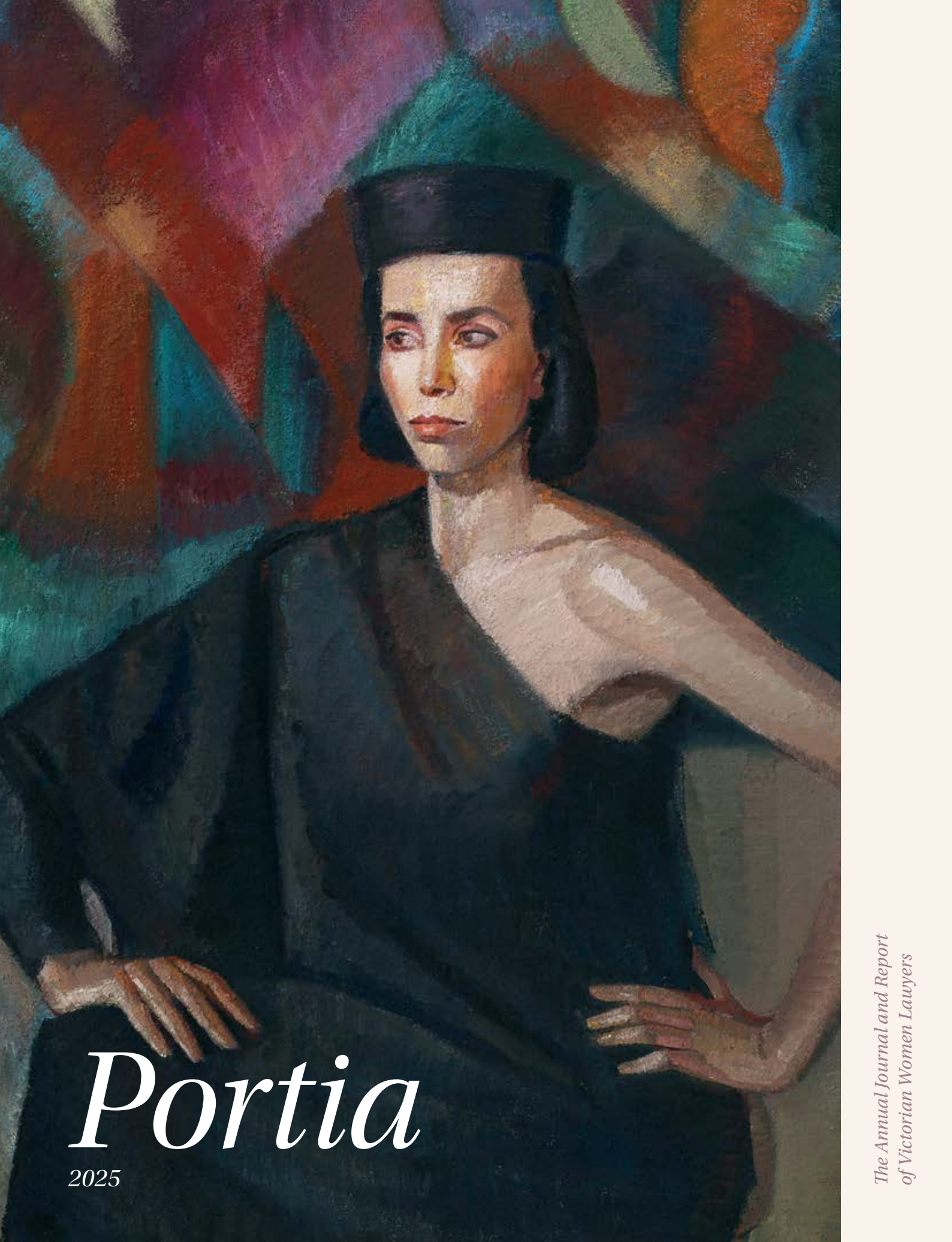




Portia

2025

*The Annual Journal and Report
of Victorian Women Lawyers*

About this edition of Portia

The 2025 edition of Portia, the annual journal and report of Victorian Women Lawyers (VWL) centres on the theme of Identity. Through championing female voices, we explore identity in its many forms - personal, professional and cultural. At the heart of this year's edition, Portia invites readers to reflect on Identity—how it threads through our lives as women lawyers, shaping the way we practise, the way we are perceived, and the law itself.

This year's collection features reflective essays, commentary on the evolving identity of the legal profession, and pieces exploring the intersections between gender, heritage, and professional purpose. A particularly special inclusion is Dr Julie Cotter's article on Portia Geach - a woman whose life's work exemplified courage, activism, and the reshaping of women's public identity in Australia. From her artistic achievements to her fearless political advocacy, Portia challenged entrenched structures and created pathways for women to be seen, heard and recognised. This piece not only honours the individual after whom our journal is named but also invites readers to reflect on how one's personal identity can become a powerful catalyst for lasting social change.

Portia also serves as a showcase of the events, programs, and initiatives that VWL has delivered throughout the year, all through the lens of our 2025 theme of Identity. Highlights include a financial literacy workshop featuring leading voices in law and finance, panel discussions on empathy and challenging workplace dynamics, a powerful presentation from Mollie Tregillis on 'thriving not surviving', and the launch of a VWL x Foley's List Podcast.

The issues facing our profession are often complex and unique. We have enjoyed exploring and documenting the challenges faced by our colleagues, peers and mentors in the law. The Publications Committee is proud to present another edition of Portia and hopes that our members will feel their own identity reflected back to them within the pages.

Editors and Co-Chairs of the Publications Committee



Amy Stagg



Bridget Gertzel

Publications Committee

This edition would not have been possible without the dedicated members of the Publications Committee: Grace O'Brien, Nicole Pereira, Jessica Toomey, Joanne Abouzaki, Amelia Daou, Ella Heaphy and Andree Pianta.

A special mention to Dr Julie Cotter, our VWL Sponsors and all of our interviewees for their contributions which have added to the rich variety of voices in the edition. Finally, thank you to our Designer and Publisher, Design by Wolf for bringing the edition to life.

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Front cover image

Yvette Coppersmith, *Seared woman with abstraction (self-portrait)* oil, sand, marble dust and wax on jute 113.5cm x 97.5cm

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Victorian Women Lawyers 2025: Message from the President

As this year's Victorian Women Lawyers President, I decided on the theme of "Identity."



AUTHOR
Linda Hart, VWL President

Identity

In the legal profession, the theme of Identity is especially powerful for women because it challenges the traditional image of who a lawyer 'should' be. For generations, the profession has been shaped by male-dominated structures and expectations, and women have often felt pressured to adapt their style or silence parts of themselves to fit in.

By exploring the theme of Identity, I wanted to provide a platform to celebrate unique perspectives, amplify representation and strengthen confidence in who we are, both personally and professionally.

As an Asian Australian lawyer, I often struggled with my own identity trying to navigate between the two cultural worlds. At VWL's Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Lunch I shared my experience of living in two worlds, but not fully belonging to either. I was caught in the tension of having to constantly choose. On one hand, there is pride in heritage, traditions, and values passed down through family, whilst on the other, there is the lived reality of being part of a diverse but still sometimes challenging Australian society. At times, I also found it difficult navigating the legal profession which has traditionally lacked visible diversity. Throughout the years, I learnt to embrace my cultural heritage while overcoming stereotypes that question leadership, authority, or communication styles. By owning my identity, it has provided resilience, authenticity, and the confidence to advocate not only for clients, but also for greater inclusion within the profession. It has also enabled me to be a role model for others by showing that leadership in law can look and sound different, while still being powerful, compassionate, and effective.

The theme of Identity is not just personal; it is a call to action. For too long, women have been measured against standards that were never designed with us in mind, forcing many to dilute their voices or adapt to structures that don't reflect who we are. It is time to reclaim identity as our strength. When women lawyers lead authentically and draw on our diverse experiences, values, and perspectives, we don't just practise law, we change it. We set new standards of advocacy, empathy, and leadership that better reflect the communities we serve. Embracing identity means refusing to be confined by stereotypes and instead stepping forward as visible role models for the next generation.

VWL Events

In this edition of Portia, you will read about the incredible events and achievements of VWL in 2025. Each of our committees has worked tirelessly this year to deliver an outstanding calendar of events incorporating the theme of Identity. This includes arranging panel discussions, networking evenings, submitting law reform submissions, mentoring programs and organising the mooting competition. The aim of each event, project and submission was to advance, support, and empower women in the legal profession.

Thank you

As President, I want to extend my heartfelt thanks to our Executive Committee and nine sub-committees, your commitment continues to drive the success of our organisation. Balancing the demands of a full-time career in the legal profession with the additional responsibility of volunteering is no small task, yet each of you contributes your time, expertise, and energy with unwavering dedication. Your dedication ensures that our programs thrive, our community remains connected, and our mission to empower women in the law continues to move forward. It is because of your commitment, often after hours and on top of already demanding schedules, that VWL can create meaningful opportunities, advocate for equity, and support the next generation of women lawyers.

I also want to extend our sincere gratitude to our sponsors for their invaluable support and commitment to VWL. Thank you for standing beside us and investing in the vision of our organisation. Your ongoing support ensures our programs and initiatives can thrive.

On a personal note, it has truly been an honour and a privilege to serve as President and to lead this incredible organisation. The passion, resilience, and generosity of our members and volunteers have inspired me every single day. I am deeply grateful for the friendships formed, the lessons learned, and the chance to walk alongside such remarkable women in shaping a stronger, more inclusive future for our profession.

Message from our Patron

When I started out in the law, a very long time ago, I felt very outnumbered and out of place. Males in the law faculty outnumbered females by ten to one.



AUTHOR

The Hon Marilyn Warren AC, KC,
Vice Chancellor's Professorial Fellow,
Monash University

When I started at my first legal office, all the lawyers were males. And so the experience continued for a very long time. My way of coping with and surviving my minority status was to sublimate gender, to envisage myself as a lawyer and not as a female lawyer. On reflection, I avoided my identity.

However, in my later career years, especially as a Judge, I better appreciated the power of gender and its capacity to reveal an additional perspective of the law and justice. I recognised my identity as a female lawyer.

I have sometimes wished I could return to being that young student or that trainee lawyer, and say, 'Your identity matters! You are not just about yourself and your own self-consciousness and personal inadequacies! You have an obligation, a duty, to apply the law, identify injustices and use your feminine mind so that the law renders true equality for all.'

If asked what brought about the change in my approach, the first response would be to say confidence - notwithstanding that what I was trying to do had not been done before, I knew I had the training, skill and capacity to do what was needed. Secondly, I would say as a female lawyer I was privileged to have the chance to observe a small number of other female lawyers being lawyers, thus demonstrating the importance of role models and feminine collegiality. Thirdly, I would respond saying when looking around and seeing the deprivation, inhumanity, cruelty and violence of gender-based poverty, crime, punishment and social disadvantage, I appreciated that I could apply my skills and experience to help people. To my mind, one of the greatest aspects of being a lawyer is being able to help people.

Being a female lawyer is my identity. When I was much younger, I was naive to try to put it to one side.

The very statement 'I am a female lawyer' is both a personal and professional declaration of ability, capacity and preparedness to apply the law. The projection of the identity of the female lawyer is both collective and individual. Perhaps as a female lawyer each of us could ask the personal and professional question: what is my identity as a lawyer and how do I project who I am both within and outside the law?

This edition of Portia brings us to that reflection with a collection of writing and artwork that is inspirational. The next pages lead Victorian Women Lawyers, its members and supporters to a path of confident, ongoing, reform and change while, as always, keeping gender on the agenda. Congratulations to Portia and the Editors.



Deborah Walker

Portia Geach: Portrait of an Activist

Portia, in league with the likes of Vida Goldstein and Edith Cowan OBE, heralded the age of the modern Australian woman. She voiced their concerns and ambitions and, in the process, challenged the old order of government, business and society ruled by men. She advocated for equal pay, access to the positions of political power and better standards of healthcare and nutrition.

AUTHOR

Dr Julie Cotter

Portia established women's networks to not only create a power base but also to provide ready access to a like-minded community, her most successful foray being the NSW Housewives Association (1918). She organised petitions, boycotts and protests. It was grass roots feminism that emanated from a background of her father's drapery business in Melbourne, a family and social group of strong forthright women and an accomplished career as an artist whose intelligence and desire for independence was formidable.

As an art historian, I was attracted to Portia's story of embattled attempts to be acknowledged – not that the historical or collection record provided an easy path of discovery. Despite being Australia's first woman to attend London's Royal Academy of the Arts, living and working between Melbourne and Sydney, holding many exhibitions in both cities, critics admiring her decorative Pre-Raphaelite style mixed with a French post-impressionism, finding her work in a public collection is not easy. While the Art Gallery of South Australia recently outbid some fierce competition to acquire one of her views of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, she is not represented in the Sydney, Melbourne or national public galleries. It is, unfortunately, a story often told.

Place Portia's name into the Trove database and an incredible 3,000 plus entries result. Almost every aspect of Portia's public life from the age of fourteen to her death at 85 years was covered by the newspapers and journals of the day. Her exhibitions, her 300-mile horse ride in rational dress through Gippsland countryside, her travel and her leadership. Portia used the newspapers and magazines as we now use social media, defining a new identity for Australian women that supported their emergence from the shadows of World War I and into the modernity of the twenties with its labour-saving devices and international perspective.

Portraiture assisted with the redefinition of the twentieth century woman. Women were portrayed as strong, savvy, fashionable and independent – the works usually painted by women artists. It was during the Maternity Bonus Conference of 1923 that Portia spent time with Edith Cowan, the first woman elected to an Australian parliament. A firm friendship developed, both women committed to social justice, peace and the representation of Australian women at the League of Nations. Another outcome was Portia's portrait of Edith Cowan, a tender and skilful work suggesting

a portrait career that would have burgeoned with more time. The portrait is refreshing, it anticipates the intimacy and spirit to be found in portraits by William Dobell, Edith Cowan appearing to have raised her eyebrows in response to a question. The glasses are the centrepiece, Portia guided by her knowledge of a woman who was steadfast in the heat of debate, fiercely intelligent and business-like.

Portia entered the portrait in Australia's Archibald Prize for 1923. There was no chance of victory. The prize began in 1921, is offered every year, but a woman was not deemed worthy of the prize until 1938; the next woman to win was in 1960 - in 104 years of awards women have won only 15 times.

Image was important to the perfectly groomed Portia, her fashion often flamboyant and acquired soon after its display in Paris collections. Following one of her many trips to America to observe the professionalism of women activists, she returned, proclaiming (amongst many such directions) that clubwomen in roles of authority should have their photos taken, as American women did, and send them to the newspapers. It was a defining moment for women activists, rather than remaining content to be known within their club circles, the professional photographs embedded their faces and authority beside those of men. Some turn of the century feminists had a problem with Portia's fashionable and media savvy approach, yet the photographs provided the public with a connection to the leaders, a prompt to support like-minded women.

Portia's feminism and the ideals of the Housewives Association were those of a domestic feminism. Women, it was argued, were best placed to engage in such activism, were referred to as Progressive-era feminists, Paige Meltzer describing them as 'municipal housekeepers', arguing 'they would clean up politics, cities, and see after the health and wellbeing of their neighbours.' Paige Meltzer, 'The Pulse and Conscience of America' (2009) 30(3) *Frontiers* 53.

The lecture topics of Portia's Housewives Association meetings ranged from haircare to a report from the Horticulture Society, subjects of interest to women and supportive of the sustainability of the lives of their families. The agendas of these meetings contributed to the discounting of such domestic feminism by later feminists, the speakers and forum perceived as quaint and belying the core of political activism, the result a writing out of history of the women who volunteered over many decades for the cause. The views of historians to marginalise their contribution plays into the patriarchy who often mocked and belittled their work.

It might seem that Portia's activism is outdated. Yet one only needs to consider some of the issues raised in seventies feminism; domestic violence, gender disparity in the workplace and politics, the environment, childcare, Aboriginal rights and healthcare, to realise that they were informed by the activism of women in the twenties and, unfortunately, remain the issues that impact society today. It is 100 years since Portia's activism really took shape, yet parts of our society continue to debate the need for equality of women in power.

