

Sh\*t  
No One  
Tells  
~~You~~  
About  
Law  
School

GIRLS

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## A Note From the Author

**R**ecently, I saw the Barbie movie. Yeah, me and about a hundred million other people. There's a powerful monologue toward the end of the movie where Gloria, one of the main characters, talks about all the ways it is "impossible to be a woman":

You are so beautiful and so smart, and it kills me that you don't think you're good enough. Like, we have to always be extraordinary, but somehow we're always doing it wrong. You have to be thin, but not too thin. And you can never say you want to be thin. You have to say you want to be healthy, but also you have to be thin. You have to have money, but you can't ask for money because that's crass. You have to be a boss, but you can't be mean. You have to lead, but you can't squash other people's ideas. You're supposed to love being a mother but don't talk about your kids all the damn time. You have to be a career woman, but also always be looking out for other people. You have to answer for men's bad behavior, which is insane, but if you point that out, you're accused of complaining. You're supposed to stay pretty for men, but not so pretty that you tempt them too much or that you threaten other women because you're supposed to be a part of the sisterhood. But always stand out and always be grateful. But never forget that the system is rigged. So find a way to acknowledge that but also always be grateful. You have to never get old, never be rude, never show off, never be selfish, never fall down, never fail, never show fear, never get out of line. It's too hard! It's too contradictory and nobody gives you a medal or says thank you! And it turns out in fact that not only are you doing everything wrong, but also everything is your fault. I'm just so tired of watching

myself and every single other woman tie herself into knots so that people will like us. And if all of that is also true for a doll just representing women, then I don't even know.

Sadly, my first thought was, "Hey, that sounds a lot like what I wrote in my book. I wonder if Greta Gerwig read it." After I accepted the fact that it was highly unlikely that an acclaimed director would have read a book for incoming law students, my next thought was, "How do I capitalize on Barbie mania right now to promote my book?" Evil, I know. After all, I am not allowed to "ask for money," "be selfish," or "show off" (see Gloria's monologue).

All kidding aside, the monologue tapped into a universal reality—that women often feel like they can't do anything right. Women entering law school are in a particularly vulnerable position. They are entering a profession that has been dominated by men since time immemorial, and they may be unprepared for some of the challenges that lie ahead.

No one talks about these things. To my knowledge, there's not one single resource for female law students that explains some of the landmines that they will encounter going forward. Instead, these things are talked about in hushed tones, in hallways or in faculty offices. Much of the conversation takes place in the shadows. Because it's icky. It's icky to have a judge comment on your clothing. It's icky to have a professor mock your tone of voice. It's icky to have a partner at a firm you're summering at ask you for drinks. It's icky to be called "hot" by the boys in your study group. But we don't talk about icky. Icky is not actionable. Nothing can really be done about icky. And we never want to complain . . . because . . . well, see Gloria's monologue again.

I have learned all these lessons the hard way—through experience. It was both cathartic and awful to write about them in "A Chapter for the Girls." Right after I drafted the chapter, I sent it to my publisher for feedback. She called me on the phone (old people like us still talk on the phone). As we were talking about the chapter, I started to cry. *God, no.* Gloria should have added "never cry" to her monologue. Writing about all this stirred up a lot of bad memories for me and I wasn't sure I wanted to share them with the world. It made me feel very vulnerable and you're not allowed to be vulnerable (Or, are you? *So hard to keep track of the rules.*). I ultimately recalibrated the chapter a little bit and took out the worst bits. But the essence of what I experienced is there.

After much cajoling, I convinced the publisher of my book, *Sh\*t No One Tells You About Law School*, to release "A Chapter for the Girls" for free!! Ok, it

wasn't that much cajoling. It was like two emails. But still. I think the themes I touch on in the chapter are relevant, timely and need to be out there. And I sincerely wish I had something like this as a 22-year-old woman entering law school. My goal is not to necessarily impart wisdom on how to deal with the bullsh\*t you will encounter as you proceed through law school and your legal career. Instead, my goal is to let you know that you are not alone.

And if you like this chapter, then be sure to buy the book, *Sh\*t No One Tells You About Law School*. If you buy direct from the publisher, they prefer that (more money). You can find it at <https://cap-press.com/books/isbn/9781531024758/Sht-No-One-Tells-You-About-Law-School>. (But it's on Amazon too if that's easier).

