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Class of 1971 Five Year Report Alumni Comments, Part 3

University of Michigan Law School

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VIII. Woman and working in the field of law (2)

There has been some minor client resistance although it is difficult to differentiate between reticence because one is young and reticence because one is female. Problem is usually overcome in short order.

Banks remain reluctant to refer clients to me and other women in the estate planning group in my firm, thus handicapping us greatly in attracting new business, which is vital to our careers.

I have not encountered any problem that I have been able to identify as preventing me from being effective or doing a particular job as yet. However, there are constant minor discriminatory acts and comments. Sometimes these are merely annoying; other times they are demeaning, but at times they may also give me an advantage.

Initial credibility problems in dealing with clients, government employees, and the public. They frequently do not take women seriously in professional roles.

My first job was made difficult by my superiors, who exhibited great reluctance to place professional reliance on a woman. This attitude prevailed in the salary scales in the office too.

Wage differential with one employer; difficulty in obtaining assignments in certain areas of labor law, e.g., organizations.

Generally people have preconceived notions of what jobs women perform (wife, secretary, receptionist). I am often asked to perform tasks by strangers (not associates) that I consider unprofessional and a waste of my time. Overcoming stereotypes (i.e., women not wish to travel) is both time consuming and frustrating.

I have found that the greatest resistance to me as a woman attorney has been from other women in traditional roles and male employees who have plateaued at lower corporate levels.

VIII. If you are a woman and working in the field of law, have you experienced any special problems in practicing your profession because of your sex?

I have heard concern for whether I can carry a heavy briefcase, work long hours or make points forcefully in negotiations. (I believe all such concerns have now been alleviated.) In addition, I still feel somewhat of a "novelty," and clients enjoy "showing me off." Such special attention is not always unpleasant and has resulted in my being more easily recognized, But I like to think my legal abilities also play a role in this.

Crushing discrimination in Boston. Terrible discrimination in first job to the point that I found it degrading to work there, i.e., low pay; disparaging remarks; being ~~xxx~~ assigned paralegal, rather than legal work; seeing male secretary promoted to "administrative assistant for litigation" because senior partner didn't want to work with me.

It is obtaining the job that is difficult!

No. To the contrary, more doors have been open than would have been the case were I a male.

1) Limitation of opportunity to work in certain subject areas as a result of sex-biased attitudes, 2) interest and effort in developing my skills as an attorney in my early years of practice has been almost wholly self-initiated as ~~opposed~~ opposed to male peers who are encouraged to attend seminars and bar assn. functions and asked to attend meetings with clients and otherwise become involved in matters requiring substantial client contact or traveling, 3) the problem of learning to work with both subtle and blatant sex-biased comments, put-downs, etc. from male attorneys, judges, etc., 4) specious "potential conflict of interest" issue (as a result of marriage to attorney in another law firm) which has affected nature of assignments to some degree in the past and hence opportunities.

The problems are too complex for exposition in this space, which permits only rhetorical generalities. As structured, the question cannot produce only useful information.

As a private practitioner, I found that women divorce clients preferred hiring me because I'm a woman. Some male lawyers expected that I'd concede my client's position more readily than a male. Most people refer to me as a "lady lawyer", which shows I'm put in a special class of lawyers. Judges treated me with equality by and large. I noticed women clients preferred me because they felt I could better represent their intellectual position.

My firm finds it difficult to make women partners. This was demonstrated quite recently in the case of a particularly qualified colleague of mine.

No. But the strain on all members of a family in which both parents work is not to be underestimated. I feel very strongly that women law students should be exposed to these "facts of life" so that they can prepare themselves and their families for the inevitable problems that will result directly from their working.

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