

REMARKS FOR FACULTY SENATE, OCTOBER 21, 2019: GENDER PAY GAP

THALIA D. JEFFRES

I read a very interesting article not long ago. ["Balancing Act," The Economist, September 7, 2019.] The subject of this article is the gender pay gap.

A study by the National Bureau of Economic Research finds that the gender wage gap is almost twice what it would be in the absence of the large premium paid for working longer and longer hours, and that "labour markets disproportionately reward those willing and able to work all hours - who are mostly men."

Their conclusion is that "women [are] swimming upstream in terms of achieving wage parity," and they even predict that the wage gap is likely to grow.

One of my friends, who, like me, is swimming upstream, told me this about her own

Another study cited in this article said that in a typical household of a heterosexual couple, that once the man was working sixty or more hours a week, it became three times more likely that his wife wasn't working at all.

That number leaped off the page at me, because what I'm hearing around here is that as teaching and service requirements balloon, many faculty members are compensating by working sixty or seventy hours a week. Those of us who don't have that "support person in the background" have difficulty expanding beyond a certain point, and it's cutting deeply into our time for research.

Nor does looking at the hours spent on research tell the whole story. It's like what I tell my students. I tell them, look, if you're embroidering a tablecloth and you put in fifty percent of the time and effort, you're going to get fifty percent of the result. If you're doing a creative activity, if you're dealing with conceptually deep material, and you put in fifty percent of the time, you're going to get ten percent of the result out.

If what it takes to make partner at a certain law firm is working eighty hours a week, is that law firm practicing overt discrimination?

Probably not. It's a free country. Any woman is free to go out and look for that marvel who is willing to subordinate his career to hers, maybe even abandon his career entirely. Perhaps the future father of her children can be found standing around a trash can somewhere.

But, maybe I'm wrong. In guessing that this isn't discrimination, I'm not as confident about that as I was a year ago. A year ago, when I walked into the classroom and wrote and drew on the chalkboard in front of a room of normally-sighted students, I had no idea I was discriminating against the blind.

Even so, even if it's not discrimination, at least the aspiring law partner would probably spend those eighty hours on that activity entirely.