Sh\*t No One Tells ~~You~~ <sup>GIRLS</sup> About Law School

## A Chapter for the Girls

*Real change, enduring change, happens one step at a time.*

RUTH BADER GINSBURG

**T**his chapter was not in the original plan, but I called an audible the month before the book was set to go to the publisher. I hope I used the term “audible” correctly and, for that reason alone, male readers will indulge me and read this chapter.<sup>1</sup>

### 1. The Face of Sexism has Changed

There has been incredible progress for women in the past 50 years. Women now comprise about half of the law student population. More and more women are partners in law firms and general counsel of large corporations. And women are quite well represented in legal academia. The overt sexism that women experienced in the past is not the norm today. And that is something worth celebrating.

That does not mean that sexism does not exist.<sup>2</sup> It just means that it takes on a more subtle form. Which is harder to deal with in many ways. One of my

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1. Yes, I get it—female students like sports too, and this is a gendered comment. Sue me. It’s called humor.

2. There are, of course, other “isms” in law school. By addressing sexism, I am not diminishing experiences of discrimination based on race, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or anything else. But I told you at the beginning of the book that my focus was going to



students puts it this way: Sexism nowadays doesn't look like "Shhh honey, the men are speaking." It's a lot quieter than that, but equally unsettling.

Let me give you an example. Early in my career, I worked in-house at a large company. I was hired after I completed my LL.M. degree, but before I had taken the bar exam. I negotiated with my company to give me from May to July off to study for the bar exam. The company originally wanted me to work part-time, but I said no. I told the company that I was happy to take the time off without pay because the important thing for me was to pass the bar exam on the first try. They eventually agreed to give me the two months off and paid me my salary during that time.

Unbeknownst to me, there were rumblings. Various support staff and paralegals didn't like that I got "time off." I don't know how it was any of their business or why they would feel like they could weigh in on this. I never talked about my arrangement with anyone. But somehow, I think they knew that I was being paid for (what they thought of as) my "time off." I took the bar exam in late July and then returned to work.

In October, I wanted to fly home to visit my family for Canadian Thanksgiving. I asked my boss if I could take a vacation day. He was very hesitant. He thought "other people" (meaning the support staff) would be upset if I had more time off. WT\*? Since when are my vacation days anyone else's business? And since when does my male boss feel like his decisions need to be guided by keeping support staff happy? I was really confused. My boss did not give me the entire story, but I was able to piece enough of it together to tell you what I just told you. My boss let me have my vacation day but told me to "keep it quiet." Seriously?

*How is sexism part of this? It just seems like you're dealing with really bizarre people.* Fair enough. I can't say for sure that sexism was part of this—and that's what makes the new sexism so pernicious.

This is what I think. The support staff was entirely female. They were about a decade or two older than me and had been working at the company for a while. I don't think they liked the idea of a 25-year-old female graduate coming into the company and being treated like a lawyer, even though she was on her way

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be only on stuff I had *direct* experience with, which is why I included the chapter on sexism. There are many great resources out there to help navigate issues related to diversity, inclusion, and belonging. In particular, I would recommend you check out Russell McClain, *The Guide to Belonging in Law School*, West Academic Publishing, 2020.

to becoming one. Lawyers were largely male, much older, and had earned their stripes. I, by contrast, did not fit their image of a “lawyer,” and so they thought I was essentially one of them. One who was getting preferential treatment. My boss handled things clumsily. He did not want the other women to cause a fuss and make his life difficult. And he did not want to deny me a vacation day for no reason. Hence the “keep it quiet” admonition.

Frankly, this was bullsh\*t. And I don’t mean that after reflection I determined this was bullsh\*t. I knew it was at the time, and I said so. Nonetheless, my boss did not do anything about it. *Were these women sexist? Was my boss sexist?* No. I don’t think so. At least not in the traditional sense. Would this have happened if I were male? No. I can almost guarantee that 100%.

## 2. Or, Maybe the Face of Sexism Hasn’t Changed

As I was preparing to write this chapter, I reached out to some female students to ask them whether they experienced what they would classify as “sexism” in law school. Several of them said no, which is awesome. But a number of them said yes. Here are some things they relayed to me.

Tamara, a 3L, told me that she was advised not to wear a skirt or makeup in court if she wanted to be taken seriously. She also said that judges often look “past her” to the males in the room, assuming that they are lawyers (they are not).

