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Exhibit A: TV lawyers

Courtroom attire: Some jurists say lawyers' necklines too low, skirts too short

Topic discussed at 7th Circuit Bar Association meeting

By Bonnie Miller Rubin | Tribune Reporter
May 28, 2009

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The cast of "The Practice" (back row, left to right): Kelli Williams, Steve Harris, Camryn Manheim, Michael Badalucco, Lara Flynn Boyle, Marla Sokoloff and Lisa Gay Hamilton. (ABC TV / September 17, 1998)

Plunging necklines. Teensy skirts. Too-loud ties. It all sounds like fodder for "Project Runway" rather than a gathering of distinguished jurists, but judges are weighing in on the topic of proper courtroom attire.

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Their verdict? Clean up your act.

It all started at the annual 7th Circuit Bar Association meeting last week when U.S. District Judge Joan Lefkow took aim at one female attorney who looked as if she stopped in "on her way home from the gym." Another panelist, Judge Michael McCuskey, was irked by women wearing "skirts so short that there's no way they can sit down," according to Law.com.

It didn't take long for the story to ricochet around the Internet, with some seeing the debate as nothing more than old-fashioned sexism.

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Whether it's steamy or slovenly, many in Chicago's legal community seemed to agree that the courtroom dress code has become too lax.

"There's definitely been some slippage," said Sarah Schrup an assistant professor at [Northwestern University](#) School of Law. "Young people ... don't have the need to dress up that much, so they don't know when the distinction is important," said Schrup, who must remind students not to wear jeans when she has a guest speaker.

Deborah Gersh, a partner at DLA Piper, has seen female colleagues whose skirts are too short, but also men "whose bellies were hanging out." For that reason, she confronts the delicate issue with all new associates, "so it's not gender-based. ... It's really about having credibility and respect."

When Linda Doyle, a partner at McDermott Will & Emery, finished law school in the mid-1980s, she bought four Brooks Brothers suits. "But that doesn't happen today. I think younger people see business casual ... and that's what comes to court." Her advice: Why take an unnecessary risk? "You should strive not to be distracting -- except in your argument."

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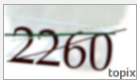
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