

Introduction: 'De-storying the Joint'

Karla Elliott and Chantal Bourgault du Coudray

'Perhaps the best way to destroy the joint, then, is actually to de-story it, by changing the tired old tale, one woman at a time.' (Moss 2013, 61)

This special edition of *Outskirts* journal draws together selected papers from the 2016 *Australian Women's and Gender Studies Association* (AWGSA) conference, held in Brisbane and hosted by a group of Queensland universities from 29 June to 1 July 2016. The conference organising committee was led by Dr Sharon Bickle (University of Southern Queensland).

AWGSA and the biennial AWGSA conference provide crucial spaces for women's and gender studies scholars to come together, exchange knowledge, collaborate and strengthen bonds in order to challenge dominant narratives about gender and sexuality that continue to produce and reinforce material inequalities. A particular focus is forging connections between feminists and feminist organisations to tackle pressing and ongoing injustices.

The 2016 conference theme was 'De-story the Joint'. This theme referenced the success and reach of the Facebook group 'Destroy the Joint', founded in September 2012 by Jenna Price in response to sexism in the Australian context that was epitomised by radio commentator Alan Jones' claim that 'women are destroying the joint' ('Destroy the Joint' 2012). The rapidity and energy with which 'Destroy the Joint' flourished evidenced a Karla Eresurgent appetite for feminist politics, pursued largely online, that many have termed 'fourth wave feminism'. In keeping with AWGSA's role as a point of contact between feminist scholars and feminist organisers beyond the academy, the 2016 conference thus sought to recognise and connect with the 'Destroy the Joint' movement,

Corresponding author:

Karla Elliott, Monash University
Email: karla.elliott@monash.edu

and to extend it through the work of 'de-storying', as advocated by Tara Moss in Jane Caro's 2013 book reflecting on the 'Destroy the Joint' phenomenon (61).

The aim of the conference was to bring together women's and gender studies scholars, postgraduates and students from across Australia to further 'de-story' what is taken for granted or unquestioned. Over three days, conference attendees presented on issues such as reproductive rights, media, justice, masculinities, health, education, work, literature, sport, mothering, film, art, violence and stories and narratives themselves. Professor Clare Hemmings (LSE Gender Institute, UK) and Professor Irene Watson (Law, UniSA) presented the keynote addresses, Hemmings (2016) on 'Feminist Articulations: Narratives of Gender and Sexuality in a New Feminist Landscape' and Watson (2016) on 'First Nations Stories: Unpacking Narratives of the Savage'. As part of the conference, a free public discussion and debate, *On Destroying the Joint: Debating Feminism, Politics and Media in Australia*, was co-presented by AWGSA and QAGOMA and supported by the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU). The discussion was moderated by Dr Zora Simic (UNSW) and panel members were Jane Caro (author; social commentator), Jenna Price (UTS), Alexandra Pyne (UQP) and Jeannie Rea (NTEU President). In the spirit of continuing this panel conversation, Rea has contributed the transcript of a recent speech she delivered to Victoria University's Feminist Research Network, about women in the neoliberal university, which appears in this volume as a concluding commentary.

This special edition of *Outskirts* based on the 2016 AWGSA conference includes six articles that 'de-story' in divergent ways. The volume opens with an article by Kara Beavis, assessing the impact of the work of New Zealand politician and feminist economist Marilyn Waring. Beavis notes Waring's relative invisibility in our contemporary moment, suggesting that the stories we tell about politics and economics have struggled to accommodate the global significance of Waring's contribution. Staying with the Antipodes, and in a similarly retrospective vein, Catherine Horne Fisher's article explores increasingly colloquial language use in Australian women's magazines of the 1950s and 1960s, demonstrating how narratives about Australian language use, especially slang, have been skewed towards consideration of male language conventions. Both of these articles substantiate AWGSA's ongoing role in facilitating knowledge sharing and also a collective memory of gender issues in the Australian context.

The next two articles by Sarah Pearce and Kathryn Hummel each explore a group of texts that 'story' gender in contradictory ways, acknowledging what Hummel calls the "two steps forward, one step back" process of de-storying (Hadleigh 1993, 287). Pearce reads themes of food refusal and consumption in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Villette* (1853) and Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights* (1847), demonstrating these narratives' simultaneous acquiescence to and rebellion against dominant accounts of women's 'appropriate' relationship to food. Similarly, Hummel's exploration of 'gay best friendship' in the films *Get Real* (1998) and *My Best Friend's Wedding* (1997) explores how heteronormativity is concurrently reinforced and destabilised in these texts. Both articles serve as reminders that de-storying is a dialectical process, in which meanings and interpretations are visibly and often messily contested.

The final two articles in this volume explore the dynamics of contemporary online feminism in the Australian context, resonating strongly with the instigating milieu of the AWGSA conference theme. Mish Singh's article proceeds from her uneasy reading of Australian feminist commentator Helen Razer, arguing that feminist 'storying' that insists upon juxtaposing material and representational concerns unhelpfully jettisons the value of digital media activism. Finally, Hannah Garden and Kim Toffoletti undertake a robust content analysis of the ways in which feminism is articulated in the online Australian women's publication *Mamamia*. Like Pearce and Hummel, they note the dialectical processes by which feminism is navigated in *Mamamia*, and bear out Singh's view that online feminism should not be summarily dismissed as a diluted and neoliberal form of feminist politics.

Overall, the papers collected in this special edition continue the effort beyond the AWGSA 2016 conference to 'de-story' gendered discourses and to re-value aspects of women's lives and contributions that are often ignored or deemed unimportant. We thank all the authors and anonymous reviewers for their work and for their contributions to this special edition.

References

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Author biographies

Karla Elliott is a Teaching Associate in Gender Studies and Sociology at the Centre for Women's Studies and Gender Research, Monash University. She is also a Research Assistant with the Monash University Gender and Family Violence Research Program, Criminology, School of Social Sciences. Her research interests include feminist care theory, critical studies on men and masculinities and narrative methods. She is a Social Media Officer and Executive member of AWGSA.

Email: karla.elliott@monash.edu

Chantal Bourgault du Coudray is a lecturer in Gender and Cultural Studies at UWA. Her teaching and research is grounded in the notion of 'transformative engagement', which foregrounds close attention to the 'soft' communicative challenges of respect for difference, intercultural and/or interdisciplinary dialogue, relationality and the art of listening. Her other research also centres on themes of transformation, through engagement with feminist philosophy and narrative (especially fairytales). She has also written and produced several films, most notably the feature-length drama *The Sculptor's Ritual* (2014). She is currently training as a Gestalt psychotherapist.