

VBA Women's Division Turns 30 Years Old: Women and the Law Today

Introduction

by Elana Baron, Esq.

This year the Vermont Bar Association's Women's Division celebrates its thirtieth year, and I take great pride in the fact that I hold the position of Chairwoman during this milestone. Why? Because, as it turns out, the Division and I share the same year of birth. Normally, as all my friends know, I would have hidden the fact that I will officially be entering my thirties, but where's the harm in sharing this secret amongst a few friends ... right? I divulge this secret to all of you with a purpose. Throughout my first thirty years, my status evolved and morphed not only as I wished but also as society dictated. As a little girl I was stereotyped as a "tom-boy." As a teenager I was a "martyr" and now I am a "young woman attorney." Just as today's societal view of "tom-boy" differs from that of thirty years ago, so too has the societal view of "young woman attorney" evolved, and so too has the purpose and role of the VBA's Women's Division.

The American Bar Association Commission on Women in the Profession recently published a report entitled "A Current Glance at Women in the Law 2007."¹ I was happy to read that 44.3 percent of associates in private practice are now women and that 48.1 percent of JDs awarded went to women.

Though this does show great improvement, a review of statistics regarding higher-paying jobs and higher levels of employment demonstrate that those positions continue to be dominated by men. Only 15.7 percent of Fortune 1000 General Counsel positions are held by women; only 16.6 percent of Fortune 500 General Counsel positions are held by women;

only 17.9 percent of women are partners in a private practice law firm; and in 2006 women made only 70 percent of the salary earned by their male colleagues holding comparable positions. These statistics demonstrate that though the role and purpose of the VBA Women's Division has changed, the Division is still very much needed. I know that my thirtieth year will be full of change, learning, and growth and I hope I can say the same for the Division.

The Women's Division's thirtieth birthday brings renewed energy. I look forward to us all taking part and molding the Division so that it can better suit the needs of today's "woman attorney" and continue to lead our profession towards better education into the truth that difference is not scary or bad but is simply different. We still suffer from the effects of past misunderstandings and injustices. But as a society we have come to understand that sex or gender is not something that should divide us, reserve certain jobs for only some of us, or dictate what one should be paid. With further education into how an attorney's sex and gender affects our work and social networking I am confident that we will continue to see positive changes. I am proud to be a part of it.

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¹ Available at <http://www.abanet.org/women/CurrentGlanceStatistics2007.pdf>.



"I will bring the understanding of a woman to the Court, but I doubt that alone will affect my decisions. I think the important thing about my appointment is not that I will decide cases as a woman, but that I am a woman who will get to decide cases."

~ Sandra Day O'Connor