

# De Minimis

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Women's Edition

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## YOU CAN'T DROWN A WITCH GEORGIA DALY



"She should be careful about being too successful. Young women burn out in politics."

I'm not sure anyone told Paul Keating to settle down when he came into parliament aged twenty-five. I'm not the first woman to complain about double standards in politics and I hope to god I'm not the last. Pioneers, political giants like Joan Kirner and Julia Gillard warned us that politics is a different game for women, you have to be submissive, smarter and above all, tougher.

I must admit, I didn't expect to experience it so discernibly myself, as someone content with occupying the lower rungs of the political ladder, so to speak. Politics is a rough, calculated, divisive game. It's not for everyone, but for me it's never been optional (I'm not one to stick my head in the sand).

Recently Melbourne University launched a program titled "Pathways to Politics" encouraging women to participate in politics. But is politics really an institution that *wants* women? Welcomes them? Full disclosure, I haven't attended this particular set, but in my experience, these workshops teach politics as though it occurs in an unbiased, neutral environment.

Because that's what women in politics are meant to be, neutral.

Joan Kirner, the first female Premier of Victoria once said "It's okay, when we as women are in a serving role. But it's not okay, it appears, still, when we have full access to power." Kirner was Premier in 1990, almost thirty years ago. Thirty years and nothing's changed.

Let's take a look at Julie Bishop. She enjoys an unusual degree of confidence from the Australian

people, she is well liked, endlessly competent and her longevity as deputy leader outlasts that of our last 5 Prime Ministers.

She also knows her place.

Predictable. Steady. Unambitious.

I would, to a certain extent, dispute the unambitious part. I think she's very ambitious, but rather, knows moving above your station as a woman in politics means you'll be turned on quickly. If you want to be around for a long time, not a good time, you stay the loyal subservient deputy.

Bishop is almost the perfect antithesis of Gillard.

I don't think feminism means being dogmatically supportive of women, there are a great number of things Gillard did that I disagree with, but it's hard to deny the level of abuse she received was unwarranted.

I don't know how many of you read murder judgements for fun, but if you do you'll notice that men who murder are often described as emotional, good men who lost control. Overwhelmingly women are described as unfeeling, calculating and "witches".

Sound familiar? Gillard was crucified for stepping above her station. She dared challenge the authority of a man. I'll admit there were other factors at play here but in essence; the character of a man who plays the political game is forgivable. Whereas when a woman plays the dirty game it apparently reveals something deeply sinister about her character.

Because, as the fairer sex, we're not meant to get dirty.

Admittedly, I'm being dramatic here. No one chants "lock her up" at me and I'm fairly sure *De Minimis* isn't too interested in my wardrobe choices. Nonetheless I've witnessed the confusion, indignation and vitriol a competent woman in politics stirs up.

I asked a friend, the subject of the opening quote and a more senior woman in politics for her thoughts. She bluntly summarised: "No one takes you seriously, or else they think you're a bitch".

I've been told I should have a male Vice President, to "balance my leadership out". I've been asked if I was sexually assaulted whilst working on the Respect. Now. Always campaign, because apparently, women can only engage with issues to which they have an emotional attachment.

I've been called emotional and a "reductive simpleton" when I've spoken passionately about an issue.

Men have spat the words "bitch", "manipulative" and "soulless" at me when I've outplayed them.

Apparently, I'm Schrodinger's woman; ruled by the emotions I'm devoid of.

I'm not factional, I'm not devious and I'm not emotional.

I'm confident, I'm smart and I'm competent.

Perhaps, instead of teaching women politics is neutral, we should teach them how to endure the onslaught that comes with it. After all, no one calls Bill or Malcolm treacherous.

*Georgia Daly is President of the GSA*

# WHAT THE HELL DO WE DO ABOUT IT?



## CRISTABEL GEKAS

### Workplace Harassment

The other day, a friend and I were discussing the usual banalities of law student life. Keeping up with readings. Balancing work and study. At some point in the conversation, probably after I noted the concerning level of masochism we were both displaying, my friend informed me that her work as a barrister's assistant had become a drain on her studies and social life. Essentially, her boss was an entitled dickhead, although I think she used a less abrasive term.