Mackenzie, a 2L student, recounted something that happened in her 1L year. She was doing her final oral argument for LRW. A male professor was acting as a judge. During his feedback, he told her that “a jury would not like a woman making such a forceful argument against another woman,” and “you were a bit too assertive for a woman.” Mackenzie recounts being in shock after these comments. Mackenzie met with her LRW professor privately to ask if she had done something wrong. The professor told her that the comments were completely unjustified and inappropriate. To Mackenzie’s knowledge, the male professor was never told that his comments were out of bounds.

Laura worked on a research project with one of her professors. She had been selected for this project because she was one of the top students in the class. However, in an effort to undermine Laura’s achievement, students spread rumors about her, intimating that she was “involved” with the professor, who is happily married and 30 years her senior.

Emily developed a friend group in her 1L year that was predominantly male. In part, this was by design—the females seemed really intimidating and like “mean girls.” Emily would sit with the males in class. In her 2L year, she became more friendly with some of the girls in the class. They let her in on a little secret: they had initially thought she was a “whore” because she sat with the boys instead of the girls.<sup>3</sup>

Meaghan experienced what she calls “sneaky” sexism.<sup>4</sup> It’s not quite something she could put her finger on, but it’s something that she believed was related to gender. She gives this example. A friend of hers, Zoey, went to get help from a male professor. This male professor kept telling Zoey how much she looked like his wife. *Weird*. But let’s leave that aside. The male professor also commented to Zoey that Meaghan was “uppity.” *Weird. And unprofessional. And sexist?* Not surprisingly, the comment got back to Meaghan. Meaghan knew what the word meant but googled it anyway in case she was wrong and there was some other, less offensive, meaning that she didn’t know about. There wasn’t. The term is often used in relation to women. In fact, when I googled it just now, the way it was used in a sentence was “my sister-in-law is uppity.” Interesting.<sup>5</sup> Was this professor just inappropriate and unprofessional? Or was this professor sexist? Don’t know. Hence, sneaky sexism.

Erika describes how there was an interesting distinction she perceived between male and female “participators.” You know, the students who put up their hands all the time in class. Both were judged by their peers but based on different criteria. She noticed that when someone commented about males, it was about *what they said*. When they commented about females, it was about *how they said it*. She remembers comments that were made about a friend of hers, a frequent contributor to class discussions: “Oh, is she the really shrill

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3. You will see in a minute that “whore” seems to be a common refrain with some women.

4. A common theme from almost all the female students who provided me with feedback was that the sexism they encountered flew under the radar. Rose described it this way: “This form of sexism is difficult to confront because it’s hard to call out something that’s in the background. It’s more of a low buzz as opposed to a bee flying in your face.”

5. Apparently, and I did not know this, uppity also has a racist connotation. <https://www.dictionary.com/browse/uppity> (“*Uppity* means ‘haughty’ and ‘snobbish’—an adjective for someone who *puts on airs*, someone who is self-important. But, this descriptor has a very racist past, used particularly to disparage Black people as ‘not remembering their place as inferior.’”).

one?” or, “Yeah, but does she have to be so shrill?” Sadly, much like uppity, shrill is a term that is often used to describe women. Along with bossy. And a bunch of other words like frumpy, high-maintenance, diva, and ditz.<sup>6</sup>

Elizabeth relays that one male professor would be patronizing toward women in her class. When a woman would speak and use the word “like,” for instance, he would mock them in his response back to them. For example, the female might say, “So, like, the marital assets would be divided 50%-50%.” And he might say, “So, like, are you sure about that?” Maybe he was trying to be funny. Maybe he was trying to rid students of bad habits (filler words). But it’s hard not to believe there was some weird gender stuff going on there.

Hearing all these stories made me realize that maybe the face of sexism hasn’t changed all that much.

### 3. You Will Be Judged by the Clothes You Wear

In the “Getting a Job” chapter, I told you the story about my former student who got in trouble for wearing a sleeveless blouse to work. What I did not tell you is that the people who complained about her sleeveless blouse were the firm’s female paralegals. Are you seeing a theme? Sadly, much of the sexism that women will experience is from *other women*.

Early on in my academic career, I would get comments on my clothing in student evaluations. In one of my first sets of evaluations, I had students say that the slit in my “plum skirt” was too high and that some clothing choices were “inappropriate and offensive.” While I can’t know for sure, I would bet money these comments came from female students. A male student would never use the word “plum.” Incidentally, my plum skirt is part of a suit that I wore on my interview to the Supreme Court of Canada and to my law school graduation ceremony. It is a very conservative suit, but apparently, the slit was just too high for one girl’s taste. I can assure you that my clothing could in no way be characterized as offensive—unless one thinks that Banana Republic and Ann Taylor are offensive.