The exercise of economic power over the provision of basic food items energised Portia's most successful campaign and became the platform upon which she taught Australian women that they could quite comfortably disrupt. Portia's boycott of the humble potato due to the high prices charged by the vegetable markets garnered the support of thousands. Her methods confounded the 'potato barons' – as she called them – and politicians alike. When price manipulation was claimed to be associated with a lack of sustainable supply, Portia sent her women out to count the bags of potatoes lined up in supply sheds. She taught women how to grow potatoes and cook foods such as lentils as potato substitutes, essentially to question the power rhetoric that quashed ideas of alternatives.

When journalists wrote that Portia had no right to interfere in the business of men, she wrote letters to the editors telling them exactly why women should be involved in the affairs of their society. She was a whistle-blower, treated as most whistle-blowers are treated, with contempt by those within her target, championed by those able to benefit from her actions.

And when she wanted changes to legislation, she quietly led a deposition of her housewives and knocked on the door of the office of the relevant minister.

Portia tried unsuccessfully to be included in the male dominated art world as did many women artists, and the battle continues today. Despite high numbers of women students in most of our fine arts and arts courses, they do not dominate leadership positions of our galleries



Portia Geach, *Mrs Edith Dircksey Cowan JP*, 1923, oil on linen, 59.5 x 50 cm, Parliament House Art Collection, Western Australia, Perth. © Portia Geach Estate

or have equal representation in our public collections or achieve the similar high prices for artworks as those by men. The establishment of the Portia Geach Memorial Award by Portia's sister, (Florence) Kate Geach, was designed to provide a platform for women to announce their talent unhindered by gender prejudice. It was generated by Kate as a response to the lack of recognition of Portia's work during her lifetime.

Recognition of the contribution made by Australian women of the past to contemporary life often requires a cumbersome and lengthy deliberation. Portia succeeded in convincing the Sydney council to allow her to plant memory trees in Hyde Park in honour of the work of women such as Lady Macquarie knowing that statues would take too long. She was right. Dame Enid Lyons, the first woman appointed to the House of Representatives, and Dame Dorothy Tangney, the first woman appointed to the Senate in the Federal Australian Parliament walked through the doors of Parliament House in 1943. Eighty years later, their work was honoured with statues in Canberra's Parliamentary Triangle, the first statues of women in the Parliamentary zone. Acknowledging the identity and identities of Australian women still has quite a path to tread.

Dr Julie Cotter's book, *Portia Geach: Portrait of an Activist*, is available through her website, juliecotter.com, and in all good bookstores. The book was generously supported by Creative Australia and the Gordon Darling Foundation.

The Portia Geach Memorial Award

Established in 1961 and dedicated to the memory of Portia Geach (1873-1959), this award is the most prestigious prize for portraiture by an Australian female artist. The Portia Geach award is administered by the Award Trustee Perpetual and highlights the extraordinary skills of Australian female artists in portraiture.

The 2025 judging panel comprised Natalie Wilson, Curator at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Katherine Roberts, Senior Curator at Manly Art Gallery and Museum and Jane Watters, Director at S.H. Ervin Gallery.

This year, Michelle Hiscock received the award for her portrait, *The Weather Watcher* after Zurbarán.

The portrait depicts Hiscock's close friend, Simon Buttonshaw, an artist and surfer based in Bells Beach, Victoria. The title of the work is derived from Buttonshaw's *Weather Journal* project, in which for more than thirty years, he recorded the weather each morning in a series of large, handmade books. On her winning portrait, Hiscock shared that she had 'heard about the weather journals for many

years but nothing prepared me for seeing them in person – page after page of landscapes and handwritten notes, details only a surfer would notice.'

The portrait, a quiet yet powerful tribute to Buttonshaw's life and work, was conceived in the wake of a cancer diagnosis. The judges praised the painting's depth and intensity and recognised the intimacy between artist and subject. Further, the panel commented on the manner in which the portrait invites 'deeper enquiry' into the layered meaning of the piece. On this, Hiscock shared that 'it's such an intimate, heartfelt portrait of someone facing the ultimate challenge in life' and 'to know that the panel must have felt that was incredibly affirming.'



Michelle Hiscock, *The Weather Watcher* after Zurbarán





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Phoebe Bell



Redefining the Legal Archetype: Femininity, Perception and Power in Law

‘Women are men’s equals in every way and they are quite competent to hold their own in all spheres of life.’ – Grata Flos Greig.



AUTHOR
Grace O'Brien

After graduating from the University of Melbourne with a Bachelor of Laws in 1903, Grata Flos Greig became the first woman in Victoria to hold a law degree. However, despite finishing second in her cohort, Grata Flos Greig was unable to practice. Why? She was a woman. Fuelled by the injustice and her passion for the law, and with the help of her professor, John Mackey, Grata Flos Greig successfully campaigned to allow women to enter the legal profession. In 1903, the Parliament of Victoria passed the Women's Disabilities Removal Act 1903 (Vic), removing 'some anomalies in the law relating to women' allowing women to practice. In 1905, Grata Flos Greig was admitted to practice.

Women now outnumber men in the legal profession but remain subject to gender-based discrimination and prejudice. Female lawyers must often navigate a professional landscape where their competence is questioned simply by virtue of their gender, feeling pressure to adopt traditionally masculine traits and behaviours to demonstrate their capability and gain the respect of their colleagues and clients. Despite these obstacles, women continue to demonstrate that qualities often associated with femininity, such as empathy, patience and compassion, are invaluable in the law.

The legal profession has traditionally placed high value on traits such as logic, assertiveness, and competitiveness, characteristics which are

often considered 'masculine.' Traits such as empathy, collaboration, emotional intelligence, and patience have historically been viewed as 'soft' or 'less professional', not only within the legal profession but within a range of other sectors. Despite this, there is an increasing level of recognition of the importance of so-called 'feminine traits' in an otherwise 'masculine' profession and an acknowledgement of the value these characteristics bring to the industry, particularly with respect to client engagement and management.

Arguably, the subject matter of a case may influence a determination as to whether a 'feminine' or 'masculine' approach is required. Before being admitted to practice, I worked for several years as an administrative assistant to a team of family law solicitors. When taking new client enquiries, it was common for prospective clients, both male and female, to request a female lawyer. One inference that can be drawn from this is that, even before obtaining legal advice, these clients wanted to ensure their case was managed with a 'feminine' approach. On the contrary, male practitioners in commercial areas of practice such as corporate law and civil litigation may be favoured or preferred by clients due to their perceived assertiveness or 'toughness.'

There is a practical utility in being overtly empathetic towards a client's personal circumstances, particularly in sensitive areas

of practice such as family and criminal law. It is easier for clients to develop rapport with and trust in a practitioner who is cognisant of their circumstances and lived experience, regardless of the practitioner's personal assessment of the case. Statements such as 'that sounds really difficult' can help to reassure clients that the advice given or action proposed has been considered in the context of their personal circumstances, making them more receptive to legal advice to reach a sensible resolution.

Jessica Anderson, Senior Associate at Coulter Legal shared the following insights:

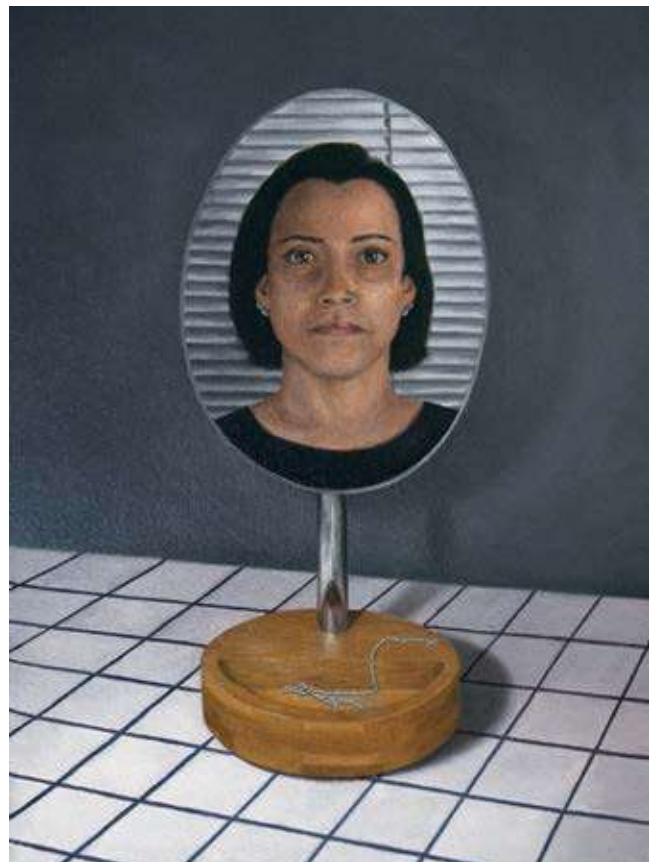
'Expressing femininity and being a young female in the workplace can be misunderstood, weaponised or manipulated in a corporate setting by clients and colleagues alike. I've found that femininity often plays a complex role in how I'm perceived and how I practice as a family law solicitor. My clients will oftentimes assume I'll be more nurturing or emotionally available than my male counterparts, which can be both a strength and a frustration. I have been thanked for my 'female perspective' when providing my client with legal advice, which has felt at times undermining my role as a professional providing a service to my clients. I have had clients request that male barristers be briefed to represent them in Court, associating femininity with softness, emotionality, or passivity, and lacking strength and assertiveness. Whilst these expectations or stereotypes can feel limiting, I've learned to embrace the empathy and communication skills that are often associated with femininity. I consider these traits to be invaluable in navigating the sensitive and emotionally charged nature of family law disputes. At the same time, I've had to assert my authority in courtrooms and negotiation settings where youth and gender can lead to being overlooked or dismissed.'

Although the narrative surrounding femininity in the legal profession is evolving, it remains undervalued. Femininity doesn't need to be hidden or suppressed to succeed in law. Femininity brings immense value to the profession, particularly in processes such as mediation or dispute resolution where success is heavily dependent upon respectful collaboration and emotional intelligence. Traits such as empathy, collaboration and patience are increasingly recognised for their importance in building strong client relationships and fostering a more inclusive work environment. Femininity must not be conflated with weakness. Instead, legal practitioners and the systems within which they operate ought to champion femininity. An industry which recognises the value of diversity is better placed to serve its clients and purpose.

More than a century later, the words of Grata Flos Greig mentioned at the beginning of this article, remain a rallying cry. Women in the legal profession must continue to endorse and embody the belief that we can hold our own, not by suppressing femininity, but by embracing it as a source of strength.



Jacqueline Hennessy



Brittany Jones



When the Machine Matches Us: Adaptability in the Legal Profession

‘Wearing their white-collar armour, these professionals have always been untouchable. But sweat is beginning to build under those collars. Now, artificial intelligence and machine learning are nibbling at the edges of these jobs’ - Andrea Clarke, Future Fit.



AUTHOR
Amy Stagg

Andrea's words capture something uncomfortably accurate. For many lawyers, the rise of artificial intelligence (AI) stirs deep unease, not just about how we work, but about who we, in the legal profession, are. The traditional stereotype associated with being a lawyer - someone who is intellectual, analytical and a trusted member of society, is an undeniable perk of practicing law for even the most modest among us. What happens to our professional identity when a computer can replicate much of the expertise we have built our careers on?

The first time I saw a legal-specific artificial intelligence software review a lengthy contract, accurately, within seconds, a task that would have taken me at least two hours to complete manually, I felt genuine excitement. I had recently transitioned from my role as a lawyer at a mid-size firm into a role in legal operations. It was easy to see the potential that the technology held for the business and my busy, and regularly overwhelmed colleagues. I also quickly understood why this technology was met with resistance. If a machine was already capable of being so sophisticated in its output, it posed a very real and alarming threat to the way that we have worked for many years.

The rapid development of AI challenges our ways of working on a practical level, as well as our identity as legal professionals. Adaptability Quotient (AQ) is, put simply, our capacity to adjust to changes and uncertainty. Our individual response to AI is directly reflective of our own AQ. In fact, Andrea Clarke argues AQ is the defining skill of high performing professionals of the future, surpassing even Intelligence Quotient and Emotional Quotient.

It is widely acknowledged that the rate of change today is exhausting and resistance to change is a natural response. Adaptability and individual capacity to handle change are certainly two themes that have emerged regularly in my short time as a legal operations professional. Although some individuals are naturally better at handling change, adaptability is a skill, just like advocacy and drafting, that can be practiced and honed. To me, the emergence of AI is the ultimate opportunity to practice the skill of adaptability.

There are valid reasons that the profession remains discerning and sceptical about AI use - regulation, accuracy, hallucinations, bias, and more. Behind these often loudly touted concerns, a separate quieter challenge emerges, that being individual resistance to change. As lawyers we pride ourselves on our years of experience, with post-admission experience (PAE or PQE) being a very real and recorded measure of our worth. Emerging AI technology asks us to become inexperienced novices again - a feeling that was left behind, with relief, after our first few years in practice. I believe that resistance towards AI may be less about the legitimate reasons for scepticism that I have raised above, and more about the discomfort of change as well as a fear of irrelevance.

The learning curve with AI is steep. It is undoubtedly a skill that takes significant time investment and requires a lot of trial and error. Yule Guttenbeil of Attune Legal suggests that it is necessary to allow up to ten hours of use per week when introducing AI tools, to avoid practitioners prematurely discarding valuable tools. This suggestion seems unrealistic, ten hours is not an investment that private firms will take lightly (or perhaps even seriously). No lawyer that I know would be comfortable with the suggestion that they have space to allocate ten hours per working week towards their professional development. Despite the hype, we are still in early days of AI adoption. Soon (if not already), it will become crucial for leaders to give teams the breathing room to experiment with AI and fail safely.

The rise of AI in legal practice is not just an ethical dilemma; it is a challenge to our individual professional identity. AI forces us to confront questions about our value and what unique skills we offer our employers and our clients. Adaptability will be a defining skill of the next decade, and AI gives us a uniquely high stakes way to develop it. The return to novice status, and the time investment is daunting. But failing to engage at all risks far more. Our professional worth will increasingly lie in how thoughtfully we adapt to change, including AI.

Protecting Cultural Identity through Legal Recognition

As a nation, we are privileged to be home to the world's oldest continuing culture, shaping not only our history but also our shared future. At the heart of this cultural continuity lies Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), the embedded collective knowledge of First Nations peoples that informs cultural practice, expression, and identity. ICIP can take many forms, including stories, language, art, song, dance and ceremonies, sacred sites, cultural objects, traditional practices, and documented heritage such as films or recordings.



AUTHOR
Ella Heapthy

The Current Legal Framework

ICIP currently has no formal recognition under Australian law. Whilst intellectual property (IP), consumer protection and heritage legislation provide some protection against unauthorised reproduction or use, these frameworks fail to capture the unique features of ICIP. Copyright law, for instance, protects works created by individual authors and fixed in material form. In contrast, ICIP is communal, often passed down orally and expressed through storytelling, song and ceremony. As instruments of cultural transmission, First Nations artworks and expressions may follow enduring patterns of repetition in accordance with cultural protocols that prioritise accuracy and continuity. As a result, many forms of ICIP fall outside the scope of protection as they do not meet the "originality" requirement of copyright law or the "novelty" threshold for patent rights. Even when protection is available, its time-limited duration does not reflect the perpetual nature of ICIP. For example, copyright protection in Australia generally lasts for seventy years after the death of the author, whereas ICIP is passed down and renewed through countless generations, making the concept of expiry entirely incompatible with its continuous character. This gap leaves much ICIP exposed to misuse and commercial exploitation, highlighting the inadequacies of the current legal framework.

The Impact of Inadequate Protection

Inadequate protection of ICIP has commercial, cultural and social consequences. Economically, it denies First Nations peoples the benefits of their own knowledge and creativity. The 2022 Productivity Commission report revealed that around 75% of "Indigenous style" products on the market are not authored by First Nations peoples, with consumers spending over \$54 million annually on inauthentic goods; funds that could otherwise sustain Indigenous artists, businesses and communities. Yet the harm extends far beyond lost revenue. The unauthorised use of ICIP not only undermines community authority over cultural heritage but weakens intergenerational trust and transmission of knowledge.