I pressed for details. Some days before, she had printed out her academic transcript in the office. Said dickhead (FYI, he's a white man) quipped, "Are these really your results? Are you actually intelligent, or have I hired an axe murderer who is trying to fabricate her grades?" He'd also made a remark about her intelligence on another occasion. "You did very well in undergrad, I suppose, but you did do an arts degree. You did do a lot of soft subjects, like gender studies."

We eventually came to the conclusion that she should ride it out for a couple of months, long enough to get a reference or the experience at least. The job probably wasn't worth sacrificing her wellbeing. But the rent had to be paid, and it was still a good opportunity.

It goes without saying that this wasn't the first time I had heard stories of workplace shame, embarrassment or harassment from a female peer. Such experiences are so commonplace that I'm no longer surprised when I do hear of them. Whilst we both agreed such behaviour was petty and disappointing, it was all too familiar to say that we were shocked.

I can hear some of you chiming in now. "What did you expect? He's a barrister. Hell, that's what he's paid to do." Well, my initial response would be, "since when does a license to practise entitle you to be a chauvinist pig?" My second response would be, "you've got a point. A little bit anyway."

And so, dear reader, I find myself in a bit of a pickle. I should say, first of all, that I am not advocating for complacency or laxness in our behaviour toward workplace harassment. Quite the opposite, in fact. But, I do want to draw attention to a perennial dilemma facing women in the workplace, to which there are no easy answers.

Two things are not up for debate. A) Women still face appalling levels of workplace harassment from their male colleagues. B) This type of behaviour is unquestionably, without a doubt, never okay. But what do we actually do about it? Where do we draw the line with this type of behaviour? When, if ever, do we *just suck it up*?

I think it is all too easy to say that women should be strong and defiant, and simply stamp out harassment when it arises. But unfortunately, the ubiquity of workplace harassment against women renders the problem far more difficult than "making our concerns known" to peers or colleagues. If I called out a customer, client or colleague every time I was

made to feel uncomfortable, belittled or degraded, I would, to put it plainly, be out of a job.

Take the example of the dismissal of Amy Tauber, a twenty seven year old journalist for Seven News. Tauber made complaints against an older male colleague for, among other things, commenting on her appearance and making disparaging remarks about her marital status. She was subsequently dismissed from duty immediately and without notice, for allegations of bullying a fellow cadet that had not been made known to her before.

Tauber's experience brought to light the continued pervasiveness of the harassment and humiliation faced by women in the workplace. It was an important and timely reminder that despite all the positive developments, damaging cultural attitudes continue to put young professional women on the back foot. And so, we're left with the nagging, unresolved question: *What the hell do we do about it?*

It's clear that we need cultural change. Deep, far reaching cultural change that probably warrants another *De Minimis* article. But in the meantime, young women entering the workforce are still left in a precarious position. Do we just "lean in" and join the boy's club, or do we make a stance? How do we strike a finite balance between being forceful and fitting in with the workplace culture? Because I'm a mere mortal, I cannot answer these questions here. But, I do encourage all of you, with what limited mental faculties you may have in week ten, to seriously consider what sort of workplace culture you'd like to be a part of when you enter the workforce. I'll leave just leave this prompt about \*cultural change starting with you!\* here...

*Cristabel Gekas is a first-year JD student*

# GSA WOMEN'S OFFICE

## MAX BERGH

My name is Max Bergh, I am currently the Women's Officer on the GSA. The GSA, or Graduate Student Association is the student representative body responsible for the interests of all graduate students at the University of Melbourne. My time as an office bearer has been extremely humbling and challenging. Within my role I often have the opportunity to assist with matters of crucial importance to the women's graduate student body and to engage with a diverse array of incredible and talented students from various cultural, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds.

I am exceedingly appreciative for the lessons this office has taught me, namely, governance practises and procedures, organising events from conception to implementation and the development of various interpersonal and professional skills. It is with great excitement

that I am currently undertaking two disparate initiatives. Firstly, following the release of the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) sexual assault and harassment survey, I have had the privilege of working within the immensely adept Respect Taskforce. Secondly, I am in the process of coordinating the upcoming 'Women's Health Day' event.

