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## Ethical Issues In Wal-Mart: A Reflection

Wal-Mart is a multinational retail corporation that currently has over 11,300 locations. It is the largest retailer in the world, and currently employs 2.2 million associates. With this size of an operation, there will inevitably be controversy. However, Wal-Mart has had more than its share of ethical concerns. There have been concerns over gender inequality, poor working conditions overseas, and the opposition of labor unions.

On a much lighter note, Wal-Mart has been the only store in which an employee has seemingly threatened me. As silly as this is in comparison, it did contribute to my decision to boycott the corporation. While I am aware that my boycotting of Wal-Mart will not hurt them in any way, it is important that consumers are aware of where they are getting their everyday products. Wal-Mart has always had issues involving their employees. The founder, Sam Walton, once said, "I pay low wages. I can take advantage of that. We're going to be successful, but the basis is a very low-wage, low-benefit model of employment".

In March of 2017, a woman found a hand-written note in her purse that she purchased from Wal-Mart. The note was written in Mandarin Chinese, and read (in part): "Inmates in China's Yingshan Prison work 14 hours a day and are not allowed to rest at noon. We have to work overtime until midnight. People are beaten for not finishing their work." This is not an isolated incident, and similar stories can be found going back decades. Wal-Mart was one of the corporations housing factory workers in the 2012 Bangladesh clothing factory that caught fire, causing the death of 112 workers. Exit doors were locked, fire extinguishers did not work, and even after the alarms started, employees were told not to evacuate. In fact, Wal-Mart had a direct role in preventing corporations from paying more to improve safety measures in the factory. The company also has a history of anti-union policies. They hide behind language such as "pro-associate" which states that employees simply need to go up the corporate ladder with any issues they may face.

Management has been assigned to report on early conversations about unionizing, and entire stores have closed to avoid union uprisings. One day, after I had decided to stop purchasing things from Wal-Mart, I had to get markers for class. Wal-Mart was the only store nearby, so I decided that one purchase would be inconsequential enough. I went to the self-checkout area to purchase these markers, and was told by the screen to wait for a representative. I was confused, but waited nonetheless. About ten minutes later, an employee approached me and simply said "I.D." I hadn't brought my wallet in, only five dollars in cash, and asked why identification was needed for a pack of Crayola markers. She simply responded by saying, "Because I said so." Still being confused, I realized that it could be the same policy as Sharpies

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or Expo markers. These products had strong fumes, and perhaps they were wanting to ensure that I was not going to sniff them. I apologized, but explained to her that I was a twenty-year-old that was worried about being late to class. The employee then told me that I could leave the building now or she would take me out herself. It was a very bizarre experience, and I have not been back to a Wal-Mart since. This experience, along with the ethical concerns, are enough for me to drive the extra mile to another store.

While I am aware that many other stores share the same issues, Wal-Mart has been allowed to do so and reap the highest benefit. I boycott a number of large businesses that have records of mistreating employees, but Wal-Mart was the first corporation to open my eyes to such injustices. This is why I urge people to utilize local business for goods when possible. Buying clothing from thrift stores, or getting produce from local sources will ensure that one's lifestyle hurts the fewest people.

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