Many industries draw on First Nations stories, symbols, and practices in their products and branding. In the absence of clear legal safeguards, this often results in appropriation rather than genuine collaboration. The Kakadu plum (*Terminalia ferdinandiana*) provides a telling example. Used by First Nations communities for millennia as food and

medicine, it became the subject of an international patent application by cosmetics company Mary Kay Inc, claiming novelty in its cosmetic use: Sarah Holcombe and Terri Janke, 'Patenting the Kakadu Plum and the Marjarla Tree: Biodiscovery, Intellectual Property and Indigenous Knowledge' in Matthew Rimmer and Alison McLennan (eds), *Intellectual Property and Emerging Technologies* (Edward Elgar Publishing, 2012) 142, 307.

Indigenous groups and researchers opposed the application, warning it amounted to biopiracy and threatened traditional use. Although the patent application was ultimately withdrawn, the case shows that First Nations peoples are left to challenge claims retrospectively, rather than being protected by frameworks that recognise their authority and guarantee benefit-sharing. Proper regulation could instead enable respectful, commercially viable partnerships that generate income, build technical capacity and safeguard cultural knowledge. It would also give non-Indigenous businesses a clear framework for engaging ethically with ICIP.

The Importance of Standalone ICIP Legislation

Recognising these shortcomings, the Australian Government announced in 2023 through Australia's National Cultural Policy entitled 'Revive', a commitment to establish standalone ICIP legislation. This marks a historic step, as it is the first time that dedicated resources have been directed towards building a comprehensive framework of ICIP protection.

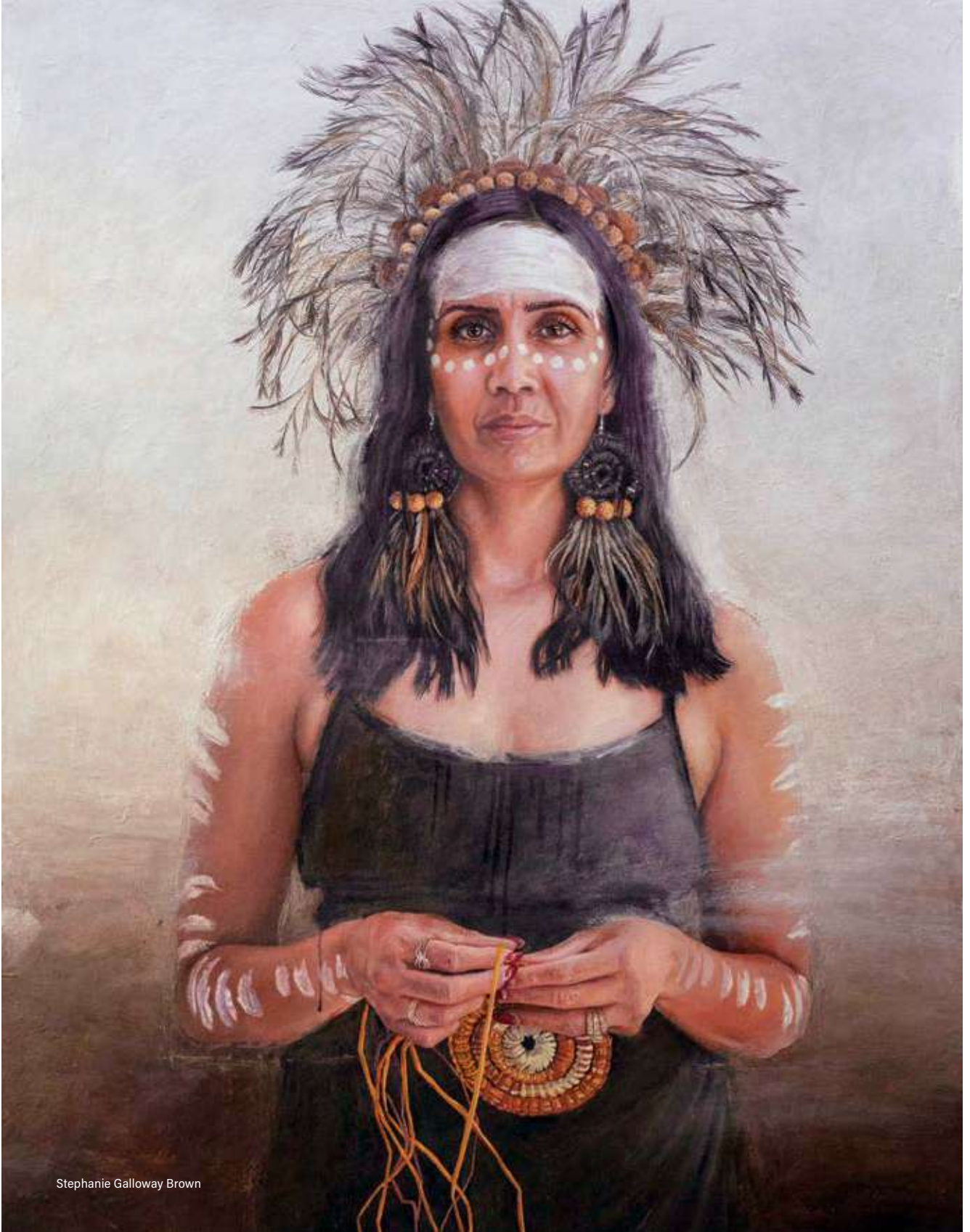
The reform is being led by a specialist team within the Office for the Arts. The approach is staged: the first stage is addressing the widespread sale of fake Aboriginal art, before expanding to broader protections that encompass the full scope of ICIP. National consultation sessions are being held across 38 locations. The government has also convened an advisory group of First Nations experts to guide the design, recognising that any credible reform must be grounded in First Nations expertise and lived experience.

The Expert Working Group is chaired by Dr Terri Janke, a Wuthathi, Yadhagana and Meriam woman whose foundational work has been instrumental in advancing recognition and respect for ICIP in Australia. Reflecting on the importance of standalone legislation, Dr Janke explains:

"In an accelerating technological age, Indigenous knowledge and cultural expressions are increasingly being stolen and used without proper care, consent, or benefit sharing."

Standalone legislation is vital to recognising and protecting Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property. A new law marks a shift from fragmented and insufficient protections to a more holistic framework grounded in respect and self-determination. Through Indigenous-led development, we can embed Indigenous values in law and create pathways for respectful collaboration."

This reform is not just a technical exercise in IP law. Standalone legislation will provide an opportunity to enshrine this recognition within the legal system, affirming that cultural identity is not something that can be commodified, diluted, or misappropriated without consequence. Instead, it acknowledges ICIP as a living expression of identity that deserves protection equal to, and distinct from, Western forms of IP.



Stephanie Galloway Brown

You Have Nothing to Lose but Your Chains

With over 15 years of experience, Dr Nadia Stojanova, Barrister, reflects on how one's identity is shaped as a lawyer and beyond. Nadia's reflections invite seasoned practitioners to thoughtfully re-examine their role in shaping the experiences of junior lawyers - especially during their most vulnerable years.



AUTHOR
Nicole Pereira

The Formative Years

Familial influences play a stark role in shaping one's identity, even when those paths are misaligned. Nadia recalls having studied law with many colleagues who had hated it but had chosen it due to family influence or external pressure. Six years spent pursuing something they loathed, only to end up in jobs they despised. That's a recipe for identity confusion.

The early stages of a legal career are supposed to foster growth, learning and the foundation of one's professional identity. Yet for many junior lawyers, these years are tainted by subtle or overt bullying from peers or management, harassment from authority figures and toxic workplace cultures that expose them to psychosocial hazards.

Nadia recalls countless stories of people who entered the profession full of promise, only to be crushed by senior lawyers who undermined their confidence. Many of them were told they weren't good lawyers. Senior lawyers and partners would look down on them and their work and that knocked their self-esteem around for years. That damage took years to recover from and some never did.

This early professional adversity often collides with a period of personal identity formation. For young people in their early twenties, the transition from student to practitioner is not just about acquiring legal skills - it's about becoming someone. The prestige of the title 'lawyer' often intertwines with a sense of self, especially when starting a career in law. For many junior lawyers, it's the only professional reality they've ever known. So, when bullying and harassment occur during these formative years, it doesn't just damage their self-esteem, but it distorts their sense of self.

'Younger people, in particular, can feel like what they are experiencing is the end of the world,' Nadia explains. In contrast, older practitioners sometimes navigate similar challenges with greater resilience, which is often shaped by years of experience, broader career perspective and the wisdom that comes with age.

It is no surprise then, that there is a significant exodus in the legal industry within the first three to five years. Many enter the field fresh out of university and quickly discover that the day-to-day reality is far from what they imagined. 'For junior practitioners, it can be devastating,' Nadia says. 'They've built their identity around becoming a lawyer, and coming to terms with leaving the profession often requires intense soul-searching'. It's not just a career change - it's an existential reckoning.

Timing, Age and Self-confidence

Nadia entered the legal profession at twenty-three. While she had always felt drawn to the law, particularly the intellectual rigour of litigation, she admits that she didn't feel ready for the bar until the end of her twenties. 'I always thought I would be a writer,' she muses. In fact, her reflective and analytical mindset now gives her the ability to distil complexity and build compelling case theories from both sides of a case.

Nadia's decision to go to the bar wasn't purely about readiness from a technical legal perspective. It was about timing and age. 'At 30, I finally felt ready,' she explains. 'I had developed the internal confidence to stand up against difficult opponents and I felt better able to handle complex matters.' It is common for this inner confidence to come with both age and experience, and it transforms not only how one practices law, but also, how one relates to their identity in the legal profession.

Interestingly, those who enter the legal industry later in life, armed with a rich collection of career and life experiences, often tend to bring with them a stronger sense of self. Having forged their identities outside the legal sphere, they tend to absorb criticism with greater perspective and sidestep the identity crises that younger lawyers frequently encounter. Their confidence doesn't just come from knowing the law, it comes from knowing themselves.

Psychosocial Hazards

Drawing on her academic work, including her PhD research, Nadia sheds light on the insidious impact of psychosocial hazards like bullying and harassment, particularly on our identity. 'Unlike most people assume, victims are not always people who are shy or quiet,' she clarifies. 'Sometimes confident, competent individuals are targeted because they're perceived as a threat by the bully.'

But the common denominator? It isn't personality type, it's entrapment. 'The defining feature of someone being bullied is that they stay in the environment and continue to suffer,' Nadia states. Whether held back by issues such as financial pressures, a fear of starting over, or a deeply ingrained association between self-worth and their job title, many victims remain trapped in toxic workplaces, enduring prolonged psychological harm.

The consequences of long-term exposure to psychosocial hazards are profound, not only psychologically, but physically. Chronic insomnia, anxiety, depression, and gastrointestinal issues are increasingly prevalent. In the most tragic cases, these stressors have led to suicide, a devastating outcome that highlights the urgency of reform in Australian workplaces.

The legal industry is particularly vulnerable to this pattern. The high-pressure work environments, hierarchical structures and competitive dynamics can render suffering invisible, and seeking support, taboo. 'Some people seek help after one incident. Others, after a couple of incidents. But some people never seek help and just endure and suffer in silence for years,' Nadia states.

The Prestige Trap

The law, perhaps more than many professions, carries an enduring aura of prestige and societal endorsement, particularly among older generations who see it as a symbol of status, intellect and societal worth. When paired with the years of rigorous study and the substantial financial investment required to become a lawyer, this reverence can make stepping away from legal practice feel almost unthinkable. 'There's this irony,' Nadia reflects, 'Some people land roles at top-tier firms with enviable titles, yet they're miserable and they feel completely trapped.'

Leaving, for many, is equated with failure. The fear of losing that hard-won prestige or social validation becomes paralysing. 'Some end up sentencing themselves to misery at work for periods that are longer than many prison terms'. Years of relentless dedication to a career or company they secretly despise. 'In the end, they become victims of the culture and of the pressure they place on themselves.'

This sense of entrapment is intensified when a person's identity is fused to their professional status. 'If your whole sense of self is built on being a lawyer, walking away can be very difficult,' she explains.

However, dissatisfaction is not a weakness. It is a signal that you need to change something. 'Frustration is your soul telling you change is needed,' she says.

'For those who have the courage to leave a position, particularly after having built a more secure sense of self, the exit often becomes a gateway to more fulfilling, authentic careers', she reminds us. 'Because you have nothing to lose but your chains.'

Nonetheless, departure from a particular role or the legal profession does not have to signal failure or loss. For some, it becomes a powerful opportunity to rediscover who they are, their core values and reconnect with work that truly resonates with them.

Justice, Healing and Courage

When an individual makes the decision to engage in formal dispute resolution processes after experiencing bullying or harassment in their workplace, their ability to heal and move on is often shaped by how



successful they felt the dispute resolution process was. 'It comes down to whether they felt the dispute resolution process delivered justice or simply became another space in which they were abused,' Nadia explains.

When the dispute resolution process brings genuine accountability, such as through compensation, an apology, or workplace reforms that protects others, it fosters closure. 'Those individuals tend to recover more quickly and move on with a renewed sense of purpose,' she observes. But when the process feels hollow or retraumatising, the psychological impact lingers, and healing takes much longer.

Beyond The Title

Nadia's reflections highlight a truth many legal professionals only come to understand in hindsight: there is more to your identity than the title of 'lawyer'. Your identity is dynamic. It is so much more than just your qualifications, it is also your life experiences, your values and the environments you inhabit. When legal professionals begin to see themselves as more than their credentials, they unlock the power to find pathways and lives that feel genuinely aligned with their soul.

In high-pressure industries like law, recognising the psychosocial hazards embedded in workplace culture and intentionally nurturing your self-worth beyond professional validation is essential for mental health, wellbeing and longevity in the field.

'There are plenty of lawyers out there,' Nadia says, 'but the profession thrives when people are actually passionate about the work they do. That's what serves clients, courts, and judges.' Her words invite us to look beyond the law itself as the problem, and question whether we are showing up as our fullest selves. What the legal world needs, she reminds us, is individuals who have the courage to choose paths that honour their personality, strengths, and genuine aspirations - whether that means staying, shifting, or reinventing altogether.

Beyond the Brief: Cultivating Identity Outside of the Law

When the only version of ourselves is who we are at work, it begs the question, what else is there, and how does this narrow view of our identity affect us?



AUTHOR
Jessica Toomey

A common question that we in the legal profession are faced with is, 'what do you do?'. But why is the answer so often and so plainly, 'I am a lawyer?'. It is a phrase loaded with effort, pride, and often, exhaustion. It is a title we have all worked so hard to claim. The process of becoming a member of the legal profession is highly demanding and can easily become the centre of our identity, leaving little room for the rest of our unique personalities to exist.

What happens when we want to be more than a lawyer, what happens when the job doesn't fulfill every part of us?

The legal profession often glorifies long hours, perfectionism, and emotional detachment. Whilst these traits may serve us professionally, they can also quietly strip away other parts of our identity. Our hobbies, culture, relationships and even just resting can be pushed aside in service of being the best legal representative we can be.

How we become the job

From high school to law school and practical legal training, we spend years focussing on our goal to be a lawyer. From day one, we are taught to be analytical, use critical thinking skills, and to prioritise our study above all else. It has become so easy for us to forget that we are more than just the output that we provide.

Early into the profession we also feel pressure to prove ourselves; to be the last to leave the office, the most reliable and dedicated. It becomes easy for us to believe that being 'all in' is the only pathway to a successful legal career. Society enables the loss of identity to become a reality. We, as lawyers, are viewed as a hardworking profession that is filled with long hours. When our identity becomes inseparable from our employment, the idea of pursuing something else can feel as if it is a form of betrayal. It can almost feel as if there is no room for us to embrace other parts of our identity, other than being a lawyer.



Zuza Zuchowski



Susan O'Doherty



Lori Pensini

The cost of over-identifying with the job

The costs of over-identifying with our role is prevalent in the form of burnout, stress, loneliness, or disconnection. The legal profession has long struggled with wellbeing. In its 2019 Lawyer Wellbeing Report, the Victorian Legal Services Board and Commissioner found that psychological distress and depression levels in lawyers are significantly higher than population norms. Similarly, the International Bar Association reported that one in three barristers believed their work had a negative or extremely negative impact on their wellbeing.