### Respect Taskforce

In late 2016 the University of Melbourne, along with 38 other Australian universities, participated in a national student survey of sexual assault and sexual harassment conducted by the Australian Human Rights Commission. The questionnaire sought information from students on the prevalence, nature and reporting of sexual assault and harassment. In response, national and institution-specific sets of data were produced. In short, 1.5% of respondents reported being sexually assaulted at university during 2015-2016; higher proportions of respondents

reported being female than male, graduate students rather than international students and undergraduate students rather than graduate students.

50% of Melbourne respondents reported being sexually harassed at university or elsewhere in 2016. 27% of respondents reported being sexually harassed at university over the same period, including on transport to and from university; notably if travel is excluded this drops to 20%. The University of Melbourne's data is overall reflective of the national findings, however, our data varies significantly in two respects. Firstly, the number of respondents reporting harassment on public transport is higher than the national average. Secondly, an overwhelming majority of Melbourne respondents indicated they had little or no knowledge of University policies in this area; of where to seek assistance; and of where to go to make a complaint.

The Respect Taskforce was established in order to formulate an institutional response to the issues raised within the survey. Membership of this Taskforce includes academic and university staff-such as Jenny Morgan MLS Deane,



Elizabeth Capp Director of Students and Equity and Professor Richard James Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Deputy Provost, various experts and student body representatives –including UMSU, UMSU International and GSA. Our work thus far has been promising. The attitude of the Taskforce, including university staff, towards the findings was not to emphasise the fact that Melbourne's responses were in line with the average, but rather to reiterate that even one instance of sexual assault or harassment is unacceptable.

The Taskforce comprises of a collective of individuals devoted to the improvement of conditions at Melbourne and whose aim it is to produce a cultural shift at an institutional level, so that our Zero Tolerance policy towards sexual assault and harassment is understood and embraced by all those whose path brings them into contact with the University. Thus far, the following primary action areas have been developed as a method through which this change may be achieved:

First, raising UoM community awareness by increasing visibility of the issues, values campaigns and ongoing maintenance activities: proposed activities in this area include the introduction of 'zero tolerance' videos to be played during lectures at the beginning of

semester, as well as competitions or incentives for students to produce their own material regarding sexual assault and harassment at university (ie. VCA films or Law essays).

Second, improving support and response: increasing awareness of available support, knowledge of reporting options and understanding of procedures and processes.

Third, improving training: for staff and students, this training may surround consent, first responder, bystander and alcohol and drugs training. A potential option to improve student training may be the introduction of a mandatory online consent program for undergraduate students.

Fourth, reviewing and renewing policies and procedures. Whilst yet in its infancy the Taskforce has the capacity and desire to effect real and enduring change within the University sphere. If you would like to be involved in discussions regarding the Taskforce, have any questions about our work or would like to express any suggestions or comments about how you think Melbourne could best achieve this change, please feel free to contact me.

#### Women's Health Day

We have been working long and hard to pull

together a suitable and enriching Women's Health event during Mental Health Week, to be held between 1-3pm on 10th October at Gryphon Gallery, 1888 Building Grattan Street. This event seeks to highlight the importance of checking one's health and balancing the demands of study, with the need to ensure mental and physical wellbeing. We will be providing several stalls in which students can have their blood pressure, heart rate and blood sugar checked. We have been very lucky to secure the services of myDNA, an Australian genetic interpretation company, to provide a personalised report, which 'decodes the information' in one's genes and which can assist one to make informed decisions about medications, diet and exercise. Additionally, we have engaged several speakers, including a nutritionist, Health and Wellbeing representatives and a representative from Safer Communities, to discuss the best ways to manage stress, a healthy diet and lifestyle, maximising personal time and methods to improve mental wellbeing.

I am very excited about this event and am extremely hopeful to see as many of you there as possible. All the services mentioned above, as well as lunch, are free and undoubtedly worth the short walk to main campus!

Max Bergh is the GSA Women's Officer

# LIBERTY

## YUJIE DU

### A Long Way to Go For Everyone

I noticed a social discussion online last week, someone asked: Some parents respect LGBT groups, and even support same sex marriage. But at the same time, they do not want their children to be LGBT. Why is this?

One reply to the question made a lot of sense: Parents themselves may consciously understand and accept that LGBT is just a different personal choice of lifestyle. However, they are afraid that their children may have to suffer too much after choosing to be one of them. The concerns come out of parents' love and care for their beloved and the pressure comes from the outside – the whole society.