It was bad enough I had to read these comments. They were petty and should not have seen the light of day. But what was worse was that all the evaluations, including the ones with comments about my clothing, went to the Dean. In my end-of-semester review, the Dean mentioned the comments

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6. See <https://togetherband.org/blogs/news/words-that-describe-women>.

about my clothing. Not in a “this is a problem” sort of way. But more in a “there’s some silly chatter” sort of way. Nonetheless, it was embarrassing to have the Dean see these students comments, which were not true and designed to take me down a peg.

The subsequent semester, a student in my class came to see me privately. He told me that he had been at a bar the prior weekend and that there were some girls in my class trash-talking me.<sup>7</sup> One of them said, “She is such a whore!” The student thought I should know that there was this anti-me sentiment among a cohort of the female students. It was distressing to hear. *A whore? Really? Where in the world does that come from? Is this a new expression the kids are using?* I tried to move past the comment, but it was hard knowing that these things were being said about me by students in my class.

I met with the Dean again after the Spring evaluations. At this point, I had some context for the weird clothing references. I conveyed to him the story about the “whore” comment to get him to see how the original evaluations may have been part of some broader effort to undermine my authority or reputation. The Dean did not say much. Since the current evaluations did not have any references to clothing, the Dean concluded that we seemed to have “moved past that.”

For three years, every time I met with the Dean, he brought up the initial comments about my clothing and how I had “moved past that.” I genuinely believe he meant for this to be supportive. But I felt like the clothing comment imprinted itself in his brain as something legitimate that I had “overcome.” This could not be further from the truth. I did not overcome anything. The statements were false from the beginning.

Because of my early experience with these comments, I became hyper-aware of how I dressed. Not too short. Not too tight. Not too low cut. Not to gape-y.<sup>8</sup> Not too high a slit.<sup>9</sup> Not too light colored.<sup>10</sup> Not too scoop neck.<sup>11</sup> How many male professors have this experience? None. I’ve seen male professors go to class in baggy jeans, in sweaters with holes in them, in skinny dress pants, in

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7. Recall, law school = sieve.

8. Check blouse buttons and use clothing tape.

9. Learned my lesson on that one.

10. Or it could be somewhat transparent in some lights.

11. Or you might see a bit of a bra strap with the wrong move.

LL Bean puffy vests, in whatever they want. I suspect there's not a whole lot of "he's a whore" comments in those student evaluations.

What's the takeaway for you? Good question. I want to say: *Dress however the f\*\*k you want*. But sadly, I think I need to say: *Be mindful of how you dress*.

#### 4. There Is a Double Standard

Above, I talked about being judged based on the clothes you wear. I hope you realize that the passage was not about clothing choices *per se*. Clothing is a metaphor for all the ways that women must tread lightly. Not only in what they wear, but in what they say, and how they say it.

Quick example. I sent out an email to my class last year dealing with house-keeping issues. One student apparently did not like the "tone" of one sentence in the email, and he let his views be known to the administration. By contrast, a male professor around this time apparently "yelled" at his students when the class was not prepared.<sup>12</sup> Any fallout? No. The male professor could yell with impunity. I, by contrast, needed to be informed of my tone issues.

Another male professor sometimes deliberately schedules meetings so that students need to come in over the holiday weekend because "that's what lawyers do." This professor's students show up and respect him all the more for it. If I ever did that, I honestly believe that there would be a mass revolt.

I shared with you my experience of the double standard that exists in academia. I've told you that students hold me to a different standard than they do their male professors. They judge me on whether I am kind, caring, and compassionate. If I am not sufficiently kind, caring, and compassionate, you can sure bet I'll hear about it. *For f\*\*king ever*.

The *Harvard Business Review* did a study on how gendered language is employed in leader evaluations. In complete "non-shocker" news, here's what it found:

The most commonly used positive term to describe men was analytical, while for women it was compassionate. At the other extreme, the most commonly used negative term to describe men was arrogant. For women, it was inept. We found statistically significant gender differences in how often these terms (and

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12. I'm hearing this second-hand, so I don't know whether "yelled" is an accurate term. Students *always* exaggerate.

others) were used (relative to the other positive or negative terms available for selection) when describing men and women—even though men’s and women’s performances were the same by more objective measures.<sup>13</sup>

So, you’re telling me that the highest compliment for a man is “analytical,” and the highest compliment for a woman is “compassionate”? Tell me something I didn’t know.