Poor wellbeing in the law presents in many ways - those mentioned above as well as anxiety, insomnia, physical health issues, substance abuse and low levels of autonomy. The contributing factors that lead lawyers to get to a point of such poor wellbeing can include the relentless workload, a culture of perfectionism, billing pressure and a lack of psychological safety. We sometimes hear that lawyers should be able to handle these things, and that stress is simply part of the career.

When we are drowning in pressure in a role with high stakes, there is a tendency to forget work life balance and lose our sense of self. Our relationships with our friends, family and our passions can become a distant memory.

We need to remember that we are more than just our email signature and the suit we wear.

Find what fills your cup

Reclaiming our identity outside of the law is a necessity that allows us to return to our work more grounded, more human and whole.

We can rediscover joy by taking control of our lives outside of the profession and recalling who we truly are. This can be done through a creative outlet - like writing, painting, baking or dancing. Others may value movement and exercise such as running, yoga or a social sport. For many, cultural and spiritual identity provides grounding through language, ritual, food, and family.

These passions aren't extracurricular, they are essential. They remind us that we are more important than our inbox, and they help us clear our mind. They help us process emotion, connect with others, and return to our work more energised and whole.



Finding balance with Tahlia Ferrari

As a Barrister practicing predominantly in family law, Tahlia Ferrari is committed to guiding families through the legal system with empathy and clarity. She provides skilled and compassionate advocacy in complex parenting and property matters, helping clients find practical, tailored solutions. Tahlia was recognised in the Lawyers Weekly, Women in Law Awards in 2023 and 2024 and in the Australian Law Awards in 2024 and 2025, as a finalist for the award of Barrister of The Year.

Tahlia acknowledges that there have been times when her identity was consumed by work. Early in her career, she approached burnout, a moment that required her to step back and seek support. Accessing therapy, including sessions offered through the Victorian Bar, helped Tahlia recognise the importance of protecting her wellbeing and building an identity beyond the law.

'If you don't have your health, you don't have anything,' she reflects. For Tahlia, balance is not accidental but intentional. She makes space for yoga, running, meditation, and time with her family and close friends. These practices, alongside firm boundaries, remind her that while she can advocate for her clients, she is not responsible for the choices that brought them to her.

Tahlia has seen first-hand how the profession can glorify self-sacrifice, particularly in environments where working the longest hours is treated as a badge of honour. By challenging that culture, she has been able to fully embrace her roles outside the law; a mother of two, a wife and a friend. Rather than detracting from her practice, Tahlia believes these identities make her a stronger, more empathetic advocate, 'Experiencing life outside of the courtroom makes me more well-rounded and helps me connect with people from all walks of life.'

Tahlia's message to younger lawyers is clear: you are so much more than your job.

'Protect your interests outside of the law and invest in friendships beyond the profession. 'When you're sick or struggling, it's your family and friends who give you the support you need' she says. Taking time for yourself is not an indulgence, it's essential: 'You'll be the best version of yourself if you take time out to sharpen the pencil.' Looking back, she adds one reminder she wishes she had known sooner: 'Be kinder and gentler on yourself — this career is not a sprint, it's a marathon.'

Don't lose yourself

Law is what we do, but it isn't all we are.

If it feels as if you have lost parts of your identity along your career path, consider this your invitation to return. Return to the book you never finished. The friendship you want to rebuild. The part of you that once danced, wrote, explored and rested. That part of you still matters.

When we take our identity seriously, beyond the brief, we embrace and thrive not in only our work, but our lives.



Because of, Not Despite: Identity and Belonging as a Female Lawyer

Whether continuing a family legacy or forging a new path, women entering the legal profession bring unique perspectives, shaping the industry as much as they are shaped by it themselves.



AUTHOR
Joanne Abouzaki

Radha Govil, Deputy Director of the Peter McMullen Centre on Statelessness (PMCS) has had a long and diverse legal career. Radha joined the PMCS in 2023 and teaches a Law Master's subject on Statelessness, Citizenship, and Legal Identity, while focusing the rest of her time on research-informed policy engagement work. Prior to joining the Centre, Radha worked at the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Headquarters in Switzerland and as a lawyer at Mallesons Stephen Jaques (now King Wood & Mallesons).

Building blocks for a legal identity

Sometimes we choose the law and other times, the law chooses us. For Radha, it was a bit of both. Reflecting on what drew her to the law, Radha recalls two formative moments from her childhood.

The first moment that ignited an interest in the law was learning about the apartheid-era in South Africa in high school. As a young girl,

Radha was deeply affected by the brutality and injustice of the regime. She recalls being shocked by the extent of the oppression and the way human beings could treat one another. She was equally inspired by the global solidarity movement led by Nelson Mandela and others, proving that individuals could stand up to injustice.

The second formative moment came during a family rafting trip along the Franklin River in Tasmania. Radha learned the river had been the site of one of Australia's most significant environmental protests in the 1980s. The protest centred upon plans to dam the river for hydroelectric power, and while she understood the need for energy, Radha also came to appreciate the intrinsic value of preservation of wilderness.

Together, these experiences taught her a powerful lesson: that the law is one of the strongest tools we have to help correct injustice.



Baby Guerilla



Jennifer Rosenell

Strength beyond the courtroom: lessons from home

For some women entering the legal profession, there exists a kind of invisible motivator - not only pursuing the degree for themselves but also carrying the hopes and sacrifices of their families.

There is often a desire to honour the efforts of parents, particularly those whose own opportunities were limited and who worked tirelessly to provide their children with a better future. Radha reflects on this dynamic but emphasises that she was determined to pursue her passions for law because of her circumstances, not despite them.

Radha acknowledges her parents' sacrifices in migrating to Australia, and the challenges they faced in adapting to a new country. She expresses that she wanted to make her parents proud, but that this was never the motivation to become the first female lawyer in her family. Radha reflects, 'I knew that if I just did my best and tried to do really well in whatever I did, they would be proud of me.'

For Radha, being the first woman in her family to enter the legal profession was not considered particularly extraordinary. Radha drew inspiration from the strong women in her family, particularly her mother, whom she describes as a 'rebel' for carving her own career path and not giving in to the norms expected of her. Radha was inspired by her mother's commitment to her own education and to enriching access to education in India. Radha's reflections highlight how change is modelled, and how strong women, in any context, can be enduring role models.

Navigating new spaces in the legal world and imposter syndrome

Many law students struggle with imposter syndrome, but Radha does not believe that the popularised term accurately describes how she felt during this period. Instead, she recalls a different experience, feeling 'constantly behind the eight-ball' or like a 'fish out of water.' Much of what she was learning, whether about Clerkships or the next steps she needed to progress her career, felt like stepping into an unknown void. At the time, Radha had no direct connections within the legal profession - a situation that many law students can relate to. Despite the uncertainty, Radha found that if she gave things a go and did her best - even if she failed - she would have at least learned from the experience and would understand how to move forward.

Although she did not always feel confident, going through the process of figuring things out, ultimately strengthened her confidence. Rather than dwelling on whether she belonged in the legal world, Radha focused on doing all that she could to understand the best way to get a job done. A compelling reflection from Radha is that while people may come from different circumstances, the one thing a person can rely on is hard work, which can help build self-confidence and self-reliance.

Radha explains how her various roles undoubtedly shaped her identity as a woman in the law. One of her first roles, volunteering at a community legal centre which focused on the rights of women in prison, shaped her desire to act as an advocate for human rights. In that role she was motivated to understand why women from certain communities are overrepresented in jail. She was also exposed to structural violence and discrimination for the first time. Radha's feminist lens was further developed during her time at UNHCR. While the workforce was largely made up of women at the technical level, leadership positions were still largely held by men.

Identity and belonging as an ongoing experiment

Law students are often keen to decide on the area of law they will pursue in order to feel a sense of belonging in that space. Radha's journey emphasises the importance of an evolving and diverse legal career.

Radha recalls how, as a student, she would panic about the next steps in her career, believing that Clerkships were the only path to becoming a successful lawyer. Reflecting on the pressure placed on securing Clerkships or Graduate roles at prestigious firms, Radha notes that one important question she had forgotten to ask herself was 'What am I actually going to be doing there?'. While acknowledging the practical need to earn a living, her advice to graduating students is that there are many ways to enter and thrive within the legal profession. She encourages these students to follow what truly drives them, the kind of work that makes them feel energised and excited to show up each day.

Now in her third decade of her legal career, Radha observes that those who find longevity in their roles are often those who have stayed connected to their interests and found ways to integrate their passions into their work. Today, Radha describes her current role at the PMCS as one she 'really, really loves' and that continues to get her fired up.

Careers are long, and pathways to a fruitful legal career extend beyond a Clerkship. While the experience of being a woman in the law can certainly vary, what should not be undermined is that women from all walks of life bring rich, unique, and important insight to the legal profession and beyond.



Kirithana Selvaraj



The Identity of the Law and its Perception: Insights from Jaclyn Masters & Candice Jackson

The identity of the law is complex and layered. The legal profession comprises diverse individuals who all share a common foundation of legal knowledge. However, our individual experiences inevitably shape how we perceive and understand the law itself.



AUTHOR
Amelia Daou

Jaclyn Masters, Senior Legal Counsel at GeelongPort and Candice Jackson, a Barrister practicing in Criminal, Public and Administrative Law, share how their perceptions of the law have evolved during their time in practice and how they identify with the law. Their individual reflections showcase two unique experiences and insightful perspectives on the profession.

Jaclyn Masters



In an evolving system of justice, societal values should be reflected in legislation. Yet the rapid pace of change in today's world means that legal regulation is often lagging behind, or at best, keeping pace.

Jaclyn defines the law as being so much more than 'black letter' legislation. Laws are the instrument of society that maintain control and order. Jaclyn's initial perception of the law in private practice was clear-cut and literal, with a strong focus on contracts and case law. Working as a construction lawyer, Jaclyn dealt with disputes which gave her exposure to a very specialist area of the law. Transitioning into her role in-house, Jaclyn was faced with a broader range of legal and commercial issues in different areas of law that required a more flexible and multidisciplinary approach. This shift has diversified Jaclyn's understanding of the law, beyond its legislative core.

The law is rarely ahead of, or driving, social values. Cybersecurity, for example, was only recently addressed through legislation. The delay in updating legislation to keep up with the rapid speed of technological development does not assist the perception of the law as being outdated. Jaclyn reflects on how the pace of change in areas like this can challenge the effectiveness of our legal system.

Jaclyn also observes the significant impact of social media on the public's perception of the law. Social media can improve accessibility of the law, yet it runs the risk of contributing to the spreading of misinformation. Public access

to legal information has been revolutionised through social media, with content creators promoting 'legal education' and career options for law graduates beyond Big Law on Tik Tok and Instagram. Jaclyn explains how this has improved accessibility of the law, making it less of an ivory tower profession. Members of the public are empowered to deepen their understanding about their rights and Australia's legal processes. Provided that content is accurate and relevant, social media will enable individuals without formal legal education to access and understand the law to a greater extent.

Jaclyn sees how the identity of the law is also evolving in response to artificial intelligence (AI), noting the unprecedented pace of change and its potential impact on legal practice. Some perceive the use of AI in legal work as a threat to the law's integrity and identity, as the law is a people centric profession. Jaclyn instead sees the opportunities for AI in legal practice, noting while it is unlikely to replace lawyers, it is better seen as a complement to the offering that lawyers bring to their work. AI is also increasing the opportunities for lawyers to embrace more complex work earlier in their careers, while more repetitive and administrative tasks can be automated.

Candice Jackson



Candice defines the law as a dynamic and nuanced framework that seeks to safeguard human rights, commercial rights and uphold societal order, as both a mirror of current values and a guide for future behaviour. When functioning effectively, the law evolves to reflect changing values and societal norms, which requires consistent and rigorous scrutiny to stay on course.



The law shapes society's values by codifying the evolving priorities expressed through the elected members of Parliament. In a democratic society the laws passed by Parliament will not reflect the values of all Australians. It is Candice's view that Parliament increasingly passes laws that are seemingly less forgiving and more punitive, with a focus on deterrence and community protection. This, coupled with a growing rigidity amongst those enforcing the law, has challenged her belief in the system's flexibility and humanity. However, these factors have deepened Candice's commitment to fearless advocacy, recognizing that our adversarial system and fairness in the law is often dependent on those who represent litigants.

Candice also believes that the media has extraordinary power in shaping public opinion on the law. The media has a responsibility to report accurately and fairly and must resist the temptation of sensationalized reporting. Candice suggests that 'the law is not a creature of emotion, yet the way people perceive the law can be coloured by their emotional response to how matters are reported.'

In the face of modern challenges, Candice echoes the views expressed by Jaclyn and believes that the profession is increasingly being called upon to evolve in response to advances in technology and demands for greater

cultural representation. In an attempt for the law to evolve in response to these demands, law makers must invest in community outreach to create legislation that reflects the modern values of Australians.

Candice explains how the integrity of the law can be undermined when legislation is rushed through Parliament in response to significant issues, without consulting appropriate stakeholders. When law making becomes reactionary it erodes public confidence and the safeguards it seeks to protect. To strengthen the veracity of newly introduced laws, Candice promotes the use of meaningful community engagement and rigorous scrutiny, to ensure that the real-world impacts of legislation align with society's values.

As shown by Jaclyn and Candice's personal reflections, our perception of the law is everchanging. Both women shared a literal interpretation of the law in the beginning of their careers, which has become more dynamic and nuanced as their careers progress. While their professional journeys are different, they share concerns about the significant impact of modern media as well as legislative reform on the opinions of the profession.

Ultimately, their reflections remind us how the law's identity is subjective and deeply personal; shaped by our work, our values and the world around us.

Sponsor

Australian Migration Lawyers

Do you think that the legal profession has its own identity, and what do you think are the strengths and weaknesses associated with it?

The legal profession's identity is built on analytical rigour and a commitment to justice. While these are strengths, a key weakness can be an over-reliance on technical approaches that neglect the human complexities of a case.

My identity as a Chinese Australian medical graduate and lawyer has shown me this firsthand. My dual background in medicine and law allows me to combine rigorous legal analysis with genuine empathy and cultural understanding. This is crucial in immigration practice, where a client's personal circumstances are as important as the legislative framework.

Ultimately, bringing compassion and interdisciplinary knowledge into legal practice does not compromise professional standards; it enhances them and leads to more just outcomes.

How does your workplace implement identity?

Our firm treats identity as a core strength. We integrate this by hiring multilingual lawyers from diverse backgrounds and fostering a culture where they can bring their whole selves to work. This is not just a value, but a practical strategy for achieving better client outcomes.

For instance, my background as a medical graduate directly led to the creation of our specialised health and medical practice. This demonstrates our commitment to using unique professional and cultural expertise to serve vulnerable clients more effectively. Our case strategies reflect this holistic approach, blending legal expertise with the empathy needed to tell compelling human stories.

How do you think that as a profession, we can continue to promote and embrace identity?

To truly embrace identity, the legal profession must redefine what constitutes legal excellence. We need to move beyond traditional metrics and actively value the diverse perspectives that professionals from different cultural and disciplinary backgrounds bring.

This means creating clear pathways into law for career-changers, prioritising cultural competency in legal education, and challenging outdated archetypes of a 'good lawyer.'

Leadership in our firms and institutions must reflect the diverse, multicultural society we serve.

Success should be measured not only by technical skill but by our ability to serve all Australians effectively. The future of our profession depends on recognising that both empathy and cultural insight are indispensable legal assets.



AUTHOR

Dr Cindy Zhao, Partner and Legal Practice Director

Sponsor

Brave Legal

Could you provide an example where your identity impacted an important decision or event in your career?

My identity as a parent, partner, and someone committed to helping others and showing we can deliver legal services differently meant I created a firm where I could value all of these factors. I wanted to create an environment where people who had similar values could thrive and see the value in lawyering differently. And I wanted a home to thrive also. And be myself.

Do you think that the legal profession has its own identity, and what do you think are the strengths and weaknesses associated with it?

