
Catherine Strong (with Evelyn Morris)

“Spark and Cultivate”: LISTEN and Grassroots Feminist Activism in the Melbourne Music Scene

Catherine Strong is a lecturer in the Music Industry programme at RMIT in Melbourne, Australia. Among her publications are *Grunge: Popular Music and Memory* (Ashgate, 2011) and *Death and the Rock Star* (edited with Barbara Lebrun, Ashgate, 2015). Her research deals with various aspects of memory, nostalgia and gender in rock music, popular culture and the media. She is currently Chair of IASPM-ANZ and reviews editor for *Perfect Beat*.

School of Media and Communication
RMIT University
GPO Box 2476
Melbourne, VIC 3001
Australia
catherine.strong@rmit.edu.au

Abstract

LISTEN is a Melbourne-based feminist collective focused on improving the position of women in the music industry, in part achieved through improving the documentation of women's contribution to music. This article includes an interview with founder Evelyn Morris and gives an overview of the development and achievements of LISTEN, while placing it in the context of feminist activism in Australia. Morris discusses how LISTEN gave form to the dissatisfaction that was being felt by many women in the Melbourne music scene, and quickly became a hub for a variety of feminist activities. She also elaborates on her own perspectives on what feminism entails, and the recent increase in activism in this area.

Keywords: activism; feminism; gender; Melbourne; popular music

Introduction

This article examines the Australian feminist collective LISTEN whose mission statement reads:

LISTEN exists to spark and cultivate a conversation from a feminist perspective around the experiences of marginalised people in Australian music. (LISTEN n.d.)

Although only conceived of in late 2014, the collective has already made an impact in Melbourne, where it is based, and beyond. Although there is a significant amount of analysis that could (and should) be undertaken of LISTEN,

including how it functions as a social movement and its place in the history of women’s music-focused collectives, this article will perform two basic functions: first, it will provide a timely account of the development and significance of the LISTEN collective. As Strong (2011) highlights—and as LISTEN itself is trying to counter—women’s contribution to popular music is not recorded or celebrated in the same way as men’s. Creating a record of the activities of this group, and the conditions of its creation and successes, will work to counteract this trend. To this end, the opening section of the interview will contextualize LISTEN and give an account of its aims and achievements to date. Second, in keeping with feminist principles that privilege the voice of subjects over researchers (Hesse-Biber 2013), it will present an interview with LISTEN founder Evelyn Morris giving her take on the group.

As is often the case with social movements (Taylor and Whittier 1995), the birth of LISTEN came about through a recognition of shared inequality and the construction of a collective identity in relation to this, in this case enabled through social media. On 15 May 2104, Melbourne-based musician Evelyn Morris wrote the following post on her Facebook page:

I’m gonna publish a book called tastes of Melbourne women underground. So tired of male back-patting and exclusion of anything vaguely “feminine” in subculture. We get it. You think you’re all awesome and we’re all just kinda average. Unless we sound like you. Ladies of Melbourne ... Let’s please reject this culture. (Morris 2014)

The post was quickly recognized (and confirmed by Morris) as a response to a recently released book on the Australian music scene called *Noise in my Head* by Jimi Kritzler (2014). Morris saw the book as having an overly masculinist tone and including segments that discussed women in problematic ways (see Morris 2014). However, the specificities of this book quickly became sidelined in a deluge of comments on the post (over 650, most within the first 24 hours) that responded to Morris’s naming of the problem surrounding gender in underground music scenes, and to the idea of taking action to counter this problem.

LISTEN was formed quickly in the weeks following this post and discussion. Although the initial action suggested by Morris was for women to write their own book documenting their experiences and input into the music scene, this quickly became only one goal among many for the women who responded to Morris’s provocation and became part of the group. Over the following 18 months, LISTEN expanded and became a very visible part of the Melbourne music scene. The LISTEN website became a repository for writing on women’s experiences in music, as well as being the focus for the ongoing book project. The overall emphasis of the group became as much about activ-

ism as documentation, if not more so. Women were encouraged to tell stories about problems they face making music and being music fans. The group organized a series of gigs for women musicians, and launched a record label to release their music. They also worked to increase dialogue and conversation around the problems facing women in the music industry. LISTEN members (most visibly Morris, but also notably Chloe Turner, Katie Pearson and Jo Eaton) organized and participated in discussion panels, either as local one-off events or at large music industry conferences, such as Big Sound in Brisbane and Face the Music in Melbourne. In addition to this, they organized their own two-day conference in November 2015. Melbourne community radio station 3RRR also ran a series of LISTEN programmes over the summer of 2016, where members engaged in discussion with listeners and played segments recorded during the conference.

