**Is it just me?**

I’ve been to two meetings in quick succession in which gender representation on committees was discussed. In case you’re wondering, at neither of the meetings was it suggested that there should be more men, gays, lesbians, bisexuals or transsexuals on the committees.

Why is there still such an emphasis on gender issues? Isn’t it time that as women, we got over ourselves? Are we not capable of ensuring that we’re in the right place at the right time?

It’s clear that I’m not a raving (or raging) feminist. Maybe I’ve been too pig-headed to notice when I’m not wanted. Or maybe I’m just plain arrogant because I not only believe that the best man for the job is usually a woman, but I assume that she will make this clear to everyone.

And quite frankly, if men want to exclude us, well, they just deserve whatever they get!

**Wathint’ abafazi, wathint’ imbokodo**

On a serious note, though, I’m not unaware of, nor am I insensitive to, the inequity of the status of women in many areas of society. It’s also clear that Africa needs to pay special attention to ensuring that women are not marginalised.

August is Women’s Month. In case you’re a Generation Y or Millennium child, it’s not only seriously scary for me to think that you’re reading the *SAPJ*, but you may also be unaware of the significance of 9 August. On this day in 1956, more than 20 000 women marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria to protest against the pass laws which had devastating effects on families. They carried their babies in their arms and on their backs, and it was one of the most orderly and well organised marches ever seen on the Pretoria streets.

Can you imagine what it must have been like when Lilian Ngoyi suggested that the women should stand in absolute silence for half an hour? And why, you may ask, does her name sound familiar? She was the leader of the march, along with other women, such as Helen Joseph and Sophie de Bruyn. If you come from Pretoria (or perhaps I should say Tshwane), you may recognise these names. They have been honoured by the recent street name changes.

Did you understand the quotation above? I’m sure you’ve heard it before. It was the first line of the song that the marchers sang: “You strike a woman, you strike a rock.”

**A culture of non-discrimination**

We’re already aware of the importance of many areas of women’s health, so perhaps as members of the healthcare community in this country, we should now pay attention to societal discrimination against women. Although our country’s constitution forbids any form of discrimination, it’s such a complex and deep-seated problem that it will take time and effort to rectify.

We must just keep it in perspective. Don’t let’s start a counter-culture of discrimination against deserving men! After all, ladies, some of our best friends are men, aren’t they?

**Interesting meetings**

You’ve been too polite to ask, so I’ll tell you anyway. The first meeting at which gender representation was brought up was a SADC committee meeting. The second was a special South African National AIDS Council meeting, chaired by South Africa’s Deputy President, Kgalema Motlanthe.

I must say that I really enjoyed the way in which the Deputy President conducted the meeting. It coincided with “Take a girl child to work” day, and three girls from local schools attended the meeting. When he welcomed everyone to the meeting, the only people who were mentioned by name were these girls.

What did people call him? I was amused to hear them address him as “DP”? But it was very respectful and people obviously have a high regard for him.

When the matter of gender representation was discussed, one of the participants said to him: “DP, I don’t know if you’ve noticed, but you’re surrounded by a boys’ choir!” I don’t know if the Minister of Health and Mark Heyward (deputy chair of SANAC) can sing, but we got the message!

He has a delightful sense of humour. When he listed the apologies, he introduced the subject by talking about the “perennial apologisers”, and mentioned some very senior cabinet ministers by name.

Chairing a meeting is not always easy. People doze off or don’t pay attention, and then they expect answers to their questions, even if the topic has been fully discussed. The DP dealt with such a situation by saying: “I suspect you arrived late”, even though the person who asked the question was sitting in the front row!

When addressing someone who had not said a word during the meeting, the DP quoted Nkosi Albert Luthuli: “Even if you have not spoken, you are still excellent in the meeting”.

I think I’m going to claim that sentence, and maybe change it a little: “Because you have not spoken, you are excellent in the meeting”. Pity it’ll never apply to me.

**Lorraine Osman**