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To the Editor:


We write on behalf of the Women's Bar Association of Massachusetts, a non-profit association of over 1,300 attorneys and judges which advocates for the professional advancement of women in the law. We read with great interest Kris Frieswick's article ("The Job Without Benefits," 3/10 Globe Magazine) on the degree to which women professionals still perform a disproportionate share of household duties in addition to their professional duties.

Ms. Frieswick taps into a very fundamental home dynamic with vast repercussions at work: not only do professional women serve "double duty" which robs them of their capacity to participate in voluntary community or leisure activities, but it's not a far stretch to think that the power relationship between the genders that are set at home carry over into the workplace. In the same way that one's political worldview can be greatly influenced by patterns of authority in one's personal relationships, so, too, is there a growing recognition that women may never truly have an equal voice at work until they have an equal voice at home. And, with less time to participate in "extracurricular" career-related activities, women often have less of an opportunity to participate in vital networking and mentoring opportunities that lead to professional advancement.

At the same time, Ms. Frieswick raises a delicate "push-pull" tension -- does the woman need to stand up for herself more or at least lower her standards? or should her male partner more readily acknowledge the burden on her and raise his standards? -- that is hard to generalize on a grand scale. It is too simple an answer to suggest that women (or men) are by and large the source of the problem, for which there are probably as many "solutions" as there are dual-working couples today. Again, though, many of the negotiating skills practiced at home translate directly to the work setting: how many women who do the laundry or clean up the kitchen themselves "because it's just easier" to do than fight or because it preserves the relationship, also settle for less compensation or take on their colleagues' work themselves? How often do professional women accept administrative duties that their male counterparts avoid?

Ms. Frieswick has very articulately and insightfully provided us with yet another example of how the personal is in fact the professional.


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