The same kind of social pressure is on a woman throughout her lifetime.

Instead of a truck she may get a doll at 5 – "a girl's toy"; Instead of playing footy, she may have to go to some dance classes – an "activity suitable for girls."

How many girls choose a major in math or computer science? – "Girls are not good at math and computer stuff." How many women have to sacrifice a job to look after the family? – "Women should be the one to do the house chores."

Do women have to change their family names after marriage? – "Probably yes."

Can you say all these happen out of her own will? Are there any social stereotypes effectively

playing in all the situations? When her parents let her choose between a Barbie and a Teddy Bear, can you say she has the 'freedom' of choices? Sadly, in most cases, the girl follows the guide of social rules to grow up as a 'typical girl'.

Laws as normative rules are so much simpler compared to social rules, considering the latter are invisible in a sense that they are not written down and even not noticed by people when they comply with them. Acknowledging that all people are equal in legislation is only the first step to promote equality. More importantly, how are we going to fight against the complex, implicit unfair social rules when most people just subconsciously conform to them without a question?

Fighting against those unfair stereotypes involves the whole society. Because social equality concerns everyone, including men. When there are certain ways of living for everyone in different phases of life, everyone is constrained to the extent that any behaviour away from the 'normal practice' would receive pressure and criticism from the society. This pressure forces people to stick to the stereotypes, hence in fact, restricting our freedom.

Thus, although we ensure equality and freedom by law, there's a long way to go to achieve real equality.

We are not alone in the world and we're not free. We may never gain absolute freedom as long as we are members of a community. But I would love to have more options. To achieve that, we should allow and welcome 'abnormal' conducts in breach of the social norms – Being LGBT, girls having a boy's hobby, boys doing a girl's job, etc.

After all, each departure from the social rules is an attempt to expand our landscape of freedom.

Yujie Du is a first-year JD student

# FUCK THEM ALL AND HERE'S WHY



## ANON

Lean in. Bossgirl. Bosslady. Mentoring underprivileged youth. Empowerment. Inspiration. Leadership training. He for She. Giving back. Fuck them all and here's why.

Having been on the receiving end of well-meaning mentoring programs and similar charitable initiatives for kids from lower-SES backgrounds, I can tell you, what these programs lack in effectiveness they make up for in making recipients feel like weird charity cases.

To come into my public school and brag about your achievements like a spoilt toddler is the height of narcissism. Stop pretending you actually care and go do a charity run or whatever it is that you Beckys do.

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## Fuck them all continued

Because if you really cared you'd have more to say about funding cuts to domestic violence services, you wouldn't move to my suburb from Malvern and drive up my rental prices, and you wouldn't talk down to me like some Gorman-wearing girl-Jesus.

If you really cared you would educate yourself. You'd be aware that many of the world's women and girls have already collected themselves - they're already doing feminist work. There are Muslim feminists, working class feminists, post-colonial feminists. Your role is not to make yourself the CEO of yet another charity, to don a burqa and write about your experience of oppression, to visit disadvantaged suburbs you have no business in to show them you too have a vagina.

No! Your role is to follow! Get in line and

support what already exists. You have no place here, you are not the hero of this story. If anything, you're the oppressor.

The best advice I've ever gotten came from women who were most voiceless. The Muslim Pakistani caseworker who told me if you want to do community development right in a remote village of some post-colonial country, you need to devote 10 years minimum otherwise you're doing more harm than good. My mum who never completed high school and yet was the single-biggest advocate of education in my life. Not the hot shot lawyer mentor The Smith Family set me up with, not Hermione-fucking-Granger. My hero is my Centrelink-receiving, public housing-residing mother.

Lady - you don't inspire or empower me, and you have nothing to offer me so please don't sign up for that mentoring program.

What I really needed as a poor girl in my teens and early-20s was money, power, and critical awareness. Because the thing that disadvantaged women need is some of what you have: influence and cash. Your airy-fairy false positivity is precisely what is holding feminism back. Feminism is not about you. It's about equality. It's about paying your taxes so I can access crisis accommodation. It's about lobbying the Labor party to reverse Julia Gillard's cuts to the single parenting pension back in 2012. It's about inadequately funded Community Legal Centres and the effect that has on victims of DV. It's about the women who sew your clothes in Bangladesh, who need allies not saviours, who can't lean in and who look at Emma Watson and feel alienated AF.