In the years since I started as a graduate, and the years since Brave Legal started, the legal profession's identity has changed in that it has become more diverse – but I believe that the mainstream or stereotypical identity of the profession remains much as it was when I started. I remain unconvinced that BigLaw is willing to flex and mould to a 2025 identity such that parents are given real support before, during and after leave – or that varied experiences are offered to ensure longevity in the law – or that the challenges of the sandwich generation are recognised (those that care for young children and ageing parents). It is not always straight-forward or easy for firm owners to think about the non-legal identities of their team – and it can be financially difficult to accommodate everything – but we must try so that people can truly bring their whole selves to work – and their whole selves are supported.

How does your workplace implement identity?

We recognise identity and the differences in identity through recognising that people work, live and manage their work differently. Daily, we embrace different work locations, working styles, offer a mix of individual work and collaboration and constantly search for wellbeing initiatives to assist our team to manage the heaviness of our work. We don't all 'recover' from our work in the same way. On the day I write this, two of our team are working remotely from Europe and the rest of the team is otherwise at home and planning an individual winter wellness initiative.



AUTHOR

Bree Knoester, Principal Lawyer and Founder

Law Arts

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Marina Finlay

Book Review

The Path to Self-Love, Ruby Dhal

AUTHOR

Book review by Nicole Pereira



In a world driven by endless to-do lists, back-to-back meetings, and the constant pressure to make high-stakes decisions, Ruby Dhal's 'The Path to Self-Love' offers something quite revolutionary: an invitation to pause, reflect, and return to our core selves, to realign with what truly nourishes us. The author invites us to seek fulfillment beyond our awards and credentials, and to rediscover an authentic happiness – one that is not determined by external validation nor the outer world.

Ruby shows readers how to slow down, turn inward, and begin the journey of healing- no matter where they are standing in life. 'When you love yourself, you owe it to yourself to make certain positive changes that contribute to your mental, emotional and physical wellbeing', she writes, reminding us that self-love is neither passive nor performative, but an active practice of self-stewardship.

Through evocative poetry, personal anecdotes, and guided journaling exercises, Ruby encourages readers to examine their personal and professional boundaries and navigate the nuances of healthy and unhealthy relationships. She encourages us to resist the habit of self-comparison – particularly, in the age of social media saturation, where curated perfection and idealised realities often distort our sense of self.

Ruby reminds us that the only constant in life is change. 'Nothing lasts forever... whatever it is you're stressing about, it will pass,' she writes, offering a calm and grounding perspective. Her words encourage us to embrace the present because it is all we really have, and to reconnect with our inner child - the often-silenced source of our joy, authenticity, and emotional clarity. If you've achieved every traditional milestone - a successful career, a beautiful home, a luxury car and still feel an inexplicable emptiness, Ruby suggests it may be because we've spent so long fulfilling society's script for success that we've forgotten to listen to what our soul quietly seeks. The path to self-love, she argues, is not paved by accolades or acquisitions, but with the intentional act of honouring the truths that dwell deep within.

For those seeking a thoughtful reconnection with their inner compass, Ruby's work provides profound insights and guidance. 'The Path to Self-Love' is a quiet companion for lawyers and professionals alike who are ready to pause, reflect and begin a more intentional journey toward personal alignment.

Book Review

The Nightingale, Kristin Hannah

AUTHOR

Book review by Andree Pianta



This remarkable historical fiction novel opens in 1995 with Viann Rossignol discovering wartime memorabilia in her trunk, immediately drawing the reader's attention to a powerful meditation on memory and identity.

The story then transports us back to World War II in France, following Viann's life in the countryside during the German invasion, her complex relationship with her father, and the parallel journey of her sister Isabelle through her own wartime adventures and experiences.

The Nightingale explores how extreme circumstances force individuals to confront their core identity and values. Viann's character serves as a masterclass in moral complexity, particularly evident in pivotal moments like when she must decide whether to write the names of Jewish staff on paper for the Nazi Germans at the school. This scene crystallises the novel's central theme: the devastating tension between survival and moral integrity. Viann's internal struggle after complying with the Nazis' demands, her overwhelming shame at betraying what she believed defined her as 'a good friend and person' reveals how identity becomes both fragile and essential during wartime.

Kristin skilfully portrays how Viann questions not just her actions, but her fundamental understanding of who she is when those actions contradict her deepest values. This psychological realism elevates the novel beyond a historical narrative into a profound exploration of human nature under extreme duress. The relationship dynamics between Viann and her father, between the sisters, and within the broader community, provide intimate windows into how war reshapes every human connection. Through these personal relationships, the novel illustrates how identity is not formed in isolation but through our connections to others and our responses to moral challenges.

This novel demonstrates that heroism isn't about grand gestures but about the countless small moments when we choose who we want to be. Viann's journey from shame to self-recognition demonstrates that our true identity emerges not from our intentions but from how we respond when those intentions are tested by impossible circumstances. The seamless weaving between 1995 and the war years reinforces the lasting impact of these identity-defining moments, suggesting that who we become in our darkest hours shapes us for life.

The Nightingale is historical fiction at its finest, using the past to illuminate timeless questions about human nature, moral courage, and the price of remaining true to ourselves when the stakes couldn't be higher.





Lebanese Lamb and Beef Kafta

As a Lebanese Australian, a large part of my upbringing and culture is the food we indulge in. Food forms a large part of our identity as Lebanese Australians.

AUTHOR
Amelia Daou

My teta (or my grandma for the English readers) has been the matriarch of the family as she continuously brings us together with great tasting food. Being hospitable and generous is valued in our culture and food is the way we show our love.

My teta moved to a new country without knowing the language or culture and made a life for her family. She lived in a small village in the mountains of Lebanon, where girls were mostly uneducated, however, she utilised her cooking skills. After moving to Australia, my grandparents had milk bars and shops where they would prepare and sell traditional Lebanese food.

I grew up with a love of food that some would say I inherited from my culture. My grandparents immigrated to Australia and food was their way of making a life for themselves.

Before each meal we would traditionally drink Mati which is similar to a green tea, and we would finish each meal with Arabic coffee which is served black.

Despite the challenges that my grandparents faced when moving to Australia, their strength and persistence is something that I admire. My grandparents supported me to study, especially my teta who would always encourage me to do my homework and at times would alleviate me of house chores to go and study. After I would come home from a long day at university or work my teta would always have food made for me.

This recipe for Kafta- (made for sharing) is inspired and for my teta.

Ingredients

- 500g minced lamb
- 500g minced beef
- 1 bunch parsley (finely chopped)
- 1 brown onion, (finely grated)
- 1 tablespoon of butter (melted)
- 1 teaspoon of salt and pepper
- 1 teaspoon fine cinnamon
- 3 white potatoes (peeled and cut into 4ths)
- 1 tin chopped tomatoes
- 1 tablespoon tomato paste
- 1 cup of basmati rice, washed
- 1 tablespoon butter
- ¼ cup of vermicelli egg noodles
- 1 teaspoon vegetable oil
- 1 teaspoon Vegeta

Method

1. Combine the minced lamb and beef into a bowl.
2. Add the parsley and brown onion to the same bowl.
3. Add salt and pepper, olive oil, butter and cinnamon to the bowl.
4. After all the ingredients are added, mix together with your hands.
5. Cook half the amount of potatoes in salt and oil in a large pot on medium heat.
6. Cook the potatoes until slightly browned then add the next half of the potatoes to the pot for browning.
7. Take out the potatoes from the pot and put them to the side.
8. Add the half of the Kafta balls into the pot and cook until browned on medium heat.
9. Add remaining Kafta; after it is browned, add all the potatoes and kafta back into the pot.
10. Add the tin of chopped tomatoes, the tomato paste and a tomato tin full of water.
11. Leave to simmer on low heat for 15-30 minutes and then close the heat.

Rolling the Kafta

- Grab some of the meat mixture and roll into a ball shape to the size of your liking.
- A pro tip: use a small bowl of water to rinse the excess meat off your hands after rolling each meatball.
- After all the meat mixture is in ball form place on a separate plate, ready for cooking.

Cooking the rice

- Add 1 tablespoon butter and cook the noodles until brown in a small pot.
- Add the rice to the pot and then stir after adding 1 teaspoon of salt and 1 teaspoon of Vegeta.
- For every cup of rice, you add 2 cups of water and then let it cook for 15 minutes start on a high heat and then lower the heat when the water starts to bubble.

Then serve, Kafta is traditionally eaten with rice. Yalla! Enjoy!

RBG - Of Many, One: A powerful portrait of law, legacy and identity



Suzie Miller's 'RBG: Of Many, One' is a witty and moving one-woman show that brings the formidable Ruth Bader Ginsburg to life with nuance and emotional depth.

AUTHOR

Review by Bridget Gertz

Heather Mitchell tells the story of Ruth Bader Ginsburg with agility and authority, sharing the immeasurable impact of one woman on the law and women's rights. Miller positions Ruth Bader Ginsburg's Jewish, female, and working-class background as central to her jurisprudence, not incidental to it, demonstrating how identity can be both the source and subject of legal change. From her early struggles as one of the smartest, but only female law graduates, to her seminal sex discrimination advocacy and refusal to retire under Obama, Ruth Bader Ginsburg's story reminds us how the law is inseparable from the identity of its interpreters, even at the highest level.

There wasn't a moment to blink in this 90-minute monologue. Mitchell's ability to embody Ruth Bader Ginsburg as a keen young lawyer, to an unrelenting Supreme Court justice is remarkable. Not to mention her precision in taking on the voices of both Trump and Obama.

RBG is a timely and stirring exploration of the uneasy balance between personal identity and institutional authority and a fitting homage to the legacy of a woman who never stopped fighting for both. Suzie Miller's background in law deems her a powerful and captivating playwright – RBG is a must see, directed by Priscilla Jackman.



Sassy Park



Natasha Ber

Committees and Reports

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Jodi Lewis

Sponsorship Report

VWL sponsors provide the invigoration needed to create our innovative future. VWL would like to thank every one of our sponsors for their support in 2025:

- Allens
- Australian Migration Lawyers
- Brave Legal
- Clayton Utz
- The College of Law
- Coulter Legal
- Foley's List
- Gatehouse Legal Recruitment
- Justitia Lawyers and Consultants
- K&L Gates
- KHQ Lawyers
- List G Barristers
- Maddocks
- Svensons Barristers
- Victorian Government Solicitor's Office

VWL strives to connect with our community, providing relevant and thought-provoking events that resonate with the emerging needs of women in the legal profession. The invaluable support of our sponsors makes it possible to hold meaningful events and to advocate for the empowerment of women lawyers.

In 2025, VWL provided a vibrant forum for lawyers from a diverse range of backgrounds and practice to come together, contribute, learn and grow. We are delighted to celebrate another successful year with our sponsors and look forward to continuing the conversation and trajectory of ideas into 2026.

AUTHOR

Isabella Armao and Natalie Plumstead, Sponsorship Officers



Ashlee Bucholtz

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

Role

The Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) Committee champions the rights of, and promotes equality and opportunities for, lawyers who identify as (but not limited to):

- Culturally and linguistically diverse;
- First Nations;
- Having a disability;
- LGBTQIA+.

2025 Achievements/highlights

VWL's 2025 theme of Identity is at the core of the work the DEI Committee does. It is apt then, that the DEI committee proudly ran three very different events which created a safe space for the broad group of lawyers with diverse identities that we represent.

In August, the DEI Committee, supported by College of Law hosted a panel discussion that dived into practical tips on how to implement effective DEI policies in the workplace. The discussion addressed ways to get leadership buy-in, how to integrate DEI policies at an organisational level and the strategies or trends arising in the DEI space.

Next, in September, the DEI Committee collaborated with Pride in Law, generously sponsored by Svensons Barristers, to hold a Pride themed Trivia Night. Celebrating a night of colourful queerness as well as proud visibility to challenge attendees' knowledge of LGBTQIA+ icons and milestones in the law.

Finally, in November, the DEI Committee, alongside our sponsor Allens, will host a speed networking event for diverse people in the law. It will be a night of structured networking to provide a space for diverse people to connect in a meaningful way.

Special Mentions

A sincere thanks to our committee members for navigating a space that asks a lot from them on a personal level, as people with diverse identities themselves.

Looking Ahead to 2026

It's not news to anyone that the DEI space is navigating challenging times. From negative comments to budget cuts, we are facing struggles not just in policy and perception, but also in energy and resilience.

Maybe some of you have felt that the world seems to be turning sharply against values many of us believed were becoming foundational. The DEI Committee perseveres because we know how important this work is, and we are committed to it. We keep showing up because this work matters.

The DEI Committee will continue to meaningfully engage with, and actively contribute to, the DEI space and strengthen its relationship with other diversity legal associations.

AUTHOR

Felicia Leong and Nicole Teh, Co-Chairs

Committee

Justice

Role

The Justice Committee has continued its mission to promote access to justice and legal literacy for women across Victoria.

2025 Achievements/highlights

In 2025, the Justice Committee hosted a successful panel discussion at KHQ Lawyers, focused on strengthening financial literacy and securing better financial futures for Australian women. The event featured expert speakers Diana Dimitrov, Partner, William Buck and Lana Davey, Principal Solicitor, KHQ Lawyers. Jocelyn Chong, Director, Seed to Sequoia spoke as moderator. All of the speakers shared practical insights on budgeting, superannuation, and informed financial decision-making. The panel also addressed systemic barriers to financial independence and encouraged attendees to seek professional financial advice and consider future planning and goals.

Looking Ahead to 2026

In addition, the Justice Committee has commenced preparatory work on a report examining bail law reform in Victoria, with a particular focus on its impact on women and marginalised communities.

The report will analyse recent legislative changes, highlight gaps in current policy, and consider any recommendations to ensure a more equitable and just bail system. The final publication is expected to be released in mid-2026 and will serve as a valuable resource for policymakers, legal professionals, and advocacy groups.

Special Mentions

We thank our members, speakers, and sponsors for their continued support and engagement. In particular, we thank the Justice Committee members for their hard work and dedication this year.

AUTHOR

Natalia Zivcic and Zefy Souvlakis, Co-Chairs



Nicola Mason

Sponsor

Coulter Legal

What does identity mean to you and why do you think it is important?

Identity is a combination of the perceptions and projections of who we are, how we see ourselves, how the world sees us, where we have been, and where we are going (or trying our very best to go). Identity makes up the lens through which we navigate ourselves and the world, and through which the world sees us.

Identity is important because it is inherent and essential to every person and thing. Without a sense of identity, we cannot communicate in our own voice, make choices that reflect our values, find likeminded individuals, or empathise with our broader community.

Do you think that the legal profession has its own identity, and what do you think are the strengths and weaknesses associated with it?

The identity of the legal profession is interpreted uniquely by each person. Perceptions of the legal profession are informed by individual experiences and engagement with the legal system, the media they consume, the stories they hear, and their preconceived notions of those who administer the law. These collective and individual views inform the widespread perception of the legal profession.

To me, the identity of the legal profession is one of immense privilege; privilege to obtain a legal education, to advocate for our clients, to ask the hard questions, to contribute to justice and equity. And there is strength and weakness within this identity depending on how that privilege is wielded. There is capacity for those within our profession to act unethically, as some unfortunately do. But there too is dedication to the law and the imperfect system through which it is upheld, as well as a sense of connection and community with those who share in its administration.

How does your workplace implement identity?

Coulter Legal promotes the expression of individual identity through advocacy for our clients, our people, and our community – these are the values which underpin how we operate. We support our people in enriching their identities by encouraging community engagement, offering flexibility to meet responsibilities beyond work, and celebrating individuality. This is supported by our Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee, which was formed to ensure that our people are empowered, and encouraged to be their best and most unique selves, and can thrive in the workplace.



AUTHOR

Ember Rota, Lawyer

Sponsor

Gatehouse Legal

What does identity mean to you and why do you think it is important?

To me, identity is a mix of our values, experiences, cultural background, and beliefs. It shapes how we lead, respond to challenges, and relate to others. In a people-focused industry like recruitment, especially in the legal profession, identity is essential for building trust.

