

Women, listening and law – what does it take to be heard?

A Symposium hosted by the Legal Intersections Research Centre

School of Law, University of Wollongong

3 & 4 November 2022

This Symposium calls for attention to the politics and practices of listening in legal contexts, as the necessary counterpoint to voice and ‘speaking out’ in feminist legal theory and activism. Exploring, analysing, conceptualising and theorising listening is critical to our current political moment, as we witness a renaissance of feminist activism across a range of issues including women’s safety, economic security, political participation and representation, the care economy, workplace rights and gender-based violence. Women’s voices are central to this activism; yet, we contend, *listening* lies between voice and a meaningful, effective response from those with the power to effect change. Indeed, a focus on listening to women – and anger at the silencing of women or failure to listen to them – is increasingly prevalent in public discourse concerning feminist activism, as seen in the recent federal election, in public protest against inadequate government responses to call for feminist reforms, and in the emergence of the hashtag #listentowomen.

Feminist legal theory and activism champion the value of women’s speech, voice and experience in a range of legal contexts, including policy development, law reform, institutional inquiries, and truth and justice commissions. Indeed, women’s testimony of personal experience is commonly adduced and elicited by law and policy processes seeking to address inequality, injustice and violence against women. Yet women regularly report that their voices are not *heard, listened to or valued*, or that their testimony is used selectively to suit a particular agenda. The voices of LGBTQ+ survivors and advocates, Indigenous women, and women living with disabilities, are further marginalised or silenced completely in hierarchies of listening and attention.

As successful as feminist legal theory and activism has been in establishing the centrality of women’s voices in recognising gendered forms of harm and highlighting the exclusions and limitations of law, less attention has been paid to how women’s voices are elicited, received, and listened to, and the forms of response they have received.

We welcome abstracts for papers of 15-20 minutes in length, which address the central question of how women’s voices are heard and listened to in legal contexts. Specific topics might include:

- Listening, silencing and First Nations women
- Creating safe spaces for voice and listening
- Women’s voices and listening on social media
- Hearing the voices of LGBTQ+ women
- Listening to, and hearing women in international contexts
- Hearing women’s voices in law reform processes
- Public survivors

- Hierarchies of attention
- The ethics and dynamics of listening in legal contexts
- Testimony
- Women's voices, hearing and emotions

We aim to foster a dialogue across disciplines, with the hope that a legally-oriented conceptualisation of listening may be influenced by existing theory and practice from related disciplines including philosophy, sociology, literary, cultural and media studies and politics. We also aim to foster an intersectional approach to experiences, practices and ethics of listening, and particularly welcome papers from First Nations women, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, women living with disabilities, LGBTQI women, and women from a range of socio-economic backgrounds.

We welcome contributions in a range of formats, including individual and collaborative papers, possible panels and workshop ideas. Please email abstracts of up to 200 words, together with a brief biographical statement, to Dr Sarah Ailwood (sailwood@uow.edu.au) and Associate Professor Cassandra Sharp (csharp@uow.edu.au) by Friday, 2 September 2022.

Confirmed Keynote Speakers:

Dr Tania Serisier (Reader, Birkbeck College, University of London), Leverhulme Research Fellow, 2022

Associate Professor Tanja Dreher (Scientia Fellow, UNSW)

Selected papers from the Symposium will be published as a Special Issue of *Social and Legal Studies* co-edited by Dr Sarah Ailwood and Associate Professor Cassandra Sharp, a proposal for which has been accepted for publication in 2023.



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