

Women have left the building



Michael Bradley

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NOW let's see. For many years, more than 50 per cent of law graduates have been female. The halls of the big firms are largely populated by young female lawyers in dark suits and serious hair.

By partnership time, they're almost all gone. The old "it takes

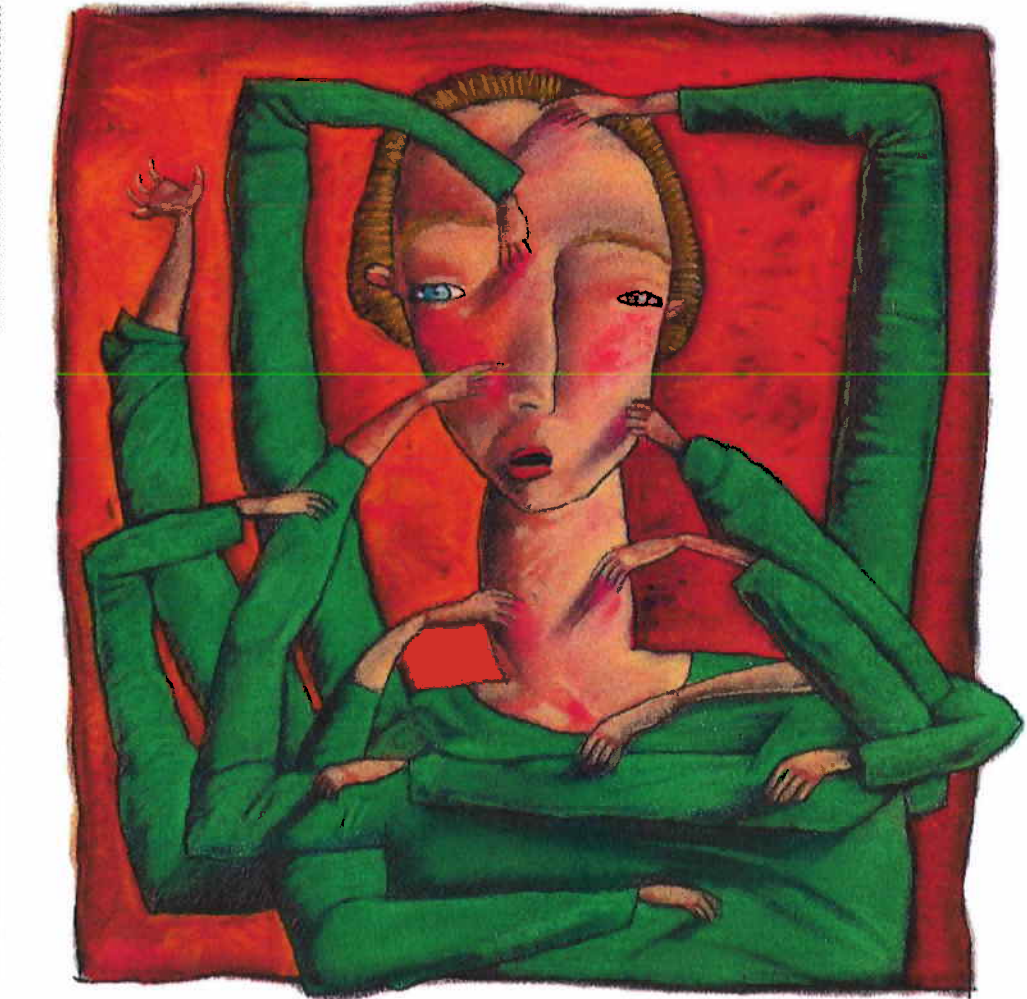
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time to filter through" defence no longer washes, the women have been in the building for ages now, way longer than the time it takes to make partner. But they're not making it. Where are they?

They're long gone. Inhouse. Overseas. Raising kids. Making movies, writing books. For the women who gave up or left the chase, there are thousands of unique stories, epiphanies and graceful exits. All those clever, creative lawyers lost to the profession, what a shame.

And the persistent and seemingly impermeable gender imbalance at the top just begs the question. Why?

It's not because women aren't as bright, focused, committed or enterprising. Come on, we know this isn't about talent or aptitude. For the most part they're leaving out of conscious choice. As to why, my personal conclusion is that they're making the obvious and sensible choice. For all the endless talk about flexibility and work/life balance, law firms



*In The New Lawyer's first managing partner report, to run every Tuesday, Marque Lawyers managing partner **Michael Bradley** explains why the options of women in the law are as limited as law firms' imaginations.*

haven't really changed at all.

It's all very well to sit a pregnant senior associate down and discuss her options with her, part time work, work from home, the firm crèche and a discreet room in the corner for expressing milk, but while that conversation continues to take place in a context, both physical and cultural, that hasn't actually changed in the past 30 years, it's all just a bit of a joke.

Here, have a BlackBerry and remote access from home. We'll pay you for three days while expecting you to work five and by the way you can't tell the clients you're a part timer. Even so, you should know your career prospects will be held back by your part time status, but

that's a fair trade-off hey.

The wonder is that any of them stay around. Of course, the parenthood issue is not the whole story, but it's a big part. If we're serious about having women in partnership in appropriate proportions, then the rules of the game have to change.

We advertised recently for a senior property lawyer to work on a casual, flexible basis. We discovered that there's a treasure trove out there of seriously talented, experienced women who want to work flexibly, really flexibly. Their options are as limited as law firms' imaginations.

And we implemented our own affirmative action policy. It's called Men at Marque, and we're currently fighting for the right to

have the cricket on the big screen. We're losing. But we're outnumbered three to one, so it figures.

Michael Bradley is managing partner of Marque Lawyers, voted Australia's Coolest Law Firm 2009. Admired and disregarded by its peers in equal measure, Marque is busily rewriting the rules of legal practice with youthful glee and a wide screen TV. Marque is law, done differently.

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