Session 101 | Powering Change: Asian American Women in Innovation and Creativity

Our panel includes the current head of intellectual property of a large international law firm, the director of a USPTO regional office, a former general counsel of a leading enterprise software company, and a partner at an international law firm who is also a recipient of the 2016 Texas Most Powerful Business Women Award.

Discussion topics will include 1) the issue of women and leadership in the context of their own careers; 2) patterns the panelists have noticed over the years about women in the workforce and suggestions on improvements to better advance their careers; (3) observations about the challenges women face that are specific to the fields of law and / or technology; (4) the rewards that being a leader brings; and (5) the importance of the recognition and celebration of APA women in positions of high esteem.

Moderator:
Mollybeth Kocialski, United States Patent and Trademark Office

Speakers:
Gina N. Shishima, Norton Rose Fullbright
Toni Nguyen, Holland & Knight
Purvi Patel Albers, Haynes and Boone, LLP
Powering Change:

Asian Pacific American Women in Innovation and Creativity
Introducing Our Panelists

Molly Kocialski
Regional Director
Rocky Mountain Regional
US Patent and Trademark
Office

Purvi Patel Albers
Partner and Board Member
Haynes and Boone, LLP

Toni Nguyen
Senior Counsel, Holland &
Knight
Former Senior VP & General
Counsel of Upland Software

Gina N. Shishima
US Head of Intellectual
Property
Norton Rose Fulbright
Motivation & objective

• Women comprise a small minority of:
  • Patent inventors
  • Executives in Business; and
  • Partners in Major Law Firms

• Harnessing untapped inventive talent may spur innovation and drive economic growth.
  • If women, minorities, and low-income children were to invent patented technology at the same rate as white men from high-income households, the rate of innovation in America would quadruple (Bell et al. 2017).

Why Do Women Inventors Win Fewer Patents?

• From Yale School of Management (April 9, 2018): Women inventors are less likely to have their patent applications approved than men.

• However, that disparity dips if an examiner can’t guess an inventor’s gender from her name.
  - Women inventors with common names had an 8.2% lower chance of getting their patents approved.
  - However, the difference in probability of approval fell to 2.8% for those with rare names, where it would be tougher for an examiner to guess the applicant’s gender.

• Eliminating the disparity is crucial to increasing innovation in the economy.
Panel Questions (1 of 6)

• How can we advance innovation and leadership for Asian-American women in the technical / legal fields?
  • In what ways have these fields changed in the past 5 years?

• We always hear about the “good old boy network.” Have any of you ever been a part of a good old gal network?
  • How did that group come together?
  • What value have you received by being a part of that network?
  • What value have you provided to that network?
  • How can women be more supportive of other women in the legal profession?
2.9% of all lawyers in America are of Asian ethnicity

- The percentage of Asian-American women lawyers is even smaller
  - Additional Statistics: 34.4% of the total number of lawyers in America are women
  - 4.6% are Black or African-American
  - 3.8% are Hispanic or Latino

- Source: American Bar Association, Bureau of Labor Statistics
  - Studies done in 2008
Panel Questions (2 of 6)

• What are the skills that women lawyers possess that make them good leaders?

• Statistics show that women are leaving big law in astounding numbers. Why do you think that is and what can we as women do to change that trend?

• The challenges are different, but why does it appear that women succeed more in a corporate environment versus a big law firm?
Spotlight: APA Female Entrepreneur Eunice Cho
Eunice Cho, founder of AELLA (1 of 2)

• AELLA is a fashion brand
  • Solving a problem busy women face everyday:
    • Comfortable, flattering, easily laundered staple business clothes that don’t cramp one’s style
    • Clients are mostly women in their 20’s, 30’s, 40’s and up

• “I have always been somebody that made things.”
  • Eunice spent six months in fabric research, which led to Aella’s first pair of signature pants being developed a year later
  • “Matte Skin” and “Feather Skin” are novel types of knit / jersey fabrics
    • Used for making pants
Eunice Cho, founder of AELLA (2 of 2)

• On becoming an entrepreneur
  • B.A. in fine arts, followed by MBA
  • Work experience in family’s textile business and fashion co. Kiki de Montparnasse
  • Began AELLA on a small scale, which involved testing products and business model, doing focus groups and selling events
  • Does not emphasize an overall “exit strategy”
    • Instead, asks “Where will the brand be in 5-10 years?”

• AELLA today
  • Online company open all year round
  • “Try-on” services with each purchase
  • Uses only high end, typically organic fabrics; pants average about $200 a pair
Panel Questions (3 of 6)

• What has helped you get to where you are in your industry, and what advice would you have for others who want to set off in a similar direction?

