

FEMINIST LEGAL ACADEMIC WORKSHOP 2001

Introduction

In Feb 2001, the Research Concentration in Women, Children and the Law at QUT Law Faculty held the 4th National Feminist Legal Academic Workshop on the QUT campus in Brisbane. In addition to academics, judges and lawyers from around Australia, we also welcomed international visitors from the United States of America, the United Kingdom, from Sweden, Canada and New Zealand.

Our conference theme was Praxis and Politics: Moving forward in difficult times in recognition of the challenges that confront academics who today practice feminist politics and methods. The theme highlighted some of the unique pressures and dilemmas that feminist lawyers and academics face in the contemporary academic and lawyering environment: first, the ways in which the financial restructuring of the university system in Australia has placed new institutional pressures on teaching the core and elective law program, which in turn places new pressures upon feminist academics and what they teach.

Second, the conference was an engagement with the question of whether (or not) we now inhabit an era of postfeminism that has swept away the need for an explicitly feminist politics of academic and legal practice. What, we asked, are the ways forward for feminist academics and lawyers?

The conference opened with one day devoted to gay, lesbian and transgender issues. In his opening address, Phillip Tahmindjis offered a careful analysis of the extent of homosexual law reform, and measured grounds for more equitable legal conditions.

The main conference then occupied a further two days, with Dean Kathleen Sullivan of Stanford Law School, California, delivering a superb opening speech that deliberated upon the contours of constitutional law reform that better recognizes women. The Attorney General of Queensland, Matt Foley, delivered a conference dinner speech that combined real politic and poetry. And in each of the other many and varied sessions over the 3 days, there was vigorous debate and shared insights from the assembled legal academics, judges, legal practitioners, and law students.

The following papers reproduced here are a selection that each sounds a different note within the conference theme.

The Hon Justice Neil Buckley notes the extent of the challenge in ensuring that the adjudication of issues surrounding divorce are attentive to the needs of women in Gender and Power: Balancing Rhetoric and Reality in the Family Court; Chris Geller points out both the advantages and the disadvantages of academic employment in the current hiring market in Flexible Schedules, Lower Pay and Women's "Opportunities" in Law; Lee Adams reflects upon the obstacles that confront American women in Dorothy Goes to Law School: Stories of Institutional Inertia and Response in the American Legal Academy - Women, Legal Education and Inertia; Beth Gaze uncovers some of the hidden assumptions behind part-time workers in Working Part Time: Reflections on "Practicing" the Work-Family Juggling Act; and Barbara Hamilton provided grounds for cautious optimism in The Law Council of Australia Policy 2001 on the Process of Judicial Appointments: Any Good News for Future Female Judicial Appointees?

We trust you enjoy this selection. These papers reflect the general mood of the conference; namely, that while there have been significant improvements to the unerringly masculine law school experience for students and academics alike, there are many challenges remain in providing a learning and employment experience that is fully integrative of women.

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