

At Williams & Connolly, 'The Primordial, Motherly Instinct to Protect and Defend'

By Jenna Greene
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In some ways, litigation powerhouse **Williams & Connolly** is a deeply traditional firm. It has only one office, it's not big on PR or marketing, it doesn't have non-equity partners and almost never hires laterals.

But in other ways, it's highly progressive. The latest example: All of the partners in the firm's appellate and Supreme Court practice are now women.

This would be somewhat unusual in any practice area, but appellate advocacy at the highest levels remains particularly male-dominated. During the most recent U.S. Supreme Court term, male advocates outnumbered female 153 to 32, according to Bloomberg Big Law Business. And most of the women making appearances came from the SG's office or non-profits, not law firms. That makes Williams & Connolly's all-female practice an anomaly among its peers.

Anchoring the group is **Lisa Blatt** (above, right), who has argued more Supreme Court cases—37—than any other woman, including two cases this term, *Murphy v. Carpenter* and *BNSF v. Loos*.

In late January, I wrote about her move to Williams & Connolly from **Arnold & Porter** after former appellate practice head **Kannon Shanmugam** jumped to **Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison**.



(Courtesy photo)

(l-r) Williams & Connolly partners Amy Saharia, Sarah Harris and Lisa Blatt.

I had a chance to catch up with her and partners **Amy Saharia** (left) and **Sarah Harris** (center) this week now that they've settled in.

"The move was very well-received by clients," Blatt said. "The three of us are working as a team ... doing everything. It's exciting." Saharia is Williams & Connolly born and bred, joining the firm as an associate post-clerkships in 2007.

And Blatt started her law career at the firm before taking a series of government jobs. For that reason—and because she's married to W&C

partner **David Blatt**—the firm doesn't really consider her to be a lateral.

But Harris, on the other hand, definitely is—the third-ever in the firm's 52-year history. (Shanmugam was the second.) She joined the firm as a partner in February from the **Justice Department's Office of Legal Counsel** after previously working with Blatt at Arnold & Porter.

"I think I met with about 51 partners before I came in," she said, laughing. (I couldn't actually tell if she was exaggerating. Possibly not.)

The trio have much in common—they're all working mothers, married to spouses who also have demanding careers. Saharia's husband is a doctor, while Harris, like Blatt, is married to a lawyer. (Her husband is Jeffrey Harris, a partner at **Consovoy McCarthy Park**—the firm currently in the news as **President Donald Trump's** counsel in the fight over releasing his tax records.)

"We all have each other's backs at times when

family duty calls," said Saharia, who has two sons, ages 5 and 7.

"I think we have a unique approach as women, that we're even more creative and aggressive," Blatt said. "It's the primordial, motherly instinct to protect and defend."

At the same time, the three partners have distinct political perspectives—"Opposite ends of the spectrum," is how Blatt put it. Harris clerked for Justice Clarence Thomas, while Blatt clerked for **Ruth Bader Ginsburg** when she was a judge on the D.C. Circuit and Saharia clerked for Justice **Sonia Sotomayor**.

But Blatt said they embrace their political diversity—not to mention it's great for recruiting. "It means we attract a diverse group of people politically."

But that's in keeping with Williams & Connolly's tradition. The firm has "represented everyone from **Ollie North** to **Bill Clinton**," Blatt said. "We're about serving clients, not a particular political agenda."