It won’t surprise you one bit to know that there are double standards when it comes to female lawyers. A male lawyer who is aggressive is called a “shark” (in a good way). A female lawyer who exhibits the same attributes is called a b\*tch. But, wait, there’s more! If a female is too quiet and meek, then she does not have “what it takes” to be successful.

As a female lawyer, you may find that you twist yourself into knots trying to be different things to different people. You may feel like you need to be kind and reassuring to the client; assertive, but not overly domineering, in court; and the right level of confident in meetings. I can tell you it is exhausting. While I don’t currently practice law, I feel like I walk a fine line all day every day. Be nice, but not too nice. Be assertive, but not too assertive. Watch your tone. Try not to come across as intimidating or condescending.

You will see that I have the following advice for you later in the book: “Be Who You Are.” I mean that. I do. But sometimes you should know that there are consequences associated with being who you are.

## 5. The Subtle Ways That Sexism Presents Itself

At the beginning of this chapter, I said that the face of sexism has changed. Today’s sexism is usually quite subtle and often manifests in the form of things like talking down, patronizing, gaslighting, and mansplaining. All these things are difficult to pin down and to call anyone on, so you often end up just letting it go. But you shouldn’t. The more you let this stuff go, the more it will happen.

Let me give you some examples of what I mean by *subtle sexism* (sounds like a good book title, right?).

My male boss once sent me an email asking me to “think about ways” I might have come up short in my interactions with a co-worker. *What?* Let’s

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13. <https://hbr.org/2018/05/the-different-words-we-use-to-describe-male-and-female-leaders>.

leave aside that he had made a completely incorrect assumption about what I did or didn't do. But "think about" is something a parent would say to a child. You're not my dad. Don't treat me like a ten-year-old.<sup>14</sup>

Another example. An announcement was made that I had been appointed as a Staff Editor of the *American Business Law Journal*. A co-worker wrote to me and proclaimed that this would be "such a valuable opportunity" for me. You might be thinking, *well, that's a nice thing to say*. It's not. When you're mid-career and are told this by a male who is about ten years your senior, it's patronizing. Like pat on the head patronizing.

A female co-worker of mine once got a message from a male co-worker telling her she got "carried away" in her comments at a meeting and that she was "angry" and "emotional." Way to play into the crazy, emotional woman narrative.

Then there's the male "hero" colleague. I brought up an issue at a faculty meeting about some male students in the class being belligerent. I explained that I did not think this was a matter of sexism but rather of entitlement and wanted to have a discussion surrounding that. One of my male colleagues said, "Send them my way. I'll have a word with them." Thank you. My knight in shining armor.

The worst, though, is the performative male colleague. The colleague who claims to be a champion of women but is *so* not. I received an email from one of these men about a year ago with a subject line indicating that he "esteem[ed]" me as a colleague. Is that even a correct use of "esteem"? He then proceeded to thank me for the wonderful work that I do as a scholar, teacher and member of the law school community. He noted that nobody worked harder for our students. The catch: He addressed the email to "Tina," not "Tanya." Yup, you esteem me alright.

The examples I've just given you have been largely from my time in academia. But don't assume practice is any different—it is probably worse. When I was a very junior lawyer, I was involved in some high-stakes settlement negotiations. I traveled to Florida with a senior male lawyer to meet with a prominent plaintiff's attorney (someone you'd probably recognize from television). I was responsible for laying out our legal position over a steak dinner. I was obviously nervous, and I guess I was speaking quickly. The senior lawyer interrupted me

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14. This same gentleman suggested that I work on "self-improvement" and that he hoped I "ha[d] not given up on trying to improve as [I] get older." *Seriously, who says this?*



and said, “Take a breath, slow down and start again.” I was mortified. *I mean, did you really have to treat me like a child in front of this other lawyer?* I’m sure he meant well, but I can remember how much I wanted to sink into the ground to this very day. Would he have interrupted a junior male lawyer and told him to slow down and start again? Don’t know for sure, but don’t think so.

## 6. Be Careful Leaning In

Leaning in was terrible f\*\*king advice—at least in my case. Leaning in is a concept popularized by Sheryl Sandberg, the former CEO of Yahoo. The idea is that females should advocate for themselves and be assertive in demanding what they deserve. For instance, if you are asking for a pay raise, gather all the relevant information and approach the matter with confidence and from a position of power.