When you are confident in who you are, you lead with authenticity. You are not trying to be someone else, so your connections with others feel real. I believe identity gives us clarity, a stronger sense of purpose, and makes the work we do more meaningful.

What do you think about your identity has helped you get where you are today?

My identity has shaped how I lead and make decisions. Coming from a corporate background and being trained as a Chartered Accountant gave me a strong foundation in commercial thinking, discipline, and problem solving.

Just as important is my identity as a woman, a mum, and someone who values empathy and human connection. That perspective has helped me build something different at Gatehouse, where high performance and people focus go hand in hand.

I have always backed people's potential even when it was not obvious on paper, and I have never been afraid to try a different approach. That mindset has allowed me to grow a business I am incredibly proud of.

How does your workplace implement identity?

At Gatehouse, identity is part of our daily approach. We lead with understanding, recognising that every team member has different motivators, communication styles, and ways of working.

Some people thrive with structure; others need more flexibility. Some want regular feedback, others prefer space. We adapt and check in regularly to ensure people feel supported both professionally and personally.

We also celebrate more than just results. We recognise how people contribute to the team culture, how they live our values, and how they grow. There is no pressure to fit a certain mould. We value uniqueness.

By supporting people as individuals, we create an environment where they can do their best work while being true to who they are.



AUTHOR
Louise Hvala, CEO

Committee

Outreach

Role

The Outreach Committee works to ensure that women lawyers all across Victoria have opportunities to participate in networking, learning and development opportunities irrespective of their practice location.

2025 Achievements / Highlights

In 2025 the Outreach Committee worked with VWL's goal to enhance awareness of women's contribution to the practice, and development of the law through the Wimmera Law Association Annual Professional Development Day.

Committee members worked with the Wimmera Law Association and Meldrum's List to bring a number of esteemed speakers to the region to present to the North-Western district of Victoria.

Special Mentions

Co-Chairs Bridget and Samantha would like to express our gratitude to the committee members Bridgid Mallia, Cassandra Hurley, Eve Foster, Jordan Gilmore and Sarah Younan for their contributions in 2025. We would also like to acknowledge outgoing Co-Chair Annabelle Ballard for her contribution to the Committee.

Looking Ahead to 2026

The Outreach Committee are working hard behind the scenes to organise our next event aimed at offering networking opportunities to women lawyers in the Goulburn Valley and North-East region. We are also looking at expanding to hosting online events in 2026 so that practitioners from all corners of the state can come together for professional development.

AUTHOR

Samantha Owen and Bridget Coutt, Co-Chairs



Anna Weston

Committee

Work Practices

Role

The Work Practices Committee addresses employment practices that impact women lawyers. Our primary focus for 2025 was to bring two keystone events to our members and guests - Tough Talks and Coming to the Bar.

2025 Achievements/Highlights

The hugely successful interactive panel event, Tough Talks, was showcased in Geelong with thanks to event sponsor, Coulter Legal. We had a great turnout at the Sawyers Arm Tavern with an incredible panel who shared their stories with inspiring vulnerability. This event continues to provide a valuable platform for attendees to listen, engage and share their workplace experiences.

Coming to the (Vic) Bar event was held in the Oxen Dixon Chambers, with thanks to our event sponsor, Svenson Barristers. With changes to the bar exam introduced in 2025 we were fortunate to have one of the chief examiners as a panellist. Our panellists shared their own pathways to the bar, including preparation for the exams whilst working full time, how to approach mentors, chambers and what their journey has entailed since coming to the bar. An inspiring event for those interested in a career at the bar.

Special Mentions

We extend our heartfelt thanks to all the speakers who contributed their time, insight and expertise to our events this year. The honesty and openness greatly enhanced the success and inspiration of these gatherings.

Committee member Sapphire Parsons continued to work with Women's Legal Service Victoria throughout the year, with the launch of the Starts with Us Framework to eliminate harassment and violence against women in the workplace.

Our gratitude extends to the Work Practices Committee members for their contributions and support throughout the year. Special recognition to our co-chairs, Julia and Anupama, committee members Sapphire Parsons, Von Angeles, Clare McIntosh, Meg Janssen, Shelvi Shanmugam, Claudia Lynch and Deborah Hann.

AUTHOR

Julia Eastoe and Anupama Baker, Co-Chairs



Robyn Rich

Committee

Women in the Public Sector

Role

The Women in the Public Sector (**WiPS**) Committee fosters opportunities to participate in learning and development, engagement with the broader legal community, and to explore topics impacting women in the public sector.

2025 Achievements/Highlights

The WiPS Committee has continued growing and continues to embody its goal to foster opportunities for engagement for all lawyers in the public sector.

In October, WiPS Committee hosted a career pathway panel event for public sector lawyers, which offered an opportunity to share experiences, provide career advice, and foster connections within the legal community.

The WiPS Committee expresses its gratitude to the College of Law and Victorian Government Solicitor's Office for supporting our events in 2025.

Special Mentions

The WiPS Committee expresses its sincere gratitude to our wonderful committee members - Eugenie Chung, Madeleine Sullivan, Mahi Joshi, Natalie Plumstead, Simran Kaur, Olivia Williams, Anna Filing, Alexandra Lioudvigova, Arabella Buzzard, Rachel Matulis, and Estefany Jimenez - for their contributions throughout 2025 and in preceding years.

Looking Ahead to 2026

The WiPS Committee remains committed to advancing opportunities for Victorian public sector lawyers, with a particular focus on creating pathways for law students and young lawyers to engage with the public sector. We are excited to deliver more events that foster these valuable connections.

AUTHOR

Eugenie Chung and Simran Kaur, Co-Chairs



Kirsty Neilson

Networking

Role

The Networking Committee's role is to create opportunities through which women in the legal profession, or who are about to enter the profession, can build strong professional relationships and connections in a supportive environment. The Committee does this by hosting a number of interesting and engaging networking events throughout the year.

We aim to bring our members fun events that do not feel too formal, forced or overwhelming. The Networking Committee hopes to host events that our members feel comfortable to attend alone, and leave having met someone interesting, and made a connection.

2025 Achievements/Highlights

The Networking Committee had a successful year of events which you can read about in the events section of this Journal.

We held our annual Members and Guests event with our special guest Mollie Tregillis, Founder of Mollusc and The Fulfillment Lab. Mollie is an ex-litigation lawyer and corporate executive turned joyful business owner. Among other things, Mollie now mentors corporate women to realise their potential and continue to thrive, not just survive, in work and life.

To wrap up 2025, we have our Annual General Meeting and End of Year celebration to look forward to in November. This is always a fantastic way to reflect on another busy and meaningful year within our VWL community.

Special Mentions

The Co-Chairs, Cait and Shannon would like to say a very big thank you to all of our wonderful Committee members!

Looking ahead to 2026

Our committee plans to keep bringing exciting events to our members and we are looking forward to another big year to come. For now, thank you to everyone who attended our events - We have loved having you!

AUTHOR

Cait Bowman and Shannon Hubert, Co-Chairs



Yuqing Vicky Zhou

Law Reform

2025 Achievements/Highlights

In 2025, the VWL Law Reform Committee made significant contributions to legal reform through five key submissions.

The year began with a Pre-Budget Submission, advocating for a federal inquiry into model safety regulations to address work-related gendered violence.

In April, the Committee made two major submissions:

- To the Productivity Commission's Review of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement, highlighting the lack of a regulatory focus on preventing work-related gendered violence, which includes sexual and gender-based harassment, and work-related bullying; and
- To the Victorian Law Reform Commission, recommending that Family Violence Intervention Orders for youth be restricted to actual instances of domestic violence, excluding culturally accepted non-abusive discipline.

In July, the Committee made two further submissions:

- To the Department of Social Services' consultation on supported employment for people with disability, calling for safety regulations that recognise discrimination as a safety risk, especially for women with disability; and
- To the Australian Law Reform Commission's Surrogacy Inquiry, advocating for a surrogate-centred national framework and harmonised surrogacy laws.

Looking ahead to 2026

Currently, the Committee is involved in collaborations with peak bodies representing women across a range of industries, as well as several women's alliances, for Safe Work Australia's Best Practice Review, urging for positive employer obligations to eliminate discrimination and prevent work-related gendered violence in line with the *Convention Concerning the Elimination of Violence and Harassment in the World of Work (ILO Convention No 190)*, adopted 21 June 2019, ILO C190 (entered into force 25 June 2021).

Special Mentions

The Committee expresses gratitude to their many collaborators and supporters, including Working Women's Centres Australia, the Australian Gender Equality Council, Disabled Australian Lawyers Association, Women with Disabilities Australia, and the Women in Defence Association. Special thanks also to our VWL Law Reform Committee members, outgoing secretary Madeleine Stratman, and the VWL Executive Team for their invaluable contributions throughout the year.

AUTHOR

Sapphire Parsons and Casey Guilmartin, Co-Chairs



Meg Walters



Anna Kruk



Sinead Davies



Committee

Mentoring

Role

VWL Mentoring Committee is responsible for all mentoring programs and associated education and support for mentors and mentees. Mentoring programs are a fantastic opportunity for law students and junior lawyers to gain insight into working in the law, grow their networks and share ideas with others in the legal profession.

2025 Achievements / Highlights

In August the Mentoring Committee was honoured to launch our mentoring program with a panel discussion.

The Honourable Associate Justice Mary-Jane Ierodiasconou facilitated the discussion, with The Honourable Justice Andrea Tsalamandris and The Honourable Justice Rita Incerti as our panellists. Also on the panel was a previous VWL Student Mentoring Program participant who joined the VWL Mentoring Committee, Jasmine Morrison. Jasmine provided insight on her experiences in the program.

Thank you to all our panellists for sharing their insight, to our facilitator for leading the discussion, and to the College of Law for sponsoring and hosting the event. This is sure to be an excellent night!

The Mentoring Committee is also excited to announce our second and final event for this year which will be held on 20 November 2025 at K&L Gates as an end of year celebration for all mentees and mentors to reconnect.

We sincerely thank our sponsors K&L Gates in advance for their support of our mentoring program over the years and look forward to continued relationship in the future.

AUTHOR

Cordillia Thomas and Emma Halliday, Co-Chairs



Liz Stute

Report

Special Projects

2025 Achievements/Highlights

Lesbia Harford Oration

VWL was proud to host its biennial Lesbia Harford Oration in 2025, honouring the legacy of Australian poet, novelist, and political activist Lesbia Harford. This year, we were delighted to welcome Hannah Diviney as our keynote speaker. Hannah is a leading writer, disability advocate, actor, screenwriter, and author whose work has had global impact.

Held on 8 May 2025 in the stunning Grand Ballroom of the Hotel Windsor, the Oration brought together members of the legal community for a morning of connection, reflection, and learning. Over a delicious breakfast, Hannah shared an honest and moving account of her journey, offering powerful insights.

We are deeply grateful to Hannah for sharing her story with us and for the vulnerability, strength, and humour she brought to the conversation. We also thank all who attended and contributed to the success of the event.

A special acknowledgement goes to Oriana Torcasio, outgoing Special Projects Officer whose leadership and attention to detail ensured the morning ran seamlessly. Thanks also to the many hands behind the scenes who supported her in delivering this memorable occasion.

VWL x Foley's List Podcast

VWL and Foley's List will launch 'A Legal Lifecycle: Conversations Across a Career', a four-part podcast series exploring the diverse, evolving careers of women in the legal profession. This podcast follows the success of the 2024 collaborative series, Getting your Ducks in a Row.

Through honest, reflective conversations, each episode traces a different chapter of a legal life – from private practice and career pivots to advocacy at the bar and, ultimately, a seat on the bench. The result is a nuanced look at how identity, ambition, and systemic structures shape legal careers. This is a podcast about professional evolution but also about choice, resilience, and reimagining what a life in the law can look like.

VWL extends its sincere thanks to Foley's List for sponsoring this project, and to all the participants of the podcast for their valuable contributions.

Special mentions

Oriana Torcasio for her work as Special Projects Officer in the first half of 2025.

AUTHOR

Rachel Matulis – Special Projects Officer

Report

Communications

It is pleasing to report another positive year for VWL's communications. This year VWL have continued to maintain strong levels of engagement across our social media accounts, including facebook, LinkedIn and Instagram

Our main sources of promotion, in addition to emails to our member list, remain our posts on social media. We have also used the stories function on Facebook and Instagram as further advertising in the lead up to events, which has proven to be a helpful tool to boost posts or events that may have otherwise been missed. This year in particular, our posts have centred more on our events and initiatives, including a more committed effort to celebrate and commemorate past events in addition to promoting new ones.

It has been a pleasure to use our communications to continue building connections with the community. We thank those who have engaged or interacted with our posts, including VWL members, sponsors and the legal community. The support is appreciated, and we value the opportunity to hear feedback about the initiatives we are delivering to our members and the broader community. Our communications channels are the most immediate way in which we can receive this important feedback, and we appreciate the various ways in which our community has engaged with us throughout the year.

AUTHOR

Alexandra Lioudvigova, Communications Officer



Isabelle Chouinard

Report

Special Report from the Treasurer

2024-25 Update

The 30 June 2025 financial year saw VWL record a deficit of \$8,130.38, down from the previous year's deficit of \$19,876.48. This result flows from the continuing large increases in costs incurred hosting in person events and in a loss of sponsor and member revenues as firms and individuals face their own monetary constraints.

As forecast in last year's report, a recognition of the cost impacts has led VWL to raise its membership fees by 10% in an effort to keep up with rising costs. This is the first membership increase in ten years. VWL is also redoubling its engagement with existing and potential sponsors to consolidate our sponsorship base. The executive is considering the benefits available to sponsor firms, so that they may feel more engaged with VWL and its functions.

Events - This year there was a reduction in function revenues and expenses. Dame Roma revenue dropped and Members and Guests rose slightly. A major change was the loss of the Equitable Briefing revenue, which in 2023/24 tax year accounted for \$24,750 of revenue.

Interest - interest earned significantly increased as funds were invested at higher rates than in the past.

VWL's accounting fees and administrative expenses remained constant when compared to the prior year. Our contributions to AWL dropped in line with the reduction in our membership fees overall. Portia costs were reduced as a result of fewer copies being produced and members being encouraged to "opt-out" of receiving a hard copy of this excellent magazine.

Focus Areas for 2026

Continue to present events that appeal to our members both from a networking and from a knowledge perspective.

Reconnect with all sponsors and redesign the sponsorship program so clear benefits are recognized by the sponsors. Aim to break even for 2026 financial year.

AUTHOR

Liz Cooper, Treasurer



Nicole O'Loughlin

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Nicole Kelly

Event

Victoria Law Foundation's Legal Laneway Breakfast

4 February 2025

Victoria Law Foundation (**VLF**) celebrated the beginning of the 2025 legal year with their Legal Laneway Breakfast.

On 4 February 2025, our President Linda Hart and Vice-President, Annaleise Vulin, together with VWL committee members, Nicole Teh, Felicia Leong, Madeleine Stratmann and Oriana Torcasio arrived bright and early and assisted with providing food and drinks to attendees.

VWL was privileged to be able to sponsor the Acknowledgement to Country, performed by the talented Shauntai Sherree.

Thank you to the VLF for hosting, and congratulations on another successful event. VWL looks forward to once again supporting the VLF at the Legal Laneway Breakfast in 2026!



Event

VWL Sponsorship Cocktail Event

27 February 2025

On 27 February 2025, VWL held our annual sponsorship cocktail event at Farmer's Daughter.

The purpose of the evening was to show our appreciation to our sponsors, and it was also an opportunity for our sponsors to meet our General Executive Committee members.

VWL's work would not be possible without the invaluable support and contribution of our sponsors. The generosity of our sponsors has allowed us to run meaningful events and facilitate important conversations within our community. It is also the reason VWL can keep striving to remove barriers and increase opportunities for participation by, and advancement of, women in the legal profession in Victoria.



Kit Hiller

Event

Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Luncheon

13 March 2025

In celebration of International Women's Day, Victorian Women Lawyers and Women Barristers Association hosted its annual Dame Roma Mitchell Memorial Lunch on Thursday 13 March 2025.

Over 300 attendees from the legal profession packed the Grand Hyatt Melbourne. We were graced with a musical Acknowledgement of Country from the talented Sherree Abdul-Rahman.

