Research Proposal

Research Question: As a an attorney, how does one negotiate a family life and work in law?

Introduction: I chose this topic because as a Law and Society major I am considering going into a profession that involves law. In general, balancing a work and family is difficult, but having a father who is an attorney, I know being a lawyer could be even more demanding than a normal job. Often times the work is not left at work but must be taken home and can cut into family time. Being in a demanding career is difficult. Being a woman who wants to raise a family in a demanding male dominated career is even more difficult. Because I am interested in going into law and also raising a family, I want to research from a woman attorney’s point of view how to negotiate a family life and work in law.

From this I am hoping to learn about what it is like specifically for women trying to make it in law. I want to know what sorts of things that she may have to go through that male lawyers may not have to deal with. For example, how maternity leave works and how much time is she allowed to take off? Or if law firms are bias against women if they know that they want to have kids. Do some women decide to quit after having kids? For the women that do have kids I want to know if being a mother in anyway affects the way she works. I also want to know whether she has to take a lot of work home and go on business trips and how this affects the family. Another question I have is whether some women regret going into law because it is so demanding and can take away from their family life. Are there things that these women do to make sure they are doing what they need for their family and their job? I also want to know if women who do not have families are seen to have an advantage, especially in promotion.

Annotated Bibliography:

This article discusses the issue of the increase in women in law schools, but still low numbers of women as partners in law firms. Asner goes through possible reasons why women are not as prevalent in the law as men. A big reason she says is that women often times want to have families and it is difficult to balance both out because work in law is so demanding. Another reason is that women downplay their abilities and accomplishments more than men do. Because of this, women attorneys are less likely to make partner.

Noonan, Corcoran and Courant research reasons why despite the high numbers of women law schools there are low numbers of women partners. Women and men graduate and enter law firms at roughly the same rates as men do but then women increasing fall behind. The article looks into reasons why. One of the reason is because women face “multiple glass ceilings” that men do not have to face. A large problem is that women do not remain in a firm long enough to become partners. A primary factor is cutting back work to balance the demands of motherhood with the demands of practicing law. They conduct a study where they sample University of Michigan Law School graduates where they look at income, promotion, grades, and spouses to determine why and who was more likely to make partner.


The article discusses the perfect woman who is able to balance a family and job and do it well. It goes in to talking about how most mother-attorneys try to be Superwoman but that today it is nearly impossible because they are stopped by the maternal wall. The maternal wall affects women in a variety of occupations but had a huge impact on female attorneys. It then looks at the problem of the maternal wall in the legal workplace and how it affects these women and whether they are successful in their jobs. Last, the article looks at possible solutions to this problem ranging from mother-attorneys working in particular parts of law to law firms reforming their standards.

**Outline:**

As a woman attorney, how does one be successful in their work and negotiate a family life?

What is successful to them?

Why are there so few women in the field of law?

- Difficult to balance both family and work
  - Why?
    - Work is demanding
    - Hard to get time off
    - “career suicide”
    - Difficult to come back
    - Mommy track
    - Often leave because want to raise children
  - Results
    - Less women in profession
    - Not as many promotions

- Gender earnings gap
- Gender stereotypes
- Sexual harassment
- What are the women’s feelings about their demanding job?
- How do they feel their job affects their family?
- Does husband pick up slack?
- Do they wish they were in a different career?
- Rates for women who stay as attorney?
- How does maternity leave work?
  - What are firm’s policies?
  - How do they look at maternity leave?

Comment [W3]: Are these questions you are planning on addressing for your interview?