Problem is people don’t like women like that. We just established this above. Leaning in is not very *feminine*. And, as we know, people do not respond well to women who deviate from their prescribed gender roles.

I used the lean-in approach to ask for a raise once. I spent months compiling all the relevant information. I worked with numbers (scary!) and I sliced the information every which way. I tried to show on paper how valuable I was. This is all classic lean-in stuff. You know what? My boss told me that I should bring more “humility” to the conversation and that I was engaging in unrestrained advocacy. *But that’s what I thought I was supposed to do!* I did not get the raise I asked for. And the relationship with this boss became incredibly strained. He repeated to me on multiple occasions that I was not sufficiently humble. I don’t know if it’s just me, but that feels patently gendered, doesn’t it?

Is there a lesson in here? Maybe. But I’m not sure what it is. Just be forewarned that leaning in may not always be the best approach. Leaning in may cause your boss to lean out.

## 7. Do Not Shoulder the Burden of Administrative Work

In the academic realm, there is a fair amount of administrative work. This is work like drafting reports and internal documents, organizing speakers, and serving on committees. The work is not usually very hard. But it is tedious and flies below the radar. No one calls you up to congratulate you on coming up with a new draft of the Honor Code. A disproportionate share of adminis-

trative work falls to women. It has been documented time and again, and I've seen it firsthand. I don't know whether this is true in the law firm setting—but I suspect that it is. Whether it's the perception that women are “better” at these things, or the view that men's time is more valuable, it's a real problem.

Last summer, I was asked to share my views on a new amendment to the Honor Code. I was not on the Committee that was considering the change, but I was one of the two co-proponents of the amendment. The Committee was composed of three men. When the time came to discuss who would work on re-drafting the amendment, one of the men suggested that I do it.<sup>15</sup> He said he was “too busy” writing law review articles and just didn't have the time. *Are you kidding me? You're too busy, and what, I'm not? And let's not forget, I'm not even \*on\* the Committee.* Some version of this conversation has played out in every law school in the country. And, like I said, I suspect that there is a lot of this in the legal profession generally.

What do you do if this happens to you? Don't stand for it. I didn't. And I won't. If it's clear that I am being tasked with a disproportionate share of administrative work or if I am being asked to do work so that a male can have “more time” for his research, I will politely decline. But I'm tenured. This is way harder for a newly minted attorney to do. I get it. However, it doesn't change my advice.

## 8. Imposter Syndrome Is Connected to Gender Dynamics

Several of the female students I reached out to expressed that they had not experienced sexism *per se*, but that their Imposter Syndrome was linked, in part, to gender dynamics.

Claire is a superstar 2L student. She relays that gender dynamics in law school “can sometimes lead you to believe that you're not as qualified or competent as your male classmates.” She explains that “the combination of Imposter Syndrome and being surrounded by outspoken men can cause you to not even express an interest in opportunities you may be qualified for.” She has the following advice for female law students: “Your male classmates' competence will be assumed. Yours will have to be earned. This is the ultimate frustration and the source of a lot of Imposter Syndrome, so just stick to the old saying—you have to be twice as good.”

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15. In case you're wondering, it was the “Tina” colleague who really “esteems” me.

Tasha, a recent graduate, also felt like her gender played a role in her Imposter Syndrome. In terms of advice for future law students, she says this:

Do I have good advice for dealing with this? I don't know. I let one man's comment bother me for a solid week. But, my advice is to remind all the future female law students and attorneys that you belong. The little digs more often than not are jealousy or you threaten them. Law school brings out a lot of insecurity, and sometimes it causes people to go on the offensive. Don't be afraid to take up space. Don't be afraid to ask for the same opportunities being afforded to other male students.

Adriana is a little further along in her career. After graduating near the top of her class, she landed an amazing job at a top law firm (so proud!). Here is what she had to say:

Most of the "secret" to success in law school and practice seems to be to act with confidence. You will notice that male students, especially white male students, will speak and act with a confidence that might not even be backed up with the right answer. This confidence continues into practice. I cannot even count the number of times I have been in meetings, in court, and in court conferences where I have found myself second guessing my facts and argument because of what opposing counsel is representing to the court. Nearly every time, my understanding was accurate and opposing counsel was wrong (I do not know whether these attorneys were misrepresenting facts intentionally or because they were not well-prepared).

Learning to sound and act confident in every situation will get you very far in school and in practice, especially as a female. The male students and attorneys are already doing that. If you couple fake confidence with actual facts and law to back it up, you will already be far ahead of the male students who are just acting confident but are likely not as prepared as they sound.

