



THE LAWYER'S BOOKSHELF

REVIEWED BY LAURIE BERKE-WEISS

A Woman's Guide to Law School

By Linda Hirshman. Penguin Books, New York, N.Y.
290 pages. \$14.95.

As women have gained strength in numbers in the law, there has been an increasingly open discussion about their status in the profession. The focus is on why that status is not equal to that of male lawyers and what can be done to create equal status.

In the watershed 1995 "Glass Ceiling" report to the Committee on Women in the Profession of the Association of the Bar of the City of New York, Professor Cynthia Fuchs Epstein, commenting on women's slow climb to law firm partnership, reached a sobering conclusion: "Stereotyping, traditional attitudes, and behaviors toward women, often focused around women's roles as mothers, discourage women's full participation and commitment, and accommodations to their family obligations often place them off-track." A more recent book, *Presumed Equal*, reported on a survey of life at large law firms from a woman lawyer's point of view. That study, published in 1998, was prompted by the realization of female Harvard Law students that women lawyers face perceptions of colleagues and clients about their personal abilities not faced by male lawyers, perceptions that limit women's private practice options.

Thankfully, bar associations and employers have taken an increasing interest in the persistent inequality between female and male lawyers. But change has proven to be slow in coming. *A Woman's Guide to Law School*, a consumer guide aimed at women considering a legal career as well as those already facing the rigors of law school, takes a different approach. Professor Hirshman, a graduate of the University of Chicago School of Law who teaches at Brandeis University and has taught law in Chicago-Kent Law School, has created a multi-faceted handbook offering solid advice to men as well as women about pursuing a career in the law. Her approach, if followed by enough women law students, could hasten the progress of women in the profession.

The author wants the reader to understand that much of law school is about "dominance," and therefore advises women applicants to ask whether a school's "underlying culture is hostile to women's success." To help answer that question, she takes a page out of *U.S. News and World Report's* book and ranks 158 accredited American law schools according to how women succeed at them. She specifically identifies 66 female-friendly schools.

The rankings are based on a survey that Professor Hirshman performed in 1995, which creates a measure called the "Femscore." The Femscore is the sum of three percentage calculations: (1) the relative representation of women on law review; (2) the percentage of women on the academic faculty (as distinguished from clinical and adjunct faculty); and (3) the percentage of women in the student body. The author also surveyed female student participation in Order of the Coif, yielding a separate percentage. Notably, she underscores the point that making law review marks entry into a "privileged" group that gets most of the benefits law school has to offer. She wants the reader to know this before spending \$75,000 or more for a legal education.

As I read the book I tried to cast my mind back 20 years, to when I applied to law school. I then was lucky enough to have a good friend in the second year at Columbia. She advised me about the admissions process and let me know that all law schools were not equal in terms of future employment prospects. But you do not need a friend if you have Professor Hirshman. In addition to the Femscore analysis, her book offers a clear explanation of why the school you choose matters — an analysis equally applicable to men and women. She gives good tips for the application process, explaining that the LSAT is important enough to take a "cram" course and offering sample questions to help make her point. There also is useful advice about crafting an acceptable, or even "compelling" application.

This book further explains how to "succeed in the first-year classroom dialogue." Professor Hirshman discusses everything from the Socratic method to the necessity for developing a "success network." She addresses the fact that women's concerns are often different from men's and, using the law of rape as an example, discusses how these differences may have an alienating effect on women law students. In short, she is preparing women for culture shock so it will not affect their academic performance and prospects.

Notwithstanding the fact that the author should be congratulated for highlighting issues pertaining to women with respect to law school, however, there are certain aspects of this book that detract from its overall usefulness. Although divided into convenient "bite-size" sections with descriptive chapter and subheadings, the table of contents is all too brief, listing chapter headings only and making browsing difficult. The statistical reliability of the Femscore scale is open to question because of the author's disclosures about how the survey information was obtained.

For example, sometimes she got the information about female law review memberships directly from the law schools and sometimes she counted female names on law review mastheads, trying to factor out part-timers and night students. She complains about the refusal of some deans and women's law groups to answer her survey questionnaires, as well as about respondents who did not cooperate with her efforts.

I found these tangents distracting, but they are outweighed by the overall content of this book, which is worth reading for the important gender issues it raises; the useful suggestion that a cost/benefit analysis should be applied to the decision to study law; and, tips on succeeding at law school should you decide to go.

In short, Professor Hirshman's book contains much good advice. With the holiday season in full swing, consider making it a gift for any woman, or man, contemplating a legal career.

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