

Julie Blackman, PhD — Social Psychologist

STEPPING STONES

Julie Blackman, PhD, didn't take a traditional route to find her career in the justice system. She never went to law school or a police academy. Rather, she used her psychology degree to become a litigation consultant who provides pre-trial research services and trial-strategy consulting to lawyers.

As senior vice president at DOAR Litigation Consulting, she is involved in helping lawyers get ready for trials and build their cases.

Her first job after graduation was teaching at Barnard College, where she conducted research involving battered women and survivors of sexual abuse.

Part of this work involved distributing a high-profile survey through a local newspaper, to which more than 600 people — victims and non-victims — responded. She later published a book on the subject, "Intimate Violence: A Study of Injustice," which made her work available to attorneys and others who wanted to understand the effects of intimate violence and to educate jurors at trials involving victims of abuse who killed their abusers.

LEAPING INTO LITIGATION

At first, Blackman applied her research experience in the courtroom, testifying as an expert witness in trials involving battered women who had killed their abusers. In this role, she used science to explain the psychological state of victims — for example, why someone would stay with an abusive partner or how people who have been abused could become so desperate that they act violently in their own defense.

At the time Blackman was providing expert testimony, attorneys were realizing how psychologists could assist with jury selection. One attorney contacted her to assist with jury selection for an upcoming trial.

Her practice as a jury selection consultant grew, and she added depth to this work by conducting pre-trial research designed to identify the kinds of ideas and experiences that would promote the chance of getting a favorable verdict at trial. The more attorneys understand about how jurors are likely to see their case, the better their persuasive strategies can be.

To her delight, her work paid off and many clients accused and tried for the deaths of their abusers were acquitted.

PSYCHOLOGY OF PERSUASION

Blackman eventually turned her attention to highly complex litigation including securities fraud and patent cases.

"It is remarkable that ordinary people, with little or no relevant background, will be called upon to resolve complex disputes," says Blackman. "It is crucial for them to understand such complexities as the construction of collateralized debt obligations or the chemical activity of new pharmaceuticals." In cases like this, she applies her skills as a researcher and teacher.

"Patent law requires very high-quality teaching," Blackman says. "The jurors can only deliberate meaningfully if they understand both the technology and the laws that pertain to patent infringement and validity." Similar insight is required in cases that involve high finance.



"If you can't decide between a graduate program in psychology and law school ... if you are interested in the American jury system ... if you can make difficult concepts clear ... trial strategy consulting could be the right career path for you."

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

Social psychologists are interested in all aspects of personality and social interaction, exploring the influence of interpersonal, intergroup and intragroup relationships on human behavior.

Find out where psychology can take you at WWW.PSYCHSCIENCEACTION.ORG.

Julie Blackman, PhD — Social Psychologist, continued

The need for such instruction has led Blackman to conduct research involving focus groups and mock juries to determine the best ways for attorneys to present pertinent trial information. This helps inform which teaching methods and tools work well and are persuasive. The use of visual graphics has become central to this effort and Blackman's firm, DOAR, includes those who conceive, design and help to display educational and persuasive graphics in courtrooms.

"Attorneys rely heavily on high-tech firms like ours to help them manage the millions of pages of documents that regularly attend complex cases," says Blackman. "The graphic artists and presentation technologists make it possible for attorneys to teach aspects of their cases that defy easy comprehension."

"If psychology, sociology, government and English interest you ... if you can't decide between a graduate program in psychology and law school ... if you are interested in the American jury system ... if you are a graphic artist who can make difficult concepts clear ... trial strategy consulting could be the right career path for you," she says.

Find out where psychology can take you at WWW.PSYCHSCIENCEACTION.ORG.