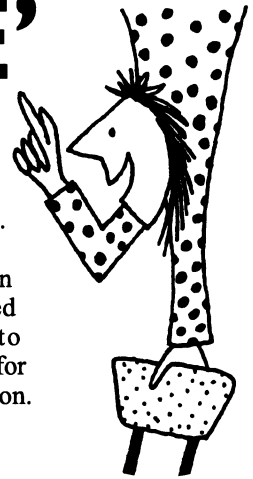


'SIT DOWN GIRLIE'

Legal issues from a feminist perspective



The eye of the beholder

The New South Wales government is currently conducting a parliamentary inquiry into cosmetic surgery. Victorian Health Services Commissioner, Beth Wilson, told the inquiry that she was very concerned about the pressures on young women to have cosmetic surgery to gain or retain work. She has told *Girlie* that she has received a disproportionate number of complaints regarding cosmetic surgery and links this to the deregulation of medical advertising in 1994.

She reports that there is an increasing number of women undergoing a procedure known as 'labial enhancement'. This purpose of this procedure is strictly aesthetic and the consequences of this can be very distressing: pain, incontinence, loss of sexual feeling and physical and emotional scarring. There are suggestions that workers in the sex industry are being encouraged by their employers to have this procedure done. *Girlie* had failed dismally to appreciate the aesthetic importance of this organ and expressed her surprise to Beth, who agreed that 'it's not like we wear them on our bonnets'.

Tales from the Trenches, or Phwoarr!

(thanks to Kaz Cooke for the spelling)

Girlie readers will not forget that it was a comment from a Family Court Registrar which gave *Girlie* her name. Sometimes late at night she dreams of a world and a legal profession in which comments like this are no longer heard. Reports from the trenches suggest otherwise, however.

One *Girlie* reports that she was overwhelmingly flattered recently when a Barrister rang her Principal upon a successful settlement and informed him that not only was 'his lovely instructress very nice to look at during negotiations, she had actually been of some assistance as well'.

Later, having achieved a favourable result for her client, the same *Girlie* was told by a partner of the firm that the client was pleased with her work because he (the client) was in love with her. When she hopefully suggested that

the client was pleased because she'd done a good job, she was assured 'Nah, it's because he reckons you're a bit of a goer'.

Girlie's favourite however, was on the occasion of an argument about the merits of paid maternity leave and the fact that this *Girlie's* firm did not provide it, a partner helpfully suggested that 'if you want paid maternity leave, darlin', come up to my office and I'll help you with the maternity part — and I'll even pay ya!'. *Girlie* considers this an example of the selfless commitment to family values shown by the legal fraternity...

Women speak up

Girlie is very pleased to report the success of the recent First Australian Tribunal on Women's Human Rights held on 21 May at the Melbourne Town Hall. A national event, 12 ordinary women from around Australia came to speak about their experiences of discrimination in Australia. These women spoke of sexual abuse and violence and the compounding factors of rural or cultural isolation; mental illness and depression; institutionalisation and prisons; poverty; immigration; sexuality and access to IVF treatments; superannuation and health for older women; access to housing; outworking; and, very importantly, three women spoke about their experiences as members of the stolen generation.

Tribunal members Pat O'Shane, Maria Dimopoulos, Cheryl Saunders and Colin Dillon provided some reflections on the fairly overwhelming material presented to them, but the day belonged to the women, who had travelled from all over the country, come together as very different people and provided support for each other as they spoke publicly, most for the first time, about their lives. The 500 audience members were frequently moved to tears as they contemplated the courage it took for these women to come through their experiences and to share them with so many people.

Congratulations to the Women's Human Rights Action Network Australia on a unique event. The second stage of the project involves fairly detailed submissions to government taking these and other testimonies into

consideration. Anybody interested in being involved is welcome to contact *Girlie* for more information.

Bits

- Victorian Women Lawyers have recently released a report entitled 'Taking Up the Challenge: Women in the Legal Profession' which highlights women's position as 'fringe-dwellers' within the legal profession and notes the number of women leaving the profession after only a few years.
- *Girlie's* Man of the Month just might be the Chief Justice of Victoria, Justice John Harber Phillips for his recent call for an overhaul of provocation and self-defence laws governing murder trials. Noting that the current conceptions of provocation did not take account of the experience of many women in abusive relationships, Phillips CJ said in a recent address (the Lesbia Harford Oration) that 'juries should be directed that a last provocative incident is simply to be regarded as a component of the woman's experience and that it is the sum total of the deceased's provocative conduct to which the focus of the juror's attention should be turned'. *Girlie* hopes that the legislative changes advocated by the Chief Justice will soon be on the agenda.
- *Girlie* acknowledges the life and death of Australia's first woman surgeon, *Girlie* Chapple Hodges, who died on 13 June 1999, aged 94 years.
- Congratulations to Professor Marcia Neave, AO.
- *Girlie* was very excited to see the lovely article on her favourite group Feminist Lawyers in a recent Victorian *Law Institute Journal*. The article gave a brief history of this wonderful organisation and noted its 21 year involvement in feminist issues and the law. Keep up the good work *Girlies!*

Dee Termination
Dee is a Feminist Lawyer