Now, I don't want this section to come across as male-bashing. It's not intended to be. What these women have experienced is the same thing I've seen for the entirety of my legal career. Men *tend to be* more outspoken than women. They *tend to* come across as more confident and secure in themselves. They *tend to* "take up space," as Tasha says. And this *tends to* have spillover effects on women.

When I was a law student, the assertive male students intimidated me the most. They were the polar opposite of me, and it made me feel like I did not belong in law school or the legal profession. As a young lawyer, I felt the same way (remember my boss who told me I was reactive and not proactive?). Early in my academic career, the feeling continued. It even continues to this day.

Sometimes knowing that “it’s not just you” is helpful. You may not change what you do. You may not try to “act and sound confident” as Adriana suggests. You may not bother trying to “take up space,” per Tasha’s advice. But having a framework for understanding what you may be feeling and experiencing is valuable in and of itself.

## 9. You May Get Comments About Your Appearance

I naively thought that law was a *professional* field, and therefore, people would be professional. I was wrong. At several points in my career, comments have been made about my appearance either to my face or in a forum where the comments made their way back to me. It’s weird and uncomfortable and undercuts what you feel are your legitimate accomplishments.

Let me give you a few examples. I interviewed at a prominent Toronto firm during my first year of law school. I thought the interview went well. I felt like I did a good job and I enjoyed meeting the lawyers there. Then, a few days later, I heard from a friend of mine who was a paralegal at the firm that lawyers were talking about the “hot” girl who interviewed with them. She figured out it was me they were talking about and told me about it. She thought this information might be relevant to my decision on where to summer. It was. I opted to go to a different firm.

After my third year of law school, I summered at a top New York firm. I had been given an assignment by a senior associate, which I completed (and did a good job on). Several weeks later, he called and asked me to do another assignment, which I did. I brought the assignment up to his office and he had no idea who I was. He put out his hand and introduced himself. I was confused. *But, um, I did that assignment for you a couple of weeks ago. And you asked me to do this assignment.* I explained all that to him and some revelation suddenly dawned on him. He said, “But you were wearing glasses last time.” *Okay, yeah, and . . .* He proceeded to say, “Well you can’t expect me to recognize you when you no longer look like the girl next door.” What the eff?! You remember me

not based on my work product (or my name, for that matter) but based on whether I'm wearing girl-next-door glasses?

The glasses thing seems to throw a lot of men for a loop. It was my second or third year teaching. A professor thought that it would be a funny "class Jeopardy" question to ask which male and female professor was the hottest. Yes, he thought this was a good question to ask to a class of 80 1L students. A female student told me about this, thinking I would want to know (I apparently was the professor he had selected for the "female" category). I raised the issue with the administration, who in turn, arranged for me to talk to the professor. I explained to the professor that I was not angry or offended. I just had a hard enough time establishing my authority in the classroom, and stuff like this didn't help. His response was something to the effect of, "But you wear glasses. So, of course, students think you're a serious teacher." *F\*\*k off with the glasses thing.*

Then there was the clueless colleague who once said to me, "You're not as dumb as you look." *Just wow.* I can't remember if I just froze or if I said something. But he clearly realized that what he said was inappropriate and offensive. He tried to walk it back. It got worse. He said, "It's not that you look dumb, but sometimes you act dumb." *Just stop.* This happened at a job where this man acted like he ruled the roost and where I already felt like an imposter. While the latter is clearly not on him, this comment has stuck with me for over a decade. *Is this what people think of me?*

I don't think any of these things were particularly ill-intentioned, even the latter comment. And I debated whether to even talk about this stuff in the book. *Cause, like, woe is me. People said you were pretty. Boo f\*\*king hoo.* But ultimately, I decided to share some of these experiences because I don't think they are outliers. I think some of these sorts of things will happen to you (I mean, I hope not—but I'm realistic). And as a 24- or 25-year-old woman, it's really hard to know how to deal with comments like this. It's awkward and embarrassing.

But it's more than that. It makes you question what people see when they see you—a lawyer or a potential date. It takes its toll on your sense of professional identity and exacerbates whatever preexisting insecurities you may have already been carrying around. I wish I had some good advice here, but I don't know that I do. I guess all I would say is if stuff like this happens to you, try your best not to let it affect your sense of self-worth. Chalk it up as a one-off and move on. People are stupid and say stupid things. You can't control stupid.

