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WOMEN IN LAW: EXPLORING EXPECTATIONS FOR WOMEN IN A MAN'S PROFESSION

by Taylor Carroll and Faculty Mentor Dr. Jacqueline Zalewski, West Chester University

INTRODUCTION

Women are treated differently from men in everyday life, including the workplace. This is particularly apparent in the law profession. Many of these treatment differences stem from qualities that women are stereotypically thought to possess such as being caring and supportive. In this study, I examined some of the situations that female attorneys report finding themselves in that their male counterparts have not. My interest in this study stems from my future plans of going to law school and becoming an attorney. I wanted to take a glimpse into the male dominated field that I am pursuing a career in.

METHODS

To prepare, I began researching the differences between men and women in the law profession by reading scholarly books that highlighted inequality in the workplace. I set out to see if the real world truly mirrored what I had been reading. I submitted an IRB proposal to conduct empirical research and once it was approved I contacted the alumni association law chapter and they connected me to several female attorneys in the West Chester area. I emailed them asking if they would be willing to participate in my study and once I received confirmation I scheduled and conducted phone interviews. I spoke with ten attorneys from various sectors including real estate/business, family, domestic relations, municipal/construction, and criminal defense. I asked them about their experiences and how they felt as women in a male dominated profession.

FINDINGS

- 1) At least one instance of a sexist interaction was noted from all ten of my participants from various sectors of the law profession. This ranged from encounters with judges and clients to opposing counsel. Most of the women noted that they had been treated as if they were incompetent and less capable than the males around them. Respondents used the underestimation of their competencies to strive further in jobs, yet they still considered the different expectations and treatment of female attorneys to be unfair and unsettling.
- 2) There are some differences among job placement for female attorneys, from county jobs to private law firms. The expectations for overwork for those who work at private firms is significantly higher, but these jobs come with increased financial compensation.
- 3) There is a clear culture of overworking among female attorneys. Women are expected to manage and be present for their families while also achieving and excelling in the workplace. The competing demands of both family life and work life can take a toll on female attorneys.

IMPLICATIONS

This research was incredibly beneficial for me as a prospective law student. It was not only valuable to receive insight on what the career entails, but also have the opportunity to network with numerous attorneys who were all willing to speak with me again outside of the study. I found the transparency that the attorneys responded to be incredibly refreshing and also eye opening. All ten respondents made it clear that this career requires a person to be honest with themselves about what they are willing to endure. As I embark on my own career I will be sure to make balance and flexibility a very clear professional priority.

SELECT REFERENCES

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