The immediate and strong response to Morris suggests (as she also says below) that an undercurrent of dissatisfaction had already been (re)developing, and that the right conditions existed for this discontent to be translated into something concrete and effective. This can be observed not just in Melbourne and not just in relation to music, but also through a greater visibility of feminist issues in politics, media and social media in Australia. The positive reception of Prime Minister Julia Gillard's anti-sexism speech given in parliament in 2012 gave a clear indication that the anti-feminist backlash of the late 1990s and early 2000s had subsided to a large extent. In Australia, columnists such as Clementine Ford and Clem Bastow have been pushing an unapologetically feminist agenda for a number of years and have been gaining increased popularity. Movements such as Slutwalk have also reinvigorated feminist protest (Maddison 2014). This is not to understate the still considerable opposition that exists to feminist ideas: Ford and Bastow are constantly subject to abuse, and praise for Gillard's words was hardly matched with respectful treatment in politics. But while open discussion of feminist ideas in mainstream discourse may have become more acceptable, one of the problems that was being noted was the fact that little has changed in terms of women's position in society. This was for instance evident in popular music (see the introduction to this issue for an account of inequality in this area). A spate of commemorative activities relating to Riot Grrrl (now over 20 years old) brought that movement back into people's consciousness, highlighting the continued existence of many of the issues Riot Grrrl was protesting. Journalist Jessica Hopper published a collection of her writings that she called *The First Collection of Criticism by a Living Female Rock Critic* (2015), making apparent women's absence in that area. LISTEN, then, emerged in a somewhat more favourable environment in which to pursue feminist goals, given the increasing awareness of the continued marginalization of women in music.

This general upswing in feminist activities relating to popular culture and music means a simple causal connection cannot be made between the existence of LISTEN and the recent positive outcomes and changes for women's equality. It also needs to be noted that the current environment of the Melbourne music scene plays a part in making change possible, as there is considerable political and lobbying know-how in the music community as a result of long (often successful) campaigning on various issues (see Homan 2011). However, LISTEN has clearly provided a focus point and a place where women can assume that their issues will be taken seriously. This has been demonstrated most powerfully in the campaign to increase women's safety at gigs that has been ongoing throughout 2015 and into 2016. Early in 2015, DJ and promoter Kate Pearson was harassed at a gig, and after complaining to security was ejected onto the street alongside her harasser. Knowing that this sort of experience is not uncommon for women at live music venues, Pearson approached LISTEN. In association with lobbyist Helen Marcou, LISTEN worked not only to try to undo the normalization of this type of occurrence, but approached music industry peak body Music Victoria and the state government to argue for better legislation and industry standards to ensure women's safety. This has resulted in the convening of a government taskforce to investigate the issue, as well as the voluntary implementation of revised guidelines for security at certain venues (for example, to prevent a woman being forced onto a street with her attacker, as happened with Pearson) (Preiss 2015). Having LISTEN as an obvious port of call for such issues facilitates action. LISTEN has engaged with the music industry on all levels, rather than adhering to ideas about mainstream versus subcultural or underground music (despite this being the origins of the musicians involved). This willingness to pursue official, non-subcultural means by which to achieve important aims has ties to uniquely Australian feminist traditions, although it is not necessarily done deliberately. Australian feminists have, since the second wave at least, been adept at finding ways to make bureaucratic processes work for women, and the Australian “femocrat” has been a feature of the political landscape since the 1970s (Sawer 2008).

The following interview with Evelyn Morris covers the impetus for starting LISTEN, the challenges Morris has faced to date, the successes of the group and some of their future plans. It also focuses on the efforts of LISTEN organizers to make the group a truly intersectional space. Since this interview, Morris has decided to step back somewhat from her prominent role in the group, instead inviting more collective and group-based decision making, and greater ownership of the organization by members. This then marks a moment of change in LISTEN, and the possibility of new directions moving forward.