VWL's president, Linda Hart, introduced VWL's 2025 theme of Identity. Our hope with this theme was to explore and reveal the complex journey of self-discovery, belonging and cultural acceptance. Linda discussed her own struggles with identity growing up as an Asian Australian and constantly navigating the space between two worlds.

Our keynote speaker Michelle Huntington, a former airline captain turned keynote speaker, inspired audiences to embrace challenges as opportunities for growth. Michelle shared her experience as a commercial pilot, incorporating VWL's theme of Identity and the International Women's Day theme of March Forward. Michelle's powerful journey of identity and resilience inspired and empowered us to embrace our own courage and strength to March Forward.

Thank you to Gatehouse Legal Recruitment for sponsoring this event.



Sponsor

Allens

What does identity mean to you and why do you think it is important?

I see identity as my sense of who I am both as an individual and as a member of my communities. Sometimes we think of identity as just a label – I'm an Allens lawyer; I'm a Monash graduate; I'm a woman. While these are all aspects of my identity, it's really more than that – it's my values, beliefs and personal experiences, and it evolves and changes throughout life as we encounter new experiences, relationships and perspectives. Identity gives us a sense of belonging and connection to a community, and a sense of purpose and direction in life.

How does your workplace embrace identity?

Allens sees enormous strength in the unique identities and life experiences that people bring to the firm. The many talents of our people help us connect with clients, solve complex problems and innovate.

Allens supports and promotes an inclusive and respectful culture so everyone feels that they belong and can bring their whole self to work. Allens has a number of employee-led inclusion committees, including the AccessAbility Network, Reconciliation Committee, Women@Allens, ALLin (LGBTIQ+ network) and Cultural Awareness Network. Our committees foster a sense of belonging and connection and create opportunities for people to celebrate their unique identities and share experiences with others.

We also have partners and business unit leaders across the firm that encourage us to bring our whole selves to work. At Allens, I've never felt like I have to fit into a mould or stifle my sense of self. I've always been encouraged by my mentors to let my personality shine through in the way I work and engage with others.

How do you think that as a profession, we can continue to promote and embrace identity?

As a profession, we can continue to promote and embrace identity by bringing our whole selves to work and encouraging others to do the same. We need to be unafraid to break stereotypes about our profession and be authentic to our own personalities.

Firms have an important role to play in creating spaces where diverse identities are valued and respected, for example through diversity in progression and hiring, inclusive work practices, leadership accountability and diversity and inclusion committees. For example, Allens commitment to gender equality and the progression of women within the firm, including through its support of the Women@Allens committee, ensures that female identities are valued and women in our profession can achieve their potential.



AUTHOR
Kate Mililli, Senior Associate

Sponsor

Foley's List

The question of identity comes across so simple, when in fact it requires an individual to delve quite deeply into the internal and external factors that have melded together to shape oneself. Personally, I would like to believe that my identity has been shaped not only by my heritage, but also from my lived experiences. It is this culmination of factors that have been the driving force to be a part of the legal community.

Being fortunate enough to be part of one of the oldest barristers' lists in Australia, I believe identity is reflected in the way Foley's List supports barristers as individuals by continuing to put great value in innovation, inclusion and community. We are proud to be a member-owned List, which shapes a culture of mutual support and shared direction. Our identity as a List is one that values autonomy, but not isolation. We provide a space for each barrister to define their own practice while feeling connected to a broader, values-led community. As a Clerk, we provide the ongoing support and continuous collaboration with our members as they navigate their identity and that of their practice at the bar.

Being a part of initiatives such as their Fast Track Connections and Mentorship Programs, the List supports our new Readers to build their own professional identities by fostering relationships and creating space for collaboration. The Women on Foley's program acknowledges that identity intersects with gender, family and career progression, and aims to address the specific challenges women may face at the Bar. Promoting identity within the legal profession requires ongoing commitment to diversity, equity and authenticity. This means more than just recognising difference, it means actively creating environments where people feel safe to bring their whole selves to their work, without compromising their professionalism or ambitions.

We also need to keep evolving our understanding of what it means to be a legal professional today. Flexibility, emotional intelligence and lived experience are increasingly valued, and should be considered just as critical to our identity as legal expertise.

Ultimately, identity and excellence are not mutually exclusive, in fact, they reinforce each other. When people feel seen, supported and empowered to be themselves, the entire profession benefits.



AUTHOR
Charlie Watkins, Barristers' Clerk

Event

Lesbia Harford Oration 2025

8 May 2025

On 8 May 2025, Lesbia Harford Oration attendees gathered at the beautiful Hotel Windsor to hear from disability advocate Hannah Diviney over a delicious breakfast. Hannah is also a leading writer, actor, screenwriter, and author. Her disability advocacy has garnered global attention thanks to both a viral petition encouraging Disney to create a disabled Disney Princess and a successful campaign encouraging both Lizzo and Beyonce to change ableist lyrics. Hannah gave an inspiring and thought-provoking account of her journey and how it has shaped her identity.

Thank you, Hannah for your time, and thank you to those who attended – it was a celebration of activism, advocacy, and the power of words!



Event

Wimmera Law Association – Annual Professional Development Day

16 May 2025

As part of VWL's goal to enhance awareness of women's contribution to the practice and development of the law, VWL works with various associations to send female practitioners to professional development and industry events. This year, VWL and Meldrum's List secured guest speakers Cassandra Hurley, Lawyer, DBA Lawyers, Elarya George, Barrister and Alan Hands, Barrister of Meldrum's List and Declan Manly, Barrister from Young's List for the annual Wimmera Law Association's professional development conference. The association covers much of Northwestern Victoria including Birchip, Horsham and Nhill.

Alan provided a comprehensive discussion on Testator's Family Maintenance claims. Declan's session provided a practical reminder on the best way to prepare for successful mediation. Elarya's presentation on pre-sentence detention was well received, reminding practitioners of the legislative and practical considerations to be aware of when acting for criminal law clients. Cassandra presented recent cases redefining client management when dealing with lost trust documents and the rising need to proactively help clients to manage succession and capacity planning. Cassandra reported being delighted with the particularly spirited discussion... which extended to the rainy golf course carpark well after the formal session had ended!



Event

Members and Guests Evening

22 May 2025

On Thursday 22 May 2025, the VWL Networking Committee hosted its annual Members & Guests Evening, where attendees had the pleasure of hearing from the wonderful Mollie Tregillis. Once a litigation lawyer and corporate executive, Mollie has since reimaged her career as the founder of a successful coaching and mentoring business.

Mollie shared her own journey from the fast-paced world of corporate law to the pursuit of a more balanced and joyful life as a business owner. She spoke candidly about the often-overlooked issue of burnout within the legal profession, highlighting how women, in particular, are often

suffering in silence. Encouraging everyone to thrive and not just survive in their careers, Mollie offered valuable insights and practical advice for those struggling to set healthy boundaries in the workplace.

The event, held at BombaBar in Melbourne, was generously sponsored by Gatehouse Legal Recruitment. It was an evening filled with meaningful networking, and we extend our deepest thanks to Mollie, our sponsor, and all the committee volunteers who helped make this event such a success.



Sponsor

Maddocks

What does identity mean to you and why do you think it is important?

This is a challenging question because identity can mean so many things in different contexts. I remember a Partner during my seasonal clerkship asking me, 'can you tell us who you are, Amelia?' I was a little stumped by the question because I had only really thought about it in a formal interview context. I answered, 'I'm the eldest of four sisters'. Looking back, I said that because family and being a big sister are the most important things to me and it has shaped who I am today.

I believe having a strong sense of identity, whether as an individual or a group, is important because knowing the 'who' helps you to focus on the outcomes you are seeking and how you are going to achieve them.

How does your workplace implement identity?

At Maddocks, we ensure that everything we do is aligned with our mission and core values, to ultimately strengthen our identity as the modern Australian law firm.

Maddocks' mission is to make a difference for our clients, the communities in which we operate and each other. We are proud to be known for our great culture which is built on our 5 core values: integrity, collaboration, commitment to doing things better, respect for the individual and diversity and stewardship.

I am proud to work at Maddocks, particularly because it is dedicated to supporting and promoting women in the workplace. Something we share with Victorian Women Lawyers. I'm very grateful for the opportunity to compete in VWL's Warren Moot in my graduate year during COVID lockdowns, which Maddocks encouraged us to do. Being part of a team gave me a sense of belonging during the isolation periods and strengthened my confidence. 'Lifting the Bar' is also one of Maddocks' initiatives that profiles and celebrates the achievements of women barristers. Through these important initiatives, Maddocks continues to demonstrate its commitment to its mission and core values.

How do you think that as a profession, we can continue to promote and embrace identity?

As a profession, I think we can continue to promote and embrace identity by listening, always. Everyone is shaped by their own unique experiences. If we hear what people have to say, whether our colleagues, clients, the community, marginalised groups or even opposing sides, and take the time to understand their point of view, we will continue to achieve better outcomes and promote and embrace individuality



AUTHOR
Amelia French, Associate

Sponsor

KHQ Lawyers

How does your workplace implement identity?

At our firm, we embody the 'KHQ Way,' which encapsulates the identity of our organization. Our overarching value is a passionate commitment to excellence in everything we do. This is supported by our core values:

- Dare to be different: We encourage our lawyers to be authentic, have fun, learn from the past, embrace change, and explore new ideas.
- Live the relationship: We prioritize exceptional client service by investing time in understanding our clients and their legal needs.
- Deliver results: We emphasize strategic execution, exceeding expectations, taking ownership, and demonstrating initiative.

These values are integral to all our activities at KHQ Lawyers.

We have regular and fun activities for the entire firm, which includes various sporting clubs (competition netball, futsal, run club), and have frequent lunchtime CPD's, pizza lunches and celebrations throughout the year.

At the senior level, each 'future leader' of our firm is invited to attend the 'Emerging Leaders Retreat', which is based on self-reflection and training around the skills of leadership. For the more junior lawyers, we have a business and development program, which assists lawyers to understand how to network and build on professional connections.

What does identity mean to you and why do you think it is important?

Identity, to me, is the essence of who we are and how we present ourselves to the world. It encompasses our values, beliefs, and experiences that shape our actions and decisions. In the context of my career as a family lawyer, my identity is rooted in a deep commitment to helping individuals and families navigate the legal system with compassion and expertise. It's important because it drives my passion for providing the best possible service and ensures that my clients feel supported and understood throughout their legal journey.

Do you think that the legal profession has its own identity, and what do you think are the strengths and weaknesses associated with it?

The legal profession undoubtedly has its own identity, characterized by a commitment to justice, integrity, and the rule of law. As a family lawyer, I see the strengths of this identity in our ability to advocate for individuals and families during their most challenging times. Our profession's dedication to upholding ethical standards and providing expert guidance is crucial in navigating complex legal pathways. However, one of the weaknesses is the perception of the legal profession as being inaccessible or intimidating to those unfamiliar with legal processes. It's essential for us to continually strive to make legal services more approachable and understandable for everyone.



AUTHOR
Monica Blizzard, Director

Event

Tough Talks

29 May 2025

The fourth consecutive year for the highly successful interactive panel event, Tough Talks, was held on 29 May 2025 at the Sawyers Arms Tavern in Geelong, sponsored by Coulter Legal.

The sharing of experiences and engaging storytelling from our incredible panellists, Belinda Perisic, Chief Operating Officer, Coulter Legal; Lauren Cassimatis, Principal Lawyer and Director, Gallant Law; and Deeann Cropley, Legal Counsel, Barwon Water, made this event the great success that it was.

Led by Shannon Landers, Principal Lawyer and Director, Neon Legal, our guests were able to take some important key messages away; how leading with empathy is critical; how to create our own seat at the table; how to navigate challenging workplace dynamics as well as the importance of reminding ourselves what we're good at (and not just at work).

A huge thank you to Sarah Duffy, Belinda Perisic and Bonnie Phillips from Coulter Legal for their support in bringing this event to Geelong in 2025.



Event

Money Matters

17 July 2025

VWL's Justice Committee hosted a panel discussion at KHQ Lawyers on 17 July 2025, exploring strategies to strengthen financial literacy and secure better financial futures for Australian women.

The panel featured some of Australia's leading voices in law and finance including Diana Dimitrov, Partner in Business Advisory at William Buck, Lana Davey, Principal Solicitor at KHQ Lawyers, and Jocelyn Chong, CEO and Founder of Seed to Sequoia.

The speakers offered practical advice on understanding tax and superannuation, effective budgeting, and making informed financial decisions. Drawing on their own experiences, the panellists also discussed the barriers that women often encounter in achieving financial independence and encouraged attendees to engage with a financial advisor.

In a world where conversations surrounding money are often viewed as "awkward", particularly among women, the panel's insights highlighted not only the importance of financial literacy, but also the power of shared knowledge, in empowering women to take control of our financial futures.

We extend our gratitude to Jocelyn for moderating the panel, Diana and Lana for their insights, KHQ Lawyers for generously sponsoring the event, and everyone who attended.



Event

Coming to the Bar

5 August 2025

With thanks to our event sponsor, Svenson Barristers, the 2025 Coming to the Bar – Ins and Outs of preparing for the Victorian Bar, was held at the Owen Dixon Chambers on 5 August 2025.

This event provides attendees with invaluable insight for anyone considering the Victorian Bar course. Attendees had the opportunity to hear the experiences, tips and tricks from our panellists and practising barristers, Dr Nadia Stojanova, Stephanie Clancy and Veronica Holt. With thanks to our moderator, Anna Svenson for her valuable insights into the Victorian Bar as a Director and Principal Clerk of Svenson Barristers.

A huge thank you to Tina Ghilardi and Anna Svenson from Svenson Barristers for their continued support for this event.



Event

Building Bridges – DEI in Policies and Action

7 August 2025

VWL's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) committee held a panel discussion exploring the importance and different perspectives of DEI, ongoing challenges, real-world success stories and practical tools to advance meaningful progress in the legal profession through DEI.

The panellists included experts who are leading and shaping the future of DEI including Mikala Purton, Director, Aboriginal Engagement, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, Khayshie Tilak Ramesh, DEI Advisor, Speaker, and Strategist and Abigail Sullivan, Associate Director, Diversity and Inclusion at Victoria Legal Aid.

At a time when the value of DEI is being publicly debated, this conversation couldn't be more important. Together, we reflected on the progress made, the challenges that remain, and how we can continue to build workplaces that are inclusive, safe, and equitable for all.

Thank you to Felicia Leong for organising and Nicole Teh for moderating the panel, and to the College of Law who sponsored this event.



Sponsor

Svenson Barristers

What does workplace culture at Svenson mean to you and why do you think it is important?

Workplace culture at Svenson is the foundation of our professional community. For me, it means building an environment where people feel supported, respected and part of something bigger. We don't just talk about diversity, inclusion and collegiality - we live them. That sense of belonging matters. When barristers feel connected and encouraged, they not only grow professionally but personally too. In a profession that can sometimes feel quite solitary, it's those everyday interactions, the genuine respect and the feeling of community that empowers barristers to bring their best selves to their practice and, in turn, better serve the justice system.

How does your workplace build a positive culture, with so many barristers who specialise in different categories?

It doesn't happen by accident - it takes effort and intention. Our list is full of people with different specialisations, and rather than seeing that as a challenge, we see it as one of our greatest strengths. To bring people together, we focus on creating opportunities for connection - through events, knowledge sharing and mentorship across different levels of experience. My role as Principal Clerk is about listening, finding ways to connect people and making sure every barrister feels valued, whether they've just joined the Bar or have decades of practice behind them. When we work from a foundation of respect and inclusion, the diversity of expertise makes us all stronger.

How do you think that as a profession, we can become more NewLaw informed and welcoming?

I think it starts with being open. Open to technology, open to flexible ways of working, open to exploring new areas of law and collaborating with other disciplines. At Svenson, we love to keep these conversations going - whether through professional panels, casual chats over coffee, or our podcast Brief Chats. It's about staying curious and creating space to share ideas.

Just as important is making sure the next generation can see a place for themselves at the Bar. Mentorship and accessibility are key. The more welcoming and inclusive we are, the more perspectives we bring to the table, and that diversity not only strengthens our culture, but the profession as a whole.



