



TITLE: Gender Equity in Judicial Writing

SESSION DATE: October 8, 2021

SESSION TIME: 10:15 AM – 11:30 AM

SESSION DESCRIPTION:

The “Me Too” Movement has forced corporations, and the entertainment industry as well as state and federal executive and legislative branch officials to take a hard look at gender inequities and sexual harassment in the workplace. But, how does our judicial system fare? Is the one branch of government charged with being fair and impartial in the interpretation and application of our laws truly fair and impartial? This presentation takes a look at the real possibility of implicit gender bias in judicial opinion writing by deconstructing four recent Iowa Supreme Court ethics opinions written by an all male Court wherein the victims were female clients and/or intimate partner of the male attorney/abuser. Not only do the case results themselves raise questions, but the language those results are wrapped in may be even more revealing.

SPEAKER:



Hon. Mary Pat Gunderson – District Court Judge (Retired), Polk County, Iowa

Mary Pat Gunderson was appointed in 2011 District Court Judge in Polk County, Iowa, where she presided over both criminal and civil jury and bench trials. Judge Gunderson served as Chair of the District’s Law Clerk Hiring Committee and Co-Chair of the Polk County Bench Bar Committee as well as on the Board of Directors for the Polk County Volunteer Lawyers Project. In 2015-16 she served on the Iowa Supreme Court Task Force on Family Law. In recognition of her courageous scholarship in support of women in the legal profession, the Iowa Association of Women Attorneys awarded Judge Gunderson the 2020 Arabella Mansfield Award.

Prior to her appointment to the bench, Judge Gunderson served as a Polk County Magistrate from 2005-2011. From 1989-1996, she was an Assistant Polk County Attorney, where she prosecuted numerous felony jury trials including kidnapping and first-degree murder.

She graduated from the University of Iowa College of Law in Iowa City, Iowa, in 1988.

Upon retiring in 2017, Judge Gunderson co-founded the Iowa Center for Children’s Justice. She currently splits her time between Des Moines, Iowa and Ketchum, Idaho. The presentation she will give draws from her 2018 publication in the Georgetown Journal of Gender and the Law and subsequent legal developments. Since the article’s publication, numerous organizations, including the Iowa Supreme Court, the Utah Supreme Court, the Iowa State Bar Association, and the Washington D.C. Bar Association, have asked Judge Gunderson to present her research on gender inequity in the judicial system.

INTRODUCER:

William (Bill) L. Harbison, Esq – Sherrard Roe Voight Harbison

PRODUCERS:

Mary Taylor Gallagher

William L. Harbison

Hon. Barbara Holmes