Interview with Evelyn Morris: The Beginnings of LISTEN

Catherine Strong: So to start off with, can you just tell me a little bit about yourself?

Evelyn Morris: My name's Evelyn Morris and I do music. I've been doing music since I was really young. I play under the name of Pikelet mostly, and recently I started a group called LISTEN which is an organization that's aimed at documenting and creating discourse around women's involvement in music, but also around diversity in music and the lack thereof. So that's a quick summary.

CS: So can you tell me about LISTEN, what its goals and philosophy are? And I suppose a better place to start would be, what the impetus was to start it. I know this is something you've written about in detail, so I feel like I'm asking you to rehash stuff that you've already gone over a fair bit. But if that's okay.

EM: So basically I was responding to a book that was written about the ugly Australian underground, which is a scene that I've been part of for many years. And I felt as though the language in it was a little bit too congratulatory of things that are coded masculine, and very dismissive of anything feminine. And on top of that, there were a few women that were written about in a way that I just felt was really dismissive as well. So really, that was just a kind of catalyst though, because I had been feeling a pretty impossible-to-put-my-finger-on kind of lack of power for many years. And I think it's something that a lot of women around me also felt, and often that would turn into a competitive spirit or just turn into a deflated giving up kind of spirit. But essentially, I think as soon as I posted about it, everyone felt they had an opportunity to air that concern. And so there was a big response to my criticism of the book. And that's how LISTEN started.

CS: I remember seeing that Facebook thing happen. It was a very short period of time, wasn't it? It happened within a couple of hours.

EM: Yeah, it was all really fast. And that's what I mean, I think I was in a position where I've been doing music long enough that I know enough people that it had kind of a reach. But also, just the right moment. Everyone was dying to talk about it. And I think maybe there were murmurings of feminism starting up again.

CS: Had you been having conversations with people about those concerns before you put that post up? Or was that post literally just this ground zero that everything came from?

EM: No. I think I had a fair few friends that we would talk about it behind closed doors, but it was always like—I feel like the way we used to talk about it is so different to how we talk about it now. We used to talk about it as like, we didn’t have a right to talk about it to anybody else, just to each other. We were always testing the water with whoever you were talking to, being like, are you going to get this? And apologizing for what we were saying. Whereas once there was a bit more support from other people, it was like we could just say it. People shared experiences, so it’s not just me. It’s not just me on my own, feeling crazy and pissed off that I’m not getting recognition or whatever. So it was like a very important thing for me personally. And I think for a bunch of other women as well.

CS: So what was the philosophy behind LISTEN when you first set it up? When you said, “I’m going to make a website”, what was the thing you wanted to accomplish with that?

EM: The intention is still, and was at the time, to create a parallel history, so something that is the history that would otherwise not be recorded because of all the invisible prejudices that occur. And that was the whole intention, just to collect all those articles online, document all the various acts that are playing now and try and also correct some from the past. But we also really quickly realized that it would be helpful to put on shows regularly, because therefore you’re having a more lived experience of the creation of that document. So that’s actually been more important than the articles itself, the community that’s built around it, because it’s sort of a physical realization of how we’re all supporting each other. We also ended up having a conference, which was really fun. Well it wasn’t really fun, it was really hard work. Yeah, our initial intention was to document everything and I guess create something for us all to feel proud of.

CS: So it sounds like it’s been a real shift then from a sort of focus on the past documentation to actual activism and sort of trying to change things in the present as well?

EM: Yeah, a community-building exercise I guess. But the activism stuff that’s come out of it, it’s almost just like policy work. So a sub-committee

really quickly formed out of the Facebook group who are interested in how we create safer spaces in music venues and there are people like Katie Pearson who have an understanding of legal stuff which I don't and a kind of willingness to engage with government, which I also have no interest in. So her and Helen Marcou from SLAM¹ have been able to really actively engage with government and change some policy around how venues operate and how much they acknowledge sexual harassment and things like that as being a danger in public spaces.