AUTHOR
Anna Svenson, Director

Sponsor

College of Law

Could you provide an example where your identity impacted an important decision or event in your career?

I was raised by migrant parents who were largely concerned that my education should pave a way into a profession. From their perspective there were only two professions - either doctors or lawyers. I chose to be a social worker. It was a huge disappointment. In my area of social work practice, I quickly learned that you had to have a good understanding of rights and be a skilled advocate. Back to school I went to do my law degree. My love of the law was borne out of the needs I witnessed in my first profession, and not because of expectation. In 2000, I was called to the Bar and there I stayed until 2015. I had by this point exceeded my parents' expectations! Now teaching in a Practical Legal Training Program, I meet many students about to enter the profession. Their reasons for entering the profession are generally always linked to a personal experience, and I always make sure to impress on them the importance of factoring in that reason (if it is still relevant) into any decision making around their career.

Do you think that the legal profession has its own identity, and what do you think are the strengths and weaknesses associated with it?

Coming to legal practice in the mid-90s after having practiced as a social worker for many years, I was struck by what I observed and experienced as a new lawyer. The culture of the legal profession seemed, by comparison, cold and sharp. I had been used to talking about feelings and seeing many shades of grey. I fully appreciated that I had changed profession and as a lawyer, there were different professional requirements and expectations. But when clients commented that I was different from other lawyers, I became concerned. I understood that it was meant as a compliment, but I saw it as negative. I worried that perhaps I hadn't fully transitioned to my new profession. With more experience, I came to appreciate how fortunate I had been to have had that initial training. I now see the 'soft' skills as an essential component of lawyer training, and, in my opinion, training in the general area of communication should be introduced, as early as possible, starting in undergraduate programs. The benefits for clients are obvious. What is not generally recognised is the spin-off for lawyers, and their own well-being in practice and the profession generally.

How does your workplace implement identity?

The College of Law workplace culture is marked by many positive values. Greatly appreciated are the thriving values of teamwork, consultation and collegiality. These values are also reflected in leadership, decision making and work processes. While it can sometimes take longer to get things done this way, in comparison with more managerial driven styles, the results, in my view, are generally always better as the process has involved many people bringing their experiences to the table, thorough discussion and evaluation. The many opportunities for employees to work together to influence decision making and outcomes is undoubtedly a significant way of promoting diversity, equity and inclusion in the workplace and in outcomes for students.



AUTHOR
Maria Corbisiero, Assistant Director

Event

VWL Mentoring Program

26 August 2025

Every year, the VWL Mentoring Committee organises the VWL Professional Mentoring Program, and the VWL and Women Barristers' Association Student Mentoring Program. However, this year, we decided to combine the two mentoring programs into one and launch it with one event. This will provide greater networking opportunities for both mentees and mentors and allow those at the beginning of their legal journey to see the invaluable role of mentorship in professional and personal development.

Our mentoring program launch involved a panel of inspiring and intelligent women to lead discussions on how mentoring has influenced their career. The Honourable Associate Justice Ierodiaconou facilitated the discussion, with The Honourable Justice Tsalamandris and The Honourable Justice Incerti as our panellists. Also on the panel was a previous VWL Student Mentoring Program participant who had joined the VWL Mentoring Committee, Jasmine Morrison, to provide insight on her experiences in the program. We also paused that evening to acknowledge someone very special to this program and to our community, the Honourable Justice Rita Incerti who has been a patron of this program since 2016.

Justice Incerti has been a steadfast supporter of Victorian Women Lawyers and of the professional development of women in the law. What has always stood out is not just her commitment, but the spirit in which she supported us, with warmth, humility, and a genuine belief in the power of mentoring. She has never shied away from sharing her own stories, including those moments that others might call failures and reframing them as stepping stones. That openness has encouraged so many of us to see setbacks not as endings, but as part of the growth that shapes us as lawyers and leaders.

Thank you to all of our panellists for sharing their insight, to our facilitator for leading the discussion, and to the College of Law for sponsoring and hosting the event.

Our VWL Mentoring Program End of Year Celebration, scheduled for 20 November 2025, was in the process of being planned at the time of printing. The Mentoring Committee anticipates this will be an excellent event in which mentors and mentees can network and celebrate the year.

Thank you to K&L Gates for sponsoring and hosting the event. Cheers to all our 2025 mentors!



Event

VWL and Pride in Law Trivia Night

18 September 2025

VWL and Pride in Law held a trivia night event to celebrate the progress of LBTQIA+ people in the law and laws about LBTQIA+ people.

The event fostered the continuing education and development of people in the LBTQIA+ community in all matters of legal interest. The trivia questions piqued attendees' curiosity and progressed an understanding of the history of human rights with respect to the queer community in the context of the legal profession.

The event provided a space for people to be able to safely, authentically and proudly identify as a person within the LBTQIA+ community which is crucial for the interlinked causes of wellbeing, workplace safety, empowerment and confidence, and career fulfillment.

Thank you to Felicia Leong, the DEI committee and the wonderful members of Pride in Law for organising this event and to Svensons Barristers who sponsored the event.



Event

Foley's List x VWL Podcast Launch

30 October 2025

On 30 October 2025, VWL and Foley's List will celebrate the podcast launch of 'A Legal Lifecycle: Conversations Across a Career', a four-part podcast series exploring the diverse, evolving careers of women in the legal profession. This podcast follows the success of the 2024 collaborative series, Getting Your Ducks in a Row.

Through honest and reflective conversations, each episode traces a different chapter of a legal life – from private practice and career pivots to advocacy at the Bar and, ultimately, a seat on the bench. The result is a nuanced look at how identity, ambition, and systemic structures shape legal careers. This is a podcast about professional evolution but also about choice, resilience, and reimagining what life in the law can look like.

VWL extends its sincere thanks to Foley's List for sponsoring this project, and to all the participants of the podcast for their valuable contributions. VWL warmly extends its gratitude to all involved and looks forward with great anticipation to a successful and engaging launch.



Sponsor

Justitia

What does identity mean to you and why do you think it is important?

Identity, to me, is built from fragments. The house you grew up in and the way people laughed in it. The language you speak to your parents in and the one you dream in.

I think identity is made clearest when it's challenged. When you've been mistaken for someone you're not or when you're expected to stay quiet. Those moments don't define people, but they remind us that the world often wants to flatten people into something legible and comfortable. Identity is the pushback — the refusal to be stripped of your fragments.

Identity also matters because it's tied to power. If we're not conscious of identity, we risk reinforcing the same systems that have kept some people out of the profession, stuck in junior roles, or afraid to speak up.

How does your workplace implement identity?

At Justitia, identity isn't something we speak about only in policy documents or mission statements on our website — it's lived. As a women-led employment law firm, Justitia has spent 20 years building a culture where people don't have to leave parts of themselves at the door.

Our lawyers and consultants come from diverse backgrounds, and we embrace that because it sharpens our advice, deepens our empathy, and helps us attract clients that share our values.

We have a saying in our workplace, 'life is too short to be unhappy at work'. This ethos shapes the way we advise our clients so that regardless of the circumstances or issues at play, our clients receive support to create workplaces where people feel safe and respected.

We train others on cultural safety, respectful workplaces and inclusive practices, but we also hold ourselves to those same standards. Our flexibility model allows staff to parent, study, care for elders, and just be full human beings, while also meeting our professional commitments.

How do you think that as a profession, we can continue to promote and embrace identity?

Legal practice too often favours sameness — the same pathways, voices and safe choices. We need to create entry points for people who didn't go to the 'right' schools, came to the law later in life or wish to practice part-time for various reasons.

This would mean recognising the value of career-switchers, caregivers, first-generation professionals, and people from underrepresented or marginalised backgrounds and reimagining what a successful legal practice can look like.



AUTHOR
Nancy Abdalla, Associate

Sponsor

Victorian Government Solicitor's Office

Identity is an incredibly multi-faceted concept that can be understood from various perspectives.

To my mind, identity refers to the unique characteristics and qualities that define an individual or group, encompassing a sense of self, belonging and purpose. It includes personal attributes, social roles and cultural affiliations, shaping how individuals view themselves and how they are perceived by others.

From my perspective, the concept of identity is critically important as it informs social interaction, including an individual's contribution to society, and personal development. It encompasses the values each of us holds, which often informs the choices we make. It is also incredibly dynamic, shifting and evolving over the course of an individual's lifespan and borne out of their individual experiences, both negative and positive.

Without identity, we would essentially take the form of a carbon copy human and remain static.

How our identity is experienced and expressed in the workplace is highly variable. The Victorian Government Solicitor's Office (**VGSO**) is in the unique position of being a self-funded law firm that acts exclusively for the State and is grounded in public sector values with a strong diversity and inclusion capability.

The VGSO adopts a very intentional approach to embrace personal identity, that is, an individual's self-concept, including their personality traits, values, beliefs and experiences that make them unique; social identity, which encompasses the categories to which an individual belongs, including their nationality, ethnicity, religion or social class; and collective identity, that is, a shared sense of belonging and purpose amongst a collection of people, often based on common experiences, goals or values.

At the VGSO, we ensure our identity as a workplace is authentic, shared, and aligned with how we show up, both individually and collectively. Everyone at the VGSO is encouraged to bring their whole self to work, where flexibility and wellbeing are prioritised.

Whilst the legal profession has shifted dramatically over the years I have been in practice, it is incumbent on each of us as practitioners, and particularly senior practitioners, to encourage and endorse behaviours that embrace personal, social and collective identity to ensure we secure and retain the best legal talent irrespective of any of their personal attributes, beliefs and experiences.



AUTHOR
Dominique Mayo, Lead Counsel

Event

Career Pathways

30 October 2025

The WiPS Committee is excited to host an upcoming Career Pathways Panel for public sector lawyers, designed to provide career insights, practical advice, and networking opportunities. In response to strong interest from our members, the event will feature a diverse panel of accomplished women working across the public sector, including a Judicial Registrar, a representative from the Wage Inspectorate, and a Government Solicitor.

Panellists will share their unique career journeys and discuss key topics such as navigating different legal pathways within the public sector, progressing into leadership roles, managing ethical challenges, and building a meaningful and sustainable legal career. The event will also provide valuable guidance for those looking to transition into the public sector from other areas of practice.

At the time of printing, the event was still in the planning stages, but the Committee anticipates an engaging and informative session that will support our ongoing goal, to connect and empower public sector lawyers, particularly students and early-career professionals.

We are grateful for the continued support of our sponsor, VGSO, whose contribution helps make events like this possible.



Jac Grantford

Event

Speed Networking for Diverse People in the Law

13 November 2025

VWL's DEI committee will hold a speed networking event which specifically invites individuals with diverse identities in the legal profession to network and connect with one another in a safe space. For people who may identify as culturally or linguistically diverse, LBTQIA+, first nations or persons with a disability, this event encourages diverse people to feel celebrated and visible to one another as a community.

The 'speed networking' aspect of the event will encourage attendees to step outside of the comfort zone and provide a guided but relaxed approach to having meaningful conversations and building connections in the legal profession. This event emphasises that the legal profession is becoming more diverse and recognises the valuable contribution of diverse people in the law. It will also provide connection and networking for diverse people and encourage the entry and retention of diverse people in the legal profession.

Thank you to Felicia Leong, Nicole Teh and the DEI committee for organising the event, and to Allens who are sponsoring this event.



Amelia Jajko

Event

Warren Moot 2025

August 2025 to November 2025

On 29 July 2025, Victorian Women Lawyers proudly hosted the 2025 Warren Moot Launch Night at Maddocks. The evening featured a panel discussion with the competition's patron, Professor the Honourable Marilyn Warren AC KC, The Honourable Justice Karin Emerton, Elizabeth Ruddle KC, and Charlee Hawkes. Moderated by VWL President Linda Hart, the discussion explored key aspects of advocacy, including preparing oral and written submissions, and maintaining courtroom etiquette.

Now in its 11th year, the Warren Moot continues to empower women in the legal profession to enhance their skills and build confidence in making submissions before members of the bench. We are honoured to have esteemed members of the judiciary, and the broader legal community generously volunteer their time to judge the three rounds and finals.

This year, eight teams competed across diverse areas of law, including criminal, commercial, employment, and judicial review. We extend our sincere thanks to our sponsor, Maddocks, to the barristers who assisted in drafting and reviewing the case studies, and to VWL Competition Portfolio holders Harriet Whiteley and Ninawa Milner for their dedication.

We look forward to announcing the winners of the 2025 Warren Moot at the conclusion of the competition.



Sponsor

Clayton Utz

Identity is something I give quite a bit of thought to. From a marketing perspective, identity feeds into my brand or offering. From a people perspective, my identity as a partner shapes the culture of my team. Having recently moved firms, it's been fascinating to see how different one law firm can be to another, which again is driven by the identity of the firm and the people in it.

What I have learnt is that Clayton Utz has a clear sense of what the firm is – high performing, client-focused, social, and involved in major developments in Australia. There are numerous people who have worked here 20 or 30 years and most of the partners I work with started here as graduates. That's unusual in the legal market.

It's hard to pinpoint exactly how the firm has implemented or created its unique identity. But I expect it relates to the many opportunities that exist to connect with colleagues, the public and private client base and opportunities to work on big projects and disputes, and the down-to-earth leadership team.

In terms of my identity, I would describe myself as driven, details-oriented and people-focused. The first two attributes are common in lawyers, but the focus on people and relationships is less ubiquitous. It's one of the many reasons why it's important to have a diverse partnership. My satisfaction as a partner comes from the relationships I build with clients, and the development of my team.

My identity has unquestionably helped get me to where I am today. The key way I was able to distinguish myself when applying for partnership was to show that I had built relationships that had resulted in new instructions coming to the firm and, ultimately a profitable, relationship-driven practice.



AUTHOR
Sophy Woodward, Partner

Sponsor

K&L Gates

Could you provide an example where your identity impacted an important decision or event in your career?

Instead of defining a specific moment or event, my identity as an Asian woman has continuously influenced my career – most profoundly through the deep respect for community instilled in me. From law school to my broader professional experience, being a woman of colour has meant carving a space for myself, making sure I'm seen.

But I've never been alone. Others – wiser and tougher – have come before me, and this reminder ensures that I do not shy away from seeking help. I actively pursue it and, in turn, pay forward the support I receive.

I have been inspired by my identity and commitment to community to organise and volunteer in mentorship programs, advocate for greater solidarity with other marginalised folks, and encourage conversations that build on our sense of belonging. In this way, honouring my identity means also cultivating space for others.

How does your workplace implement identity?

As a long-time sponsor of VWL, K&L Gates also organises a myriad of initiatives through its Women in Profession (**WIP**) Committee. For example, the Australian WIP Group Mentoring Program offers lawyers the opportunity to develop internal networks with those in their cohort as well as more senior colleagues. Women lawyers, in particular, find the opportunities afforded from this program beneficial in advancing their career aspirations. For me, the relaxed, collaborative nature of the group sessions are particularly helpful in fostering an integral sense of connection.

The Australian offices of the firm also established the Cultural Inclusion Network last year. In my role as Co-Lead, I hope to build on the existing support frameworks, such as the WIP Committee's mentoring program, to offer similar initiatives for lawyers, including racially and culturally diverse members of our Australian offices.

How do you think that as a profession, we can continue to promote and embrace identity?

This profession has made strides in conversations around identity and the intersecting factors that shape our experiences. However, much of the language still focuses on the individual. To illustrate, discussions on imposter syndrome often centre on how women and people of colour can overcome self-doubt with the right confidence tools. While helpful, this framing reinforces the idea that identity is an individual burden, rather than a workplace responsibility.

Yet, imposter feelings do not exist in a vacuum. They are fuelled by the hallmark perfectionism of the industry, and by a culture that hides vulnerability. Labelling these feelings as a 'syndrome' risks ignoring the structural conditions from which these experiences stem.

To continue promoting and embracing identity, we need to shift the discourse from personal improvement to institutional accountability, with workplaces acknowledging mistakes, spotlighting success, and challenging bias. When organisations step up, the implementation of identity stops being a personal hurdle and, instead, becomes a collective call to action.



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