

"To Be A Woman, Or Not To Be? That Is The Question."

Since childhood, when faced with a stereotypical male task, I have always responded with "I can do anything a boy can do." And I usually did. In high school, I was the highest ranked girl in my class. As I crossed the stage to accept my degree in the order of class rank, men surrounded me. In college, I was equal with men, that is, when I chose to be. For example, my junior year of college I decided that I would not allow men to purchase drinks for me when out at bars. On occasions, I would ask a guy on a date, choose the restaurant, and drive the car for the date, but this was only when I felt like it. Thus, in college, the playing field seemed as relatively equal as a female wanted it to be. I had the same grades as the men in my classes, if not better. I knew my career path and was focused on achieving my goals, just as they were. And I was in a position that allowed me to be treated as a traditional lady (where men open doors for me and protect me) or an independent woman upon my choice. Somewhere between college and law school this all changed. My once favorite phrase 'I can do anything a boy can do' was so true. Maybe I can do anything a boy can do, just not the things a man can do.

My mother's endless questions about how I would manage both a career and family finally seem important. Before law school, I would tell her that other women had done it, that it wouldn't be easy, but that I want a career and if I want something bad enough, I will find a way to do it.

After the first year of law school, I seemed broken. I am competitive, but not a cutthroat. I rarely raise my hand in class. I disliked the arrogant students and the ones that would cut down the other student's remarks or interrupt others. I despised the politics that went on and the bribing for grade bumps. I returned to my parents home hardened by this experience. I was not the woman I had been before. And my father

hated the new woman I had become. He told me I was becoming a man, and he was right. I was so focused on making it as a lawyer that I had given up many of the wonderful traits that make me who I am- a woman. So these characteristics that make me a woman, are they characteristics that society has designated a woman should have or are they biological. It is a combination of them both. Women are nurturers in society and in nature. I was not a nurturer. I wasn't even concerned with my own health or appearance. I was strictly looking out for my career, and that was all I was paying attention to. I had a hard time finding interests in what others outside of law school tried to talk to me about. Everything and everyone else seemed unimportant. I was also very unhappy. I was trying to be something that I am not. I was denying my womanhood to be a lawyer. This is not what I had wanted when I chose to become a lawyer. Before I returned for my third semester, my father told me to make sure I didn't let law school change me. He told me that I could be both a woman and a lawyer at the same time. But, regretfully, he did not tell me how I could achieve this.

Upon my return a fellow male law student told me out of the blue one day that I was not like the other girls here in law school. I didn't act like a man. He told me not to change, and not to let this experience make me what it had made them. The more I think about his advice the more I realize how different I am and the more I feel alienated and like I don't belong. My friends, whom he called she-men, have much better grades, resumes, and summer jobs than I do. Am I doing the right thing?

From this reading and my exposure of law, for the first time I realized that my phrase "I can do anything a boy can do" symbolized that the standard was a male standard and that is why I was always trying to prove myself by saying that I was just as

good as males. Equality should not be measured by male standards, as it currently is. Because women are different from men, they should not have to meet the male standard to be treated equal. However, this creates the problem of separate but equal. This did not work with racial segregation as it would not work here. Therefore, I think we should try to move the standard away from the male standard. For instance, in the reading, one suggestion was a mandatory leave for both male and female when a child is born. I think this is a wonderful idea for many reasons. First, women would no longer be different from males. When a child is born to a male, he would have to leave work for a period of time just as a woman must leave. Second, it's in society's benefit for both male and females to be involved in a child's life. Another option would be the suggestion from the reading that everyone would be required after five years to work one year as a part-time employee or have a year leave. This is a positive move in that it eliminates much of the difference between professional men and women. First, women would no longer be different or discriminated against in hiring because of the chance they might stop or slow down their career to have a family. Second, for social reasons such as procreation, it is important to support and encourage families. If women, as many women feel they are now, are forced to choose between career or family, women may reach a point where many women are choosing their career over having a family. Furthermore, since procreation is very important for our country and the survival of our species, society should support women and the special duty of reproduction. Third, men would be more involved in life of their child. Today, many believe that there has been a breakdown in the family structure as many women have become career women and no one is at home to properly raise the children. Furthermore, many fathers are the breadwinners and have

little time to influence their children and participate in their upbringing. Furthermore, it would be healthier for men and women to take a break from the high stressors of day-to-day work. This break might even lead to the male life span increasing so that it further resembles the longer life span of the female.

However, there are drawbacks to both of these ideas. First, since many professions, such as law, have evolved with the male in mind, and feminists think that this is a disadvantage to women who must try to fit into the male modeled career, then alternatively, it would not be right to model the profession after the woman either by requiring time away from the profession for procreation. Furthermore, not all females or males want to have a family or have the biological capacity to procreate and therefore, this would be an unnecessary burden on them to force them to leave their career. Third, a woman's pregnancy is detectable, whereas a man may not be notified that a woman he has been involved with is pregnant. Additionally, he may choose not to broadcast his private affairs in order to further his career by not taking the required time away. Furthermore, this may be an invasion of his privacy to force him to admit when he is becoming a father, especially if he is unwed or having an affair. Fourth, this might also be an invasion of the right to work.

However, I feel that despite these negatives, this would be the best option. It would benefit men and women alike to have a few weeks off and away from the stressors of the workforce. In fact, the profession might benefit by having happy and revived employees. And as to the argument that it would not be right to structure the profession around a woman, I believe that this is wrong under today's circumstances. The profession is already structured around the male and by adding features that coincide with

the female, we are helping to make the profession a combination of both male and female. It is already biased therefore, we cannot take away its male structure and start over. We must work with what we have and add women characteristics in a positive light to what is already a man's career.

As for myself, I am doubtful that changes will occur in time for me to experience the ability to be the woman that I feel most comfortable being and to be a top professional. I would like to have a family and I at the end of the working day, I would like to still be viewed as the lady my parents brought me up to be. However, at the end of this day, if I want these things and a legal career as well, I am not going to be a partner. There just isn't enough time allowed by the profession, in my opinion, to devote the time needed for both a career and a family. The disadvantage I have as a woman is that I have a biological clock deadline to have children that runs out earlier than men. As soon as I graduate from law school and have my career up and going, I must choose immediately between ever having a family or having the career I have worked so hard for and deserve. Maybe the answer also lies in science. They are predicting that by the year 2025, women will be able to freeze their eggs without having to mix them with sperm. This will enable professional women to continue their careers at that crucial time, to make partner, and to eventually start a family. Although women may have to stop or slow down their careers to have a family, the same problem as before, at least they will have been able to experience the peak of her career and feel the benefits of her hard work (read: partnership and respect) without having to sacrifice the female role of motherhood.