CS: Can you tell me a little bit more about how that developed? It was something that I read and was watching a little bit on Facebook when there were the discussions and things that you've been posting. For me, it was one of those moments where you have your perspective shifted where I sat up and went, why have I never heard anybody talking about this before? Of course, going to gigs is not going to be the same safe space necessarily for women as it might be for men. So from my outsider perspective, it seemed like that developed a little bit from the discussions where people were coming forward with their experiences.

EM: Yeah, specifically Katie Pearson had a bunch of experiences that she wanted to talk about publicly that were to do with—she's a DJ and she even has found in some queer spaces that she books for parties as well, she's even found that sometimes in those spaces she has felt compromised at times. There's often a real lack of respect around people's personal space. Like a smack on the bum is not a big deal or whatever. That's sort of what happened with her is she had something "small" and important happen to her, like a small sexual harassment, smack on the arse or something. And then she complained about it and the venue responded really horribly. So she kind of just took the impetus to turn that into something really positive.

CS: So having the LISTEN group then gave her somewhere to go to sort of get some of that stuff happening?

EM: Yeah.

CS: So the conference. What made you think you'd like to do a conference?

1. Save Live Australian Music, an activist group created in 2010 to protest venue closures.

EM: Well, partly it was out of the fact that the Facebook group was going so popularly. We realized there was a real need for person-to-person communication as opposed to online. So we thought a good way to do that, and also just a good way for anyone who wanted to be involved but maybe wouldn't feel okay about posting online, could come along and work with us. So it also was just something that Darebin Council suggested to us. So they gave us the venue, the Northcote Town Hall for free, which really made it possible for us to do it and not be as concerned about getting numbers and that sort of thing. And yeah, we just felt like there were so many things that needed to be talked about. We were doing lots of other people's panels and we kept finding that each panel would be an hour long, and every time we'd just get to the point of getting to an interesting point of conversation, an interesting problem to deal with, we would be wrapping up. So in-depth conversation has to happen at one place in one time in some way.

CS: And you felt the conference was successful?

EM: It really was. Once again, it was like I feel I have to pinch myself, but it was really thrown together with very little knowledge. We didn't know what we were doing. Although Chloe who is one of our co-founders, Chloe Turner, she's done lots of music management training and stuff like that. But you know, some of those courses seem so completely off the mark. I feel like she's also just a savvy person. And we just thought of all the people we wanted to hear from within the community and all the people that might need to talk and just put them on some panels, and it was actually really easy.

CS: So where else are you having these face-to-face conversations at the moment?

EM: Well that leads to another really important part of that, was that at the gigs without fail, I'll meet somebody new who's keen to be involved in some way. And you know, it's cool because that's how I've always networked. We exist within these social organizations where music is this social beast. So it's really important, the gigs I think. And some of them aren't even very big. Like some of them are really big, but other ones it's kind of small. And it's cool to have lots of different kinds of gigs because then first of all, you're going to be showcasing the fact that women have so many diverse ways of expressing ourselves. But also, you're tapping into various kinds of networks and not just speaking to the same people all the time. So that's pretty much it though. I actually also see all of the articles as a conversation, because

although they're online, there's no space for comments below it; it doesn't really digress into that online shit fight. So articles can be really good for generating conversation.

CS: I think that's a really interesting thing though, that's how you get conversation happening but don't allow the internet trolls and people who want to derail it and take it somewhere that you don't want to go.

EM: And it's hard because you need to skate the line between ensuring that you're very public and very visible and also not allowing that kind of horrible backlash. Because you want people to feel safe to express themselves. So it's a very fine line to walk. I realize with the Facebook group that it was not the right place to do that.

CS: Well can you tell me a little bit then about your understanding of feminism? And how you've arrived at that understanding and how you think that that shapes what the group looks like?

