

Harvard Women's Weekend  
November 5, 2016

Remarks from Dr. Francesca Dominci:

Good evening. I am flattered to have the opportunity to address such a powerful group of accomplished women.

I was a bit anxious when asked to speak to this audience about issues of work family balance, women in leadership, and equal opportunity so I decided to bring in a REAL PANEL OF EXPERTS. I interviewed four thirteen-year-old girls and asked about their experiences in school and in sports and the challenges they face as girls. The final question I asked was, "If you had the opportunity to speak to an audience of 400 very powerful, Harvard educated women and could ask them anything you wanted to help girls succeed, what would you ask them to do? Their responses were very powerful.

[Video Presentation]

I now have a very hard act to follow!

In 2009, I joined Harvard faculty to empower young women and support their dreams, to boost their level of confidence and always demand respect, to equip them with the skills necessary to bounce back from rejection, to practice resiliency and accept that perfection is not always attainable nor recommended, and to always feel comfortable reporting inappropriate behavior. I have worked to advocate for institutional changes. And at the same time, I have tried to promote – on a daily base – cultural change, which starts with correcting subtle inequities among students.

I am currently the Chair of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Committee on the Advancement of Women Faculty (CAWF). The mission of this committee is to collect data and analyze the promotion rates and salaries of faculty at the School, support the open recognition of women researchers, promote a healthy work/life balance, and create a strategic plan for the continued advancement of female faculty. Alongside President Faust, we strongly advocated that the Harvard Chan School select a Dean who does not "manage" but who "empowers" and supports female students, post-docs, and faculty at all levels. We were successful and I'm happy to report that Dean Michelle A. Williams was selected as the School's new Dean starting last July!

I also led a specific project to promote Women in Leadership in the academic setting. As part of this project, I conducted interviews of several women in leadership positions (professors, chairs of the departments, deans and provosts). Some common themes that emerged were: Paths to leadership were still slow or blocked for women; Leadership positions, as currently defined, are not attractive to women; Women who provide leadership are not recognized, or are undervalued, under-resourced, and often marginalized and; women are often excluded from the informal networks of intellectual leadership.

The young girls that I interviewed talked about the societal image projected on girls and how the media is always sending the wrong message. "You have to look like them (the top models) instead of looking like YOU. You have to be perfect," said one of the young girls I interviewed.

They also spoke of the inequities they felt playing sports and performing at school, especially in subjects such as Science. One girl said, "You always to prove yourself more because you are a girl." When asked about gender equality, another

girl said, “It’s always the prince (strong and accomplished) trying to rescue the whining, crying girls. Do not underestimate girls!”

In Anne Marie Slaughter’s article, *Why Women Still Can’t Have it All*, she provides a powerful quote from a woman who left a position of power. “It’s time to stop fooling ourselves, the women who have managed to be both mothers and top professionals are superhuman, rich, or self-employed.” Conversely, in her book, *Lean In*, Sheryl Sandberg encourages women to “sit at the table”, seek challenges, take risks, and pursue their goals with gusto.

But who is right – Sheryl or Anne Marie? They are both right!

So why can’t we have it all? This is one of the most difficult challenges we face in our society – in order *to have it all* we need to make cultural changes in our society. If we don't, the costs will be enormous. It’s frustrating because I see competent women drop out all the time or not even try! The image that in order *to have it all you* have to be the super human, with a lot of resources, and incredibly high energy is still pervasive among women and that is a hard role to accept. It’s not an easy fix. Unless we entertain a serious cultural change and stop rewarding the macho culture of working 24/7, we are going to continue to face these issues.

We must hold our leaders accountable for cultural change. At any given time in a team (small or large) someone will find himself or herself in a situation where he or she needs time off (childbirth, sickness, divorce). Leadership means building a culture where teamwork is celebrated; where it is possible for someone to step down and know that they’ll be supported by the rest of the team, instead of being made to feel guilty or isolated.

We need to promote a new image of Academic Leadership. We need to acknowledge that there are different ways of making contributions and we need to create a clear structure of reward for excellence in teaching and mentoring. Our most important job as faculty is that of “educator”. It is our responsibility to prepare the next generation of leaders and this is a role that cannot and should not be taken lightly. We need to reward leaders for their accomplishments in addressing gender issues and at the same time, we need to hold our leaders accountable when they fail to provide an equitable workplace. We must re-define excellence in academia and beyond, so everyone in the workplace has an equal opportunity to succeed and thrive.

Issues of work family balance are intergenerational and dynamic. Balance in our life is always a moving target and no one can balance work and family without input from others. So, talk to your children, your partners, and your family members and make a plan. Commitments are always changing and some weeks and months are going to be busier than others so be sure to revisit and reassess your work/life balance over time.

Finally, I certainly don’t have this all figured out. In addition to always bringing my work home, I also bring my home to work, and so I would like to end by acknowledging my family at the back of the room who I know I can always count on for their support.

Thank you.