

# The Australian Women's Register

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**Entry type:** Person  
**Entry ID:** AWE5386

## Couchman, Ariel

(1958 - )

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**Born** 19580101, Melbourne Victoria Australia

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**Occupation** Director, Feminist, Lawyer, Solicitor

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### Summary

Ariel Couchman is a lawyer and women's rights activist who works in the not for profit sector. She is (2015) the director of the Young People's Legal Rights Centre (Youthlaw).

Go to 'Details' below to read a reflective essay written by Ariel Couchman for the Trailblazing Women and the Law Project.

### Details

The following additional information was provided by Ariel Couchman and is reproduced with permission in its entirety.

Ariel Couchman was inspired to study law at Monash University as part of her journey as a women's rights activist. On campus in student politics, as a young lawyer being admitted and in the legal and non-legal positions she used the law to highlight and challenge inequality and discrimination and bring about social justice.

In 1987, on admission as a lawyer, she and her feminist friend, Meredith Carter, challenged the discrimination experienced at the time by women lawyers by wearing pants and requesting the title of Ms. There was much media coverage at the time and women barristers would stop them both many years later to thank them.

Couchman and Carter both also campaigned with well known feminist lawyer, Jocelynn Scutt, to have rape in marriage criminalised and for broader rape law reform. Both had previously joined Women Against Rape in the early 80's. This collective of women supported rape victims and campaigned about the treatment of rape victims by police and the courts. Women Against Rape was represented on the Premier's Rape study advisory group. Much to the chagrin of government bureaucrats different members of the collective would appear at each meeting.

In the 1990s Ariel was the first legal officer at the Domestic Violence and Incest Resource Centre. She initiated a broad campaign supported by lawyers, barristers and members of the judiciary to have two young women (the Collis sisters) exonerated and pardoned. The young women were convicted of perjury for withdrawing their complaints of incest against their father after being pressured to do so by their father and by his solicitor. They were finally pardoned and a solicitor involved disciplined. The case brought public attention to the experience of incest victims in the legal system.

In the years that followed, Couchman and others formed the Coalition Against Family Violence and campaigned to bring to public attention the number of domestic violence homicides. They wrote a book – *Blood on Whose Hands?* documenting the experience of domestic homicide victims from the perspective of their family members. One of these family members, Phil Cleary, has been an outspoken advocate for women rights and domestic violence law reform since the death of his sister Vicki.

Couchman was a lawyer for over ten years and then took up various policy and management positions with a focus on social justice and human rights. She is a registered Family law mediator and is a strong advocate for mediation options in the legal system.

In 2014 Couchman was invited to the Monash University Student Association Alumni Awards Night and was awarded the inaugural Tony Lang Award for Excellence in Advocacy.

## Published resources

### Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

### Newspaper Article

Lawyer scared the pants of the establishment, Berkovic, Nicola, 2014

### Book

Blood on Whose Hands? The killing of women and children in domestic homicides., Women's Coalition Against Family Violence, 1994

### Site Exhibition

Australian Women Lawyers as Active Citizens, Trailblazing Women Lawyers Project Team, 2016,  
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/lawyers>

### Author Details

Nikki Henningham and Ariel Couchman

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