EM: My understanding of feminism is very experiential. It comes from having had many horrible experiences is what I mean. I've always been a very observant person and I've always had a very critical mind. And so I guess it's never come from a place of theory. I've read a lot of theory but I've sort of been quite careful not to take that on as my own perspective, because I want to represent a feminism that exists in my community and is about the people around me, not people who existed in the 60s or 70s or not people who exist in America. I think every capitalist structure has its own unique set of intricate ways of controlling people. So I think it's important to know your own structure, internally and externally. It's really hard to answer the question what is my feminism, but I'm going to try really hard though. Obviously I'm a genderqueer person so my feminism comes from a place of exploring gender as opposed to reinforcing gender binaries. I don't believe in the gender binary being a necessary part of women's discourse. But that doesn't discount the fact that in the past that's been necessary for a lot of women. I believe very strongly in being supportive of any kind of marginalized people. I guess I'm interested in dismantling patriarchy for all people, so I'm also very open to having discourse with men on occasion. I mean people who identify as cis-men. Because sometimes it's necessary. If it's not too painful, I'll do it.

CS: Have there been many men expressing interest in the groups?

EM: Yeah, heaps actually. And always I think the title of male and the masculine role that people are supposed to fit themselves into is not adequate for most people. And a lot of the men that will want to be involved in this—I know people who want to live outside of that in some way and just don’t want to align themselves with that kind of masculine set of tropes that go with being masculine. Because that’s incredibly suffocating for them. I don’t have a misandry approach, but I understand if that approach is—you know what I mean? I’m definitely not discounting it, because also I’ve so many bad experiences and I’ve heard so many horror stories since starting LISTEN that it’s very hard for me—I have to work really hard not to go into misandry in my mind, because it’s like pretty easy. You get enough anecdotal evidence about it and you can very easily just go, “Fuck that kind of person”. And I do have days that are like that, but I try to remain constructive.

CS: Can you say a little bit more about the sort of—I mean I, in watching what’s going on, would describe this as a very intersectional feminism that’s being demonstrated.

EM: We’re definitely trying for that, but it’s hard to say that we are because we don’t really have—the majority of the people in LISTEN are white. So we’re still not intersectional really. We’re working on it.

CS: Why do you think that that might be? Is it the nature of the sort of music?

EM: Yeah. All the communities that we exist in are very predominantly white. I think there’s a million reasons for that. I’m really curious to unpick that as well. It’s part of the reason why I wanted to make sure part of the conference was devoted to the race and music crossover. Because also when I was starting to do LISTEN and do all the online stuff, a few people contacted me and were like, “I’ve actually got some things to say about racism”. And they were the people that ended up organizing that panel. So I think it’s important to try and engage with that as much as we can and try also to be responsible as people who are committed to decolonization as well.

CS: Do you feel like the attempts to be a good space for genderqueer and trans-people have been more successful in your view?

EM: Yeah. Well since shutting the Facebook group, that’s been a lot easier.²

2. The discussion section of the LISTEN Facebook page was disabled in October 2015 after transphobic messages were posted.

As soon as we realized we needed to shut the group and that there were a bunch of trans-women leaving the group because they felt unwelcome, I immediately had in person meetings with a bunch of women that I know are trans-women, just to suss out what we were going to do, to be as considerate as we could of everyone's needs and trying to get everyone's trust back. And thankfully we were quite successful in all of that. Part of that was just writing an article. I wrote an article just really emphatically stating that this is not how we do things, and if that's the way you want to do things then go somewhere else.³

CS: With the issues that you had, was that coming from women or from men?

EM: Mostly from women, from cis-women.

CS: A misunderstanding of ...?

EM: Unfortunately a lot of women who have done gender studies at Melbourne University and have interacted with Sheila Jeffreys⁴ and not questioned her approach have pretty skewed ideas about how feminism works. In my opinion, gender essentialism is not really where we're at anymore. It's like years ago. And so it was exhausting to try and explain all of that in such a public space, knowing that while I was explaining it and why I was kind of indulging those discourses, it was with every word making genderqueer and trans-people feel less welcome. And I'm saying, the more that you show that it's okay to debate that stuff or okay to explain why—if you show everyone that you have to explain trans narrative, then it kind of undermines it in the first place. So I'm quite happy having those conversations in private if people need some help with understanding things but like in public, it was just damaging.

CS: The fact that it's been very visible I think seems really important. What other sort of challenges have you faced?

