a shopping mall looking for some new bras. All of the bras she could find were too small, except for a few black ones. She asked the sales assistant if they had any in her size in another colour. The sales assistant told her they didn’t have a large selection in her size because „boobs are supposed to be that big.“

A New York City police policy called „stop and frisk“ has come under fire for being discriminatory. Police in the US are only allowed to stop someone they suspect are involved in a crime, but in NYC the police were given a lot of freedom to decide who should be stopped and searched. Statistics show that NYC police stop black and Latino youths at a rate disproportionate to their percentage of the population. Police groups argue that while the policy was in place crime was significantly reduced.

**Writing**

Write an essay (250 words) in which you present your view of gender discrimination in the Czech Republic. Try to cover both sides of the argument and support your arguments with examples/evidence.

**Answer key**

**Pre-listening activities**

1f, 2 i, 3 d, 4 h, 5 e, 6 c, 7 g, 8 a, 9 j, 10 b

**Listening activities**

Listening for main idea: 1 b, 2 c, 3 b, 4 b

Listening for details: 1 c, 2 b, 3 c, 4 a

**Post- listening activities**

Answers will wary

**Discussion**

Answers will wary

**Tapescript**

ARUN RATH, HOST:

Gender discrimination in Silicon Valley is at the heart of a court battle that has captivated the tech world this week. Ellen Pao claims that the venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers had a toxic, misogynistic environment that led to her being passed over for promotions and eventually pushed out. She is seeking $16 million in damages. Kleiner Perkins says Pao simply wasn't qualified for a higher position. Davey Alba of WIRED has been in the courtroom every day of the trial so far. I asked her about what the prosecution's been trying to demonstrate through Pao's testimony.

DAVEY ALBA: They paint a picture of this old-boys culture at Kleiner Perkins. She's testified about a male partner organizing all-male ski trips and dinners at Al Gore's apartment and talks about how he, at one point, said that women kill the buzz, and that's why he's left them out of these events. There's also been some pretty raunchy talk that's been brought up during the trial - talk of the Playboy Mansion, Victoria's Secret fashion shows, how one Kleiner-backed executive had wanted to get Marissa Mayer of Yahoo! on their board, not because she was necessarily qualified, but because she was "hot," quote, unquote.

RATH: So how does the defense for Kleiner Perkins counter that? I mean, 'cause those things sound pretty bad. How are they countering that there is actually - it's not a hostile work environment?

ALBA: They've portrayed Pao as this resentful, greedy, aggressive worker at Kleiner Perkins. And they say that, you know, in fact, the composition of their workforce at Kleiner Perkins is 20 percent female, which is above the industry average of 6 percent. And so they paint Pao as a person who wasn't successful at Kleiner Perkins because she wasn't qualified - that she just wasn't cutting it.

RATH: Given the context in Silicon Valley - the enormous gender disparity that in the tech world we all know about - people are writing about this trial as being kind of a watershed. Could the outcome of this trial lead to real change in the tech industry?

ALBA: I think it definitely can. And I think that's why it's being watched so closely. There is a problem of sexism and gender discrimination for sure - just if you look at the numbers in the tech industry, and in venture capitalism, even more so. I believe there's four percent female executives in sort of the upper ranks of VC firms according to some studies.

And however the outcome of this trial ends up could lead to changes in the way that the industry views and deals with gender issues. But it's a little bit tough because it's kind of hard to take just one single trial as sort of emblematic of gender bias in tech. It's kind of a hard trap to fall into to say that the sexism at your company - your tech company - doesn't look like this, so you don't have a problem. That's not necessarily true. There are many more subtleties involved.

RATH: And Davey, where does the trial go from here?

ALBA: So right now, we have heard from Pao, which has been kind of the pivotal moment in the trial. And she's ended her testimony. Judge Kahn, the judge on this case, hopes to start deliberations by March 23. So if all goes well, we'll have maybe a week or two more, and then we'll have to listen to closing arguments.

RATH: That's Davey Alba. You can read her coverage of the Ellen Pao trial at wired.com. Davey, thanks very much.

ALBA: Sure. Thank you.

(taken from National Public Radio)