

The Pink Ghetto: What happens when we get what we want?

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A few years back the New York Times published an article about women in the law. It posed the question: as law schools accept larger and larger percentages of women, will law become a pink ghetto when women are fully integrated in the practice?

A "pink ghetto" is a prestigious profession, formerly dominated by men, that becomes increasingly female. Some obvious examples are secretarial, nursing, and teaching jobs. As the jobs become dominated by females, their relative salaries and prestige drop.

Regardless of how many women become lawyers, I think law is not now, or ever, at risk of becoming a pink ghetto.

I sit on the disciplinary rules committee of the Georgia Bar. In the late 1990's, we wrote the first-ever set of ethics rules for Georgia lawyers. Under the rules we wrote (which were modeled on the ABA rules), lawyers were not allowed to form business relationships with non-lawyers.

But several years back, the Bar's Executive Committee asked us to consider the question: *should* lawyers be allowed to form professional corporations with professionals other than lawyers? The possibilities are endless. For example, a lawyer might hook up with an accountant to offer full business services to clients, or a lawyer might join chiropractic or medical practices that provide medical care to injured clients.

At the time the change was proposed, the chief argument in its favor was that it was going to happen with or without our sanction: clients demanded full service, and in the end, lawyers would provide what the clients demanded.

Some on our committee opposed the idea because they saw law as a profession that stood apart, uniquely devoted to the service of justice. They saw the potential for

the legal profession to be run by huge conglomerates that saw law as a profit-making center, not as a profession. I wholeheartedly agreed with them, but I also saw an additional risk: the law could easily be turned into a pink ghetto, where accountants ran law firms, and women worked, perhaps for gentler hours, but for greatly reduced prestige, power, and compensation.

Our committee's only job was to draft a proposed rule, which could be accepted or rejected by the Executive Committee of the Bar. We did what we were asked, although, because many of us voiced strenuous objections, the rules we drafted were strict and narrow. Fortunately, the Executive Committee made the right choice: even the narrow rule changes we had proposed were rejected.

I do not believe that the profession of law will become a pink ghetto. Regardless of how many women or men occupy our ranks, lawyers serve as the guardians of justice itself. Our society cannot operate without justice, and so I believe, in the end, law will never become a pink ghetto. Law's prestige arises from our desperate desire to live in a just society -- and that desire transcends gender, and always will.

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