EM: Dealing with incidents that we've been told about because of who we are, of intimate partner violence and sexual abuse. That's been pretty much impossible and very traumatizing. And I still have no good answer to how

3. This article can be found at <http://www.listenlistenlisten.org/internet-and-inter-sectional-feminism/> (accessed 16 June 2016).

4. Jeffreys is a recently retired radical feminist academic from the University of Melbourne. She has been a controversial figure, partly because of her negative position on trans-persons (see Jeffreys 2014, and for a critique of this see Johnson n.d.).

to deal with that. I'm really wracking my brains every day, trying to suss [work] out a set of steps that can be taken once you know about an incident. But as yet, I have not got it down. Unfortunately it would be really great if it was simple to just be like, "That person fucked up. Everyone, we need to talk about it". But in my experience of trying to do that, everyone tends to shut you down. Everyone's very protective of the mental health of alleged perpetrators. I have to say that, I guess, but I generally am on the side of survivors. My approach is like pretty black and white. I always believe when someone says they've been abused because it's so hard to say that. To get to the point where you say that is very hard and I know that because it's taken me so long. So it's been really actually mostly just upsetting, the response that people have to those narratives, of just silencing.

CS: Are people approaching you or the group, do you think, because this is the place where they see women talking about these things and it's the only place they know where these things are happening?

EM: Well the desired outcome in most cases that I've dealt with has been that they want to stop seeing everybody patting the perpetrator on the back. They want to stop seeing somebody that hurt them being celebrated all the time.

CS: Is this in the case of the perpetrators being musicians and they're looked up to?

EM: Or organizers. It's really hard when the structure or the system is so social, but also hierarchical. There's definitely hierarchy involved in abuses. The more that you "achieve", the more respect you have and the more people you know. And then it's kind of like, if you're in a position where you have less power than the person who's perpetrated against you, you essentially get ousted from your community, because people will always believe the person with more power. And also, people don't like to hear about it or look at it. It's too ugly. People don't like being agitated. And when a person reports sexual violence or intimate partner violence, they're essentially disrupting the kind of comfortable, pleasant narrative that's going on. We're all friends and we make music together and everyone's lovely, so they're seen as a pain in the arse and they're treated that way in no uncertain terms. They're also treated as though they're crazy. It's incredibly damaging, social structures. That has been the most painful thing for me to deal with and to observe. It's very disappointing.

CS: So what else do you think needs to happen? So you guys are thinking about policy, on the ground change in terms of women's safety, inclusiveness. What else do you think needs to happen, or what more needs to happen, for these things to move us closer to equality in the music industry?

EM: My goal is that the difference shouldn't be an issue in any way, but how that would happen, I don't know because it's such a big part of the way that capitalism and patriarchy are set up, to notice difference and to capitalize on difference. Like I really do just kind of take it a day at a time, because I feel like everything changes from day to day as well in a lot of ways. I think so much more needs to happen though. I mean I would like it if all of us were a little different so that when people do have reports of sexual violence or whatever, they actually get listened to and that reporting wasn't so difficult. But I would also love it if the community would stop doing that thing of, if you haven't been convicted then it's not a thing. It would be nice if there was more legitimacy around certain horrible experiences, and then also it would be nice if those experiences didn't occur. But for them to stop occurring, we need to stop protecting it. So many steps to take before that can even happen. I guess I hadn't realized when I started LISTEN how much of an intricate matrix of horrible bullshit actually there is. As soon as you start pulling one thread, five other ones come loose. So I guess that sounds quite negative, but I do see the act of disruption and questioning, challenging norms to be a really positive process. It's hard and it brings up lots of feelings, but to me it's a joyous thing. It's an expression of freedom, an expression of the fact that I am in this position where I can do that. And it's also just fun. So my whole plan is just to keep agitating. That's pretty much it.

CS: It seems to me there's a lot of discussions like this that are happening at the moment in various forums, doing these disruptive things and really calling people out for the behaviour that's gone unchallenged for a long time. So do you see this as really sitting as a part of that wider discussion?