• Do you have mentors?
  • Are they all women?
  • Do you have any men mentors?
  • Are you a mentor?
  • What value do you derive from being a mentor?
Spotlight: APA Virologist Flossie Wong-Staal
• Born in China, Wong-Staal completed her doctorate in molecular biology at UCLA in 1972.

• 1980: AIDS was declared an epidemic, affecting 1.2 million Americans.

• 1983: Wong-Staal was the first person to clone HIV, which helped prove that this virus is the cause of AIDS.
  • A crucial step in understanding the then-mysterious disease – specifically, that HIV depletes T-cells
  • Tests could be developed from her genetic mapping, to screen donated blood and to test patients themselves for the virus
Flossie Wong-Staal, HIV Research Pioneer (2 of 2)

• Wong-Staal has approximately 46 U.S. Patents and Patent Applications.

• One of her most recent, U.S. Patent 9,328,391, is titled “Cloning and Expression of HIV-1 DNA”.
  • **Abstract:** The determination of the nucleotide sequence of HIV-1 DNA; identification, isolation and expression of HIV-1 DNA sequences which encode immunoreactive polypeptides by recombinant DNA methods and production of viral RNA are disclosed.
Spotlight: APA Professor Anjana Rao
Anjana Rao, Immunologist

• "The immune system is an ideal model for studying all sorts of biochemical processes - development, the regulation of gene expression, alternative splicing and cellular stress responses, to mention only a few." — Anjana Rao, Ph.D.

• One of her most recent patents, U.S. Patent 10,337,053, is titled “Labeling hydroxymethylated residues”.
  
  • Abstract: The present invention provides for novel methods for regulating and detecting the cytosine methylation status of DNA. The invention is based upon identification of a novel and surprising catalytic activity for the family of TET proteins, namely TET1, TET2, TET3, and CXXC4. The novel activity is related to the enzymes being capable of converting the cytosine nucleotide 5-methylcytosine into 5-hydroxymethylcytosine by hydroxylation.
Panel Questions (4 of 6)

• What are common misconceptions people have regarding Asian-American women in pioneering / leadership roles?
  • How can we combat these misconceptions and communicate more effectively?

• In 2019, which Asian American wom(e)n is making the greatest advancements in the legal / business / tech industries?
  • What are they specifically doing?

• What are the most critical changes that we must make to face the future effectively?
Forty-year trends of women in U.S. patenting

- patents with at least one woman inventor
- women inventor rate
- women’s share of total patenting
Women patent inventors vs. women in science and engineering occupations

Across nearly all science occupations, women participate at a much higher rate than they invent patented technology.
Women inventor rate by state (top 20)
Women inventor rate at certain top patent assignees, 2007-2016
Share of patents with at least one woman inventor by gender composition
Share of patents by inventor team size

All inventor teams

Teams with at least one woman inventor

Year

Percent of patents

1 inventors
2-3 inventors
4-5 inventors
6+ inventors
Women inventor rate by technology sector

Women are specializing in technology fields and sectors where female predecessors have patented rather than entering male-dominated fields or firms. 
Key findings

• Women continue to comprise a small minority of patent inventors, accounting for only 12 percent of all inventors on patents granted in 2016.

• Gains in female participation in science and engineering occupations and entrepreneurship are not leading to broad increases in female patent inventors.

• Technology-intensive states and those where women comprise a large percentage of the state’s overall workforce show higher rates of women inventors.
Key findings

• Women inventors are increasingly concentrated in specific technologies, suggesting that women are specializing in areas where female predecessors have traditionally patented.

• Businesses have the lowest women inventor rates among the various categories of U.S. patent owners.

• Women are increasingly likely to patent on large, gender-mixed inventor teams, highlighting the growing importance of understanding the relationship between gender and innovative collaboration.
Panel Questions (5 of 6)

• What are some of the more systemic ways male advocates can make a difference?
  • For example, what kinds of programs or policies might advocates advance, or have you experienced programs or policies that have made a difference for you or would have made a difference if implemented?

• Law firm responses to the lack of women partners sometime refers to women failing to “build a book of business”.
  • What are your thoughts on that?
  • In your opinion, what do women need to do to either begin to build or to grow their book of business?
Panel Questions (6 of 6)

• What question would you like to hear Purvi, Gina, or Toni answer?

• What is one piece of practical advice you would give to someone starting out?

• Is there really such a thing as a “work-life balance”?  
  • Would a better term be work-life choices?