## 10. When the Professional Turns Unprofessional

It is a hard truth that women sometimes face unwanted personal advances in the work setting. Sometimes this is just an awkward situation that ends up resolving itself with some time and distance. And sometimes a professional relationship is severed because of an unrequited overture. I feel like I'm writing for an 18th-century audience: "advance," "unrequited," and "overture." Okay, let me try to say this in language you'll understand. You may get hit on at work and it may f\*\*k up some of your professional relationships.

I would not say that this happens a lot. But it happens. The first time I experienced something like this was early in my career. I was contacted by a partner I had met at a law firm dinner for Supreme Court clerks. He was the head of a practice group and well-known in his field. He told me he had an interesting project he was hoping to talk to me about. We met up for dinner to discuss. He told me that he was planning on writing a new casebook and was looking for a co-author. He asked if I would be interested. *Would I be interested?! Of course, I would!* I had no academic connections to speak of and thought this could be a way to get my foot in the door. I was on cloud nine for the rest of the dinner.

By dessert, however, I clued into something: this man wasn't just interested in me professionally. The realization was almost slow-motion. My excitement over the book slowly drained away. I extricated myself from the situation, which was not easy to do. And we never spoke again.

On some level, it was no big deal. It's not like I had actually started work on the book. He had just made me the offer a couple of hours earlier. But, nonetheless, it felt like something had been taken away. Or, more accurately, something had been given, but for the wrong reasons. I felt a sense of loss that stayed with me for a while. As someone who did not have any law connections, this felt like a huge blow to my future career. Fortunately, it wasn't. But I never fully recovered from feeling like I had earned something based on merit, only to realize I hadn't. Or—maybe I had—it's just that there were strings attached.

\* \* \*

I told you that this chapter was a last-minute addition. Why did I originally decide to jettison it? And then decide to put it in? Other than because I'm an "indecisive woman."

I originally decided not to include this chapter because there are a lot of less-than-happy memories in here for me. I have presented you with a small snapshot of some of the ways that I have experienced gender dynamics in the workforce. But these stories are abridged, somewhat sanitized, and devoid of context. In other words, the reality is worse than what I've described. I did not particularly want to take a trip down (bad) memory lane. And I did not want this chapter to be about all the ways that I've been aggrieved (*Poor girl—people hit on you!*). Ergo, I made the decision to cut it.

But I've been experiencing more than my fair share of drama at work, and much of it involves male offenders. It's not all sexism stuff, but there is *often* a gendered undertone there. It's made these issues more prominent and acute in my mind lately.

Also, I recently received this email from one of my 2L students that stuck with me:

Also, this is definitely pushing the professionalism line, but I hope it brightens your day to know that many of us women see you as a hero because you seem to be thriving in a male dominated world, and you are always dressed like a boss.

The email was sweet and sincere and made me smile. But I felt like female law students should know that appearances *can be deceiving*. I am doing my best to “thrive” in a male-dominated world. But it is not always easy, and I don't always thrive. I do not want you, my female readers, to be left with the impression that I am kicking a\*\* in a male-dominated world. I'm just doing the best I can.

But I do agree with the student on one count: I am always dressed like a boss.

# Sh\*t No One Tells You About Law School

**Irreverent. Fun. Honest.** Words never before used to describe a book intended for law students. Until now. *Sh\*t No One Tells You About Law School* offers law students a compilation of advice culled from the author's fifteen years of teaching experience. Think Jessica Pearson meets Carrie Bradshaw—shoe closet included! This book is a tell-it-like-it-is account of how students can successfully navigate the law school experience (minus the boring stuff). Written for today's law student, this book goes far beyond the run of the mill “here's how you case brief” and “read cases carefully” advice. Expect to be both motivated and entertained by the author's practical, hands on guidance.



**Professor Tanya Monestier** was a first-generation college and law student. She graduated #1 in her class from Osgoode Hall, one of Canada's top law schools. You'll hear her brag *a lot* about that in the book. Then she got the Holy Grail job: a clerkship at the Supreme Court of Canada. She subsequently pursued an LL.M. from Cambridge University, but not before turning down Harvard's offer of admission.

After completing her education, Tanya worked in-house at a pharmaceutical company we'd prefer not to name. She stayed there for just enough time to say that she “practiced law” but not long enough to have the experience sully her chances at an academic career.

Tanya is currently a tenured professor at the University at Buffalo School of Law, where she teaches Contracts, Sales, and Conflict of Laws.