EM: Definitely. It's a collective movement. It wouldn't have happened if there wasn't already so much going on in that way. Like so many people working so hard and talking so publicly. That's what I mean by the insidious change. You constantly infuse people's brains with these sorts of discourses and things just change over time. The way I think about it is like every problem that exists within the structures, like all the structures in themselves, even are just ideas that we keep reinforcing. So you just have to keep changing those little ideas every single day with conversation. And I think if people like Clem

Ford and Clem Bastow, and all the other women that are writing currently and all the cool websites that are doing amazing ... I mean if that wasn't happening, I wouldn't even know if we would have the room to be so specific in our discourse. I never considered what we were doing as being singular or separate. It's very much a part of a massive thing that's going on. At the conference everyone was saying it's fourth wave now.

CS: It sort of feels that way. There really has been this visibility all of a sudden.

EM: I didn't even know that the third wave happened.

CS: Well, that was actually one of my questions I was about to ask. To what extent do you see connections to what's going on now to what's happened in the past? Either in terms of the waves or in terms of something like Riot Grrrl where there was that really explicit moment about music and women. Are there those sorts of things that you're drawing inspiration from?

EM: I guess a lot of trans-women have a lot of issues with Riot Grrrl because that whole kind of girls to the front movement meant that people who didn't fully look like girls would get pushed to the back and with all the dudes. So Riot Grrrl, I don't know. See I never really connected with Riot Grrrl when it was happening either. I think that's been the case with heaps of different movements of feminism because I've never felt like a female or not. So that's what I mean. I've read lots of different theory and I've investigated previous waves and stuff, and I have so much gratitude and respect for all that work, but I've never fully identified with it because I don't know if I've ever felt like I'm winning at being female. So until there was a movement that felt less about essentialist stuff, just women, until that started to happen, I wouldn't know how to talk with authority on any of it. But talking from a personal level, in terms of the entire movement, there's no way that it can't be confused with previous feminism. It's all part of the one story in a lot of ways.

CS: Do you think a lot of the other people who have become involved have seen essentialism as a problem?

EM: I think probably there's heaps of different things going on. Everyone's feminism is very personal, very different. I'm certainly not undermining that kind of real ownership of womanhood as well. Whether that's from a cis-woman or trans-woman, I think owning being woman, being feminine is amazing, as long as it can be alongside another experience of being female.

You can be female and also masculine. If there's a popular angle on feminism that's like pop stars that do feminism and they're always still really beautiful [laughs]. I see that stuff and I think, well they can talk because they're all pretty or whatever. I think that experience doesn't need to be an essentialist experience. That experience happens to men. That experience is something that happens to everybody when they realize they don't want to be part of this patriarchal capitalist structure anymore. I mean I have an anti-capitalist approach to feminism, a lot of people also don't. A lot of people, the way they do feminism is to support capitalism. So I think everyone has got the light-bulb moment and it doesn't need to be based on being female. And I think also guys often feel—I mean the whole thing with the way patriarchy affects guys is that they're not even allowed to speak about how they feel about a lot of things. Having feelings or a light-bulb moment is probably not something you talk about.

CS: Well, especially not around something like gender.

EM: Yeah. But I think I understand what you're talking about to be that moment where you suddenly realize, and this definitely happened for me too, even though I was raised feminist, where you go, "I thought I was crazy. I thought I was super insecure just because I was built that way". But then you go, "I'm super insecure because I've been told to be. I've been trained to be". All of that. I think that's such a beautiful moment when you realize that, and I feel like I have those sorts of moments every day. I'm always investigating my own insecurities and stuff and going, well that's where that comes from. It's cool.

CS: Have you guys considering building up networks to other similar groups in other places?

EM: Yeah, actually when I was in New Zealand I met heaps of people that do really good work. There's a group in Auckland called Uniform and they're I guess more based in art stuff, but they do a lot of music shows, most of them outdoors in parks and things like that. They've rejected venues altogether and are trying to make their own spaces. They're really cool and I'm hoping to collaborate with them on some shows over there soon. But I don't know about anywhere else. We kind of cross paths with people but it's almost like everyone does their own thing.

CS: So there's nothing else in other Australian cities that you know of that does something so organized?