*Anonymous is a second-year JD student*

## KICK LIKE A GIRL



## OLYMPIA FUSCALDO WARD

You know which Adelaide Team didn't lose the Grand Final miserably in front of an enormous Melbourne crowd crowing for their blood? The Women's Team. Although, they played in the Gold Coast....as an opener to the round one of a men's match....on a stadium that had been danced dry at an Adele concert three weeks before. But I'm sure the men had it tough. No you delightful anonymous commenters, I'm not man-bashing football. I will reason with myself - watch:

**Me:** The women's sport needs to grow slowly!

**Me:** I hear you, great things take time, baby steps, set yourself up to succeed.....but like an opener for a men's round 1? Really?

**Me:** No no I get that but they just can't draw the crowds, nice shirt by the way is that topshop?

**Me:** For sure, except that didn't they have to turn people away at the gates for all the matches? Dude thanks for noticing I'm classing up my look.

**Me:** Yeah but that's because it was a novelty this year, they need to consistently draw crowds. It's working, classy af.

**Me:** Ok yeah I can see that, we're all excited, but will it last is that what you're saying? It's just that I've noticed every single female human I know seemed to play footy this year...plus didn't the

AFLW just announce 2 more women's teams for 2019 and 4 more the year after? It looks like more than novelty or hype...almost like a legitimate league... You know you inspired my look by the way?

**Me:** Now obviously, I come from a place of wanting women to succeed...

**Me:** Obviously

**Me:** ...but they are never going to be as good as the men, they are biologically weaker, they haven't been playing the game long enough, this sport requires rough and tumble. Why do we have to pretend the games are equal when they just aren't? Also I'm really flattered, it takes an extra hour in the morning but it'll be worth it one day when Kirby J walks by and compliments that stiff collar

**Me:** You'd kick like a girl if you hadn't been able to play past the age of 12! These women take care of kids, study, work and play professional sport. There is no logical reason the women's teams have to be like or identical to the men's teams - I think it's differences that make it interesting....but by that same token women's teams like the Matilda's, the Southern Stars and the Rugby Sevens have all risen to the greatest height of their sport, in some cases much higher than the men's teams! All with lower...

**Me:** But what about...omg sorry were you done?

**Me:** Oh my bad was I lecturing? No one wants that, I was going to add something if you don't mind?

**Me:** No no please, it was informative I just had a thought but I can wait

**Me:** Thanks I'm on a role but keen to hear what you wanted to say. I was just going to add that all these women's teams have had these golden moments on much lower salaries, often with multiple jobs and smaller sponsorship deals - so imagine a social experiment where we give the

women everything the men have, including supplements, and then ask if they're good enough?

**Me:** I can see your point, but the fans demand elite level football and let's face it I'm all for inclusion but they just suck!

**Me:** Well 13 year old boys suck too but if we poor enough money, love and mum's spaghetti into them they turn into Dusty Martin!

**Me:** Yeah yeah but do women have to get into everything. They make bloody great ice skaters and gymnasts, stick to that. I sometimes feel like we just hand out freebies to women because they're....women ...also the opening barb about the Crows loss on Saturday is a low blow, that stings!

**Me:** But my mate Daisy Pearce does not want to ice skate, she wants to play footy! As for the freebies, what's free about working as a barista on top of training round the clock just to get to the World Cup!? I'd ask you to consider - at least in the context of the AFL - the serious advantage the men's teams have and the serious catching up women have to do, not just in sport but across multiple facets of their lives. What's a little support in the grand scheme of things? And speaking of grand schemes, isn't the whole point that watching your own kind take a magnificent speccy makes us all 'dream larger'. Oh my bad, too soon too soon. Maybe consider following the women's crows, much more satisfying

**Me:** That's not a bad idea actually....I'm going to marinate with these interesting new thoughts you've presented. Thanks! I don't feel at all 'man-hated' - this was almost pleasant

**Me:** Thanks! I don't feel mansplained and I really appreciate you listening. But omg did Kirbz really speak to you? Does his breath smell like dissent?

*Olympia Fuscaldo Ward is a second-year JD student and Secretary-Treasurer of De Minimis*

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