

Research Project Proposal

Jessica Drummond

T00545067

Tracy Penny Light

HIST 2480

October 11, 2017

“YOU MUST ALWAYS HAVE FAITH IN PEOPLE; AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, YOU MUST ALWAYS HAVE FAITH IN YOURSELF.” - ELLE WOODS, *LEGALLY BLONDE* 🌸

How is the film Legally Blonde similar or different to the history of women in law? What kind of impact has women in law/the film had on today's society?

My main focal point will be the film, Legally Blonde and I will focus on how she was a woman in law and perceived to not be so serious. I will then continue my research to answer this question by researching the history of women in law and how times have changed since the first female became a lawyer. I will also focus on how Elle Woods is portrayed in Legally Blonde and compare/contrast her to other real women in the law industry. I'll focus on equal rights for women and how Elle portrays that within the film and I'll also discuss the impact women have had in a career like such. I will be discussing the first female to practice law in Canada, Clara Brett Martin who invoked a positive message regarding the success of women not only in the workforce but as lawyers. My research will include different information regarding the film as well as the diversity of genders in law and how women have created history. I'll discuss how women were treated as lawyers back in the late 1800s and how they are respected/disrespected today. With those ideas mind, I'll discuss how Elle Woods (Reese Witherspoon) was portrayed in Legally Blonde and how she managed to prove everyone wrong and become a successful lawyer without much experience. I'll discuss the issues of gender and sexuality which pertains to Elle in the film and how she overcomes those barriers. Basically, I will be researching the changes of perceptions regarding women in law and how the film illustrates positive messages regarding so. I'll also be doing my research on what kind of impact women as lawyers have had on today's generation and how they have implemented change.

Bibliography

Alley-Young, Gordon. "Celebrate Diversity, Even If That Includes the Hopelessly Superficial: Lessons on Gender, Race, Class, and Sexuality in "Legally Blonde." *Online Submission* (January 1, 2006): *ERIC*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 11, 2017).

Gordon Alley-Young's article will be beneficial for my research as I think gender, race, class and sexuality is a huge factor within the law industry. This information will be useful as it also pertains to the film I am discussing.

Backhouse, Constance B. "To Open the Way for Others of my Sex"; Clara Brett Martin's Career as Canada's First Woman Lawyer." *Canadian Journal Of Women & The Law* 1, no. 1 (June 1985): 1-41. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 11, 2017).

Discussing Clara Brett Martin's career as Canada's first female lawyer is beneficial to my research as it shows the persistence women have in careers and that women are unstoppable when it comes to showing others that they can be as successful as men.

Mossman, Mary Jane. 2016. "Precedents, Patterns and Puzzles: Feminist Reflections on the First Women Lawyers." *Laws*, Vol 5, Iss 4, P 39 (2016) no. 4: 39. *Directory of Open Access Journals*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 11, 2017).

Feminism is a huge thing in today's society so I believe that reflection on first female lawyers is key to understanding my research and expanding my ideas further regarding the film Legally Blonde.

Mossman, Mary Jane. 2005. "Defining Moments for Women as Lawyers: Reflections on Numerical Gender Equality." *Canadian Journal Of Women & The Law* 17, no. 1: 15-25. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 11, 2017).

Gender equality is something that is continuously fought for and will be for generations to come so this article will be interesting to grasp information from regarding Canadian women and the law and to discuss how things have improved over the years.

Seron, Carroll. 2013. "Afterward: A Comparative Look at the Status of Women in the Legal Profession." *Indiana Journal Of Global Legal Studies* 20, no. 2: 1359-1372. *Academic Search Complete*, EBSCOhost (accessed October 11, 2017).

Women in the legal profession used to be unusual and not very common. With my research, I'll break those assumptions and prove how many successful women there are as lawyers and how their sexuality/gender shouldn't be a factor in the way they do their job.

Statement of Process

1. I chose my topic because gender/sexuality is a very controversial topic within the work force. I specifically chose to analyze the movie Legally Blonde as it is one of my favourite films and I believe it to portray women as lawyers in a positive light. I find it important because it reminds us not to judge a book by its cover and to be more open to the idea of women as professionals. I find it super empowering and inspiring that Elle Woods breaks the barriers of the assumption she is a 'dumb blonde' and wins her case in the end. She struggles at first but then shows everyone she can be as successful as anyone. I believe the history of women not only in the workforce, but as lawyers fighting for equality or change, is something we mustn't look past and begin to recognize the change women have created for us today.
2. I chose my sources by researching the history of women in law as well as researching legally blonde academic articles. My thinking that led me to choose my sources was I wanted to find out more regarding the first female lawyers and the impact they have had, as well as the thoughts and ideas around the film Legally Blonde and if it portrays a negative or positive message to young girls.
3. The assumptions I brought to my research was that the interpretation of women in law was a negative one. I assumed they were/are not recognized for the positive changes they have made involving politics. However, my sources caused me to think differently as it proved to me that there are many women in history who have become successful lawyers and when comparing it to the film Legally Blonde, it opens my eyes even more to the injustice women face in that type of career but still demolish those oppressions they experienced everyday.

4. My view of the past regarding the history of women in law has changed drastically. I've always known in the back of my mind that there are tons of successful women as lawyers, but I didn't realize how many there truly were until I read some articles. I had no idea who the first woman lawyer in Canada was until I did my research and I believe educating myself on that topic is very important in my further research relating to my topic. Even comparing the film to the academic journals I have read, has opened my eyes more pertaining to how women are perceived as lawyers, which for the most part was negative. Some unanswered questions I have are, "why are women still discriminated against as lawyers and not taken as seriously even if they prove they can win cases?" and "will the injustice towards women in law continue over the years or get better?".
5. Lastly, some things I would do differently next time would perhaps interview a lawyer in town who is a woman and see how she is treated at her job. I think it would be interesting to hear a real person's experience and to see if she feels belittled etc as a woman because of what profession she chose to do. I'd also narrow down my research by discussing certain cases involving women lawyers and how they were perceived. An example being Marcia Clark in the O.J. Simpson murder trial and how she fought tirelessly against O.J. Although, she lost the case, she proved that any women can be brilliant in that type of career as she has gone on to do many more successful things with her life.