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CSW Update Newsletter

Title

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Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/90f9w75c>

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Publication Date

2008-12-17



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Recently I was talking to a friend (I'll call her Gail), an academic who teaches in a university on the East Coast. She recounted a story that was all too familiar. A couple of months ago, her department chair had approached her about being on a hiring committee for a gender and sexuality search. Even though Gail had already done extensive service in her department and had a medical condition whose debilitating effects excused her officially from further academic service, her chair was insistent. This position was incredibly important. Everyone else who might legitimately serve was on leave, serving on another committee, or otherwise unavailable. Those one or two people who could serve would surely sabotage the mission and intent of the search. Her chair begged her, and Gail very reluctantly agreed to serve. Now, she is physically suffering as a consequence.

Though Gail's particular version of this story was extreme, in its general outlines, it is a very familiar story. I have certainly experienced such situations and have also heard similar versions of this story from many female and minority colleagues. In addition to the regular service demands that we all face, certain faculty are vulnerable to requests for extensive service based on community and ethical "imperatives" that sometimes, as in Gail's case, greatly exceed the boundaries of self-interest. When I (and several other people) told Gail she needed to resign this committee immediately, she spent a considerable amount of time dwelling on the problems such a decision would raise for the committee. Though she ultimately saw the wisdom in the advice she was universally receiving, Gail felt guilty withdrawing from a situation that was causing her debilitating pain. In each instance, she was seeing the situation not from

her own perspective, but from that of the committee and its aims. Though I do not think there are any hard and fast rules about how to decide between our own self interests and the interests of causes and structures we believe in and need to support, I do think some people, maybe women especially, are more inclined to read and make ethical decisions about their responsibilities from a position that does not take their own interests sufficiently into account. To make effective judgments about our commitments, we have to keep ourselves in the picture. We do not always have to begin and end at that point, but our own interests do need to be part of the equation. If saying "yes" means physical pain, detrimental consequences to our own work, serious incursions on home or personal life, sometimes we just have to say no.

— **Kathleen McHugh**