

[Lawyers: Are You Confused About Appropriate Attire?](#)

By [Cordell Parvin](#) on September 4th, 2014

Men, has there ever been a morning when you were getting dressed for court, or an important meeting, and you had to think beyond whether your tie matched your suit, or whether it is ok to wear a striped shirt with a striped suit? I doubt it. As you will see below, you have a relatively stress-free clothing selection.

Women, how about you? Has there ever been a morning when you were getting dressed for court, or an important client meeting, and you did not worry how the judge or client might evaluate your attire?

Look, I don't want to create a major controversy here, but frankly I was really surprised when I did research for my novel. As you know I am writing about Gina Caruso, an alpha female lawyer, mother of two, and partner in a big Texas law firm who finds herself as a potential defendant or witness in a DOJ criminal investigation of her energy client.

Gina is smart and a high achiever. She is self-confident and will never allow herself to fail. She is fit and is the best golfer in her law firm. She has charm and lights up a room when she enters. All of those positive traits work against her in her quest for success in my fictitious Texas law firm.

Gina faces some smaller challenges as well. At one point, a firm mentor tells her to quit dressing like the men in gray and navy pantsuits. Later she is criticized for dressing less conservatively, including her 4 inch Christian Louboutin heels.

In my research, I have found true stories that I could have never made up. Just do a google search and you may find more articles with strong suggestions on how women lawyers should dress than perhaps any other topic for women. Here is a small sample:

I found an article: [Do Female Lawyers Have The Strictest Dress Code?](#) ([Ally McBeal](#) seems to be a popular example of how not to dress, as this article includes her photo. David Kelley must have purposely created Ally McBeal's attire to create a stir.)

There are many interesting suggestions/rules mentioned in the



article. Here is one.

Famed judge Lenore Nesbitt, the first female judge appointed to the U.S. Southern District of Florida, used to send women out of her courtroom for wearing open-toed shoes. Pearls were an absolute requirement.

Pearls? I was surprised. How about you?

I found this Slate article: [Female Lawyers Who Dress Too “Sexy” Are Apparently a “Huge Problem” in the Courtroom](#). From this article, it appears that “real” progress is being made, as long as women did not dress sexy:

Prior to the 1980s, it would have been scandalous for a lady lawyer to approach the bench wearing pants. Pantsuits are acceptable now, but the expansion of wardrobe possibilities for female attorneys has not made their choices any less political.

But, while pantsuits may have become mainstream, women still better make sure their skirts are an appropriate length. You must read: [Federal Judge Suggests That Women Lawyers Not Dress Like ‘Ignorant Sluts.’](#) (He comes across as the ignorant one.) Do you see why I say I could not make up stuff to match this.

Finally, if you are confused about what is appropriate attire, take a look at: [THE IMPORTANCE OF A WOMAN’S IMAGE IN THE WORKPLACE](#). The detailed suggestions there are based on “substantial research:”

The information presented in this article isn’t opinion; instead it’s the result of focus groups, surveys, and in-person testing with a database of more than 18,500 respondents from across the United States and in seven foreign countries, including attorneys, judges, and other professionals.

Make sure and read the article. In it you will learn about:

- Hairstyle-shoulder length or shorter with no loose strands.
- Your jacket-very important and you must keep it on.

- Your work shoes-dark colors, no open toes and heels no higher than 2 1/2 inches

How would [Jessica Pearson](#), the lawyer in Suits be judged? I think her attire is very professional, but clearly her heels are too high and she frequently does not wear a jacket. You can read about the designer's ideas in [‘Suits’ costume designer on the show’s tailor-made wardrobe](#), or [How the Costume Designer for Suits Tells Stories Using Just the Right Attire](#).

Check out this interview of Gina Torres.



[Actress Gina Torres is Here to Discuss Her Hit Show](#)

Some law firms have created memos to help the women lawyers in their firm. One law firm wrote a memo: Presentation Tips for Women. Even though the firm had good intentions, the memo was not well received when it was leaked on the internet. You can find some of the memo tips in this article: [Biglaw Memo From Top Firm Advises That Women ‘Don’t Giggle,’ Don’t ‘Show Cleavage’](#)

Want to help me with my novel? You could help me with the wardrobe. Also, do you have a law firm or courtroom true story that is stranger than fiction to share with me for my book?

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Cordell M. Parvin built a national construction practice during his 35 years practicing law. At Jenkins & Gilchrist, Mr. Parvin was the Construction Law Practice Group Leader and was also responsible for the firm's attorney development practice. While there he taught client development and created a coaching program for junior partners. In 2005, Mr. Parvin left the firm and started Cordell Parvin LLC. He now works with lawyers and law firms on career development and planning and client development. He is the co-author of ***Say Ciao to Chow Mein: Conquering Career Burnout*** and other books for lawyers. To learn more visit his Web site, www.cordellparvin.com or contact him at cparvin@cordellparvin.com.