EM: No, but I don't want to say that that's not the case because there probably is, I just haven't heard about it. We also have a lot of people operating in other states on our behalf. We just had our first Hobart show that was booked by some people that live down there that are interested in it. They did such a good job, it was awesome. And in Perth there's a few people, in Sydney there's a few people, in Brisbane there's a few people. Even I think Adelaide is starting to kick off. The whole intention has always been for it to be nationwide, and part of the reason behind that is that I think if you have an intention behind building networks, it's easier to build networks. I think that trying to book shows around Australia and tour around Australia is actually really hard. So it's hard for anyone, and then if you then put that through the filter of how things are structured and who things are easier for, it's always much harder for women to book tours around Australia. So the intention has always been, we want to make it a network of people around the country that are into us and want to promote particular voices over others. So we're working on it. And also spreading into New Zealand, but also I want to go into some of the islands as well, Indonesia. There's lots to do. It should also not be—if things are going to be happen in a different place, it should be driven by someone who's there. So I'm always putting the call out to people and trying to encourage people, but it can't be run by me because I don't live there.

CS: One last question. It's a broad one. Feminism and music, is music a particularly good place to be addressing these things?

EM: Yeah. I've got so many reasons. Like I think music is super important in so many ways because it's a very intangible art form. It does things to us emotionally. It's hard to explain the creative process behind it. So that's one thing, the way that it impacts us, the way that it communicates is able to explain things that words often can't, which is really important to me because we can then get beyond certain structures. Even the structures of language. Language has been made by a patriarchal system as well. So music is super important because of that, but also the social structures are mirrored in most communities. Like when I was at this conference in Otago University, there was also a talk about comedians and their contribution, and then visual artist people, a couple of other things as well. We talked about the exact same things. So it's a good one just because it's an example of how most social structures work. And also just that in terms of the fact that there's been fewer female voices heard, there's fewer versions of how we express ourselves in the world. Do you know what I mean? So I think it's important to rigorously investigate what people's expressions of sexuality and gender and identity are, and then

have that be as broad and intricate and interesting as possible, to break down the very kind of monochromatic one-dimensional binary way that gender is expressed in music. It's also the thing that I know the most, so for me it makes the most sense to use it as a platform to discover feminism.

References

- Hesse-Biber, Sharlene. 2013. "A Re-invitation to Feminist Research". In *Feminist Research Practice: A Primer*, edited by Sharlene Hesse-Biber, 1–13. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Homan, Shane. 2011. "'I Tote and I Vote': Australian Live Music and Cultural Policy". *Arts Marketing: An International Journal* 1/2: 96–107.
- Hopper, Jessica. 2015. *The First Collection of Criticism by a Living Female Rock Critic*. Chicago: Featherproof Books.
- Jeffreys, Sheila. 2014. *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism*. New York: Routledge.
- Johnson, Tim. n.d. "Review of *Gender Hurts: A Feminist Analysis of the Politics of Transgenderism* by Sheila Jeffreys". *Hypatia: A Journal of Feminist Philosophy*. <http://hypatiaphilosophy.org/HRO/content/gender-hurts-feminist-analysis-politics-transgenderism> (accessed 7 January 2016).
- Kritzler, Jimi. 2014. *Noise in my Head: Voices from the Ugly Australian Underground*. Melbourne: Melbourne Books.
- LISTEN. n.d. "Why LISTEN". <http://www.listenlistenlisten.org> (accessed 11 January 2016).
- Maddison, Sarah. 2014. "Slutwalking: Where is the Next Generation of Australian Feminists?" In *The Women's Movement in Protest, Institutions and the Internet*, edited by Sarah Maddison and Marian Sawer, 132–47. London and New York: Routledge.
- Morris, Evelyn. 2014. "Noise in my Head". <http://www.listenlistenlisten.org/noise-head/> (accessed 11 January 2016).
- Preiss, Benjamin. 2015. "Anti-Sleaze Taskforce to Stamp out Sexual Harassment at Gigs and Clubs". *The Age*, 5 August. <http://www.theage.com.au/victoria/antisleaze-taskforce-to-stamp-out-sexual-harassment-at-gigs-and-clubs-20150805-girvfg.html> (accessed 11 January 2016).
- Sawer, Marian. 2008. *Making Women Count*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press.
- Strong, Catherine. 2011. "Grunge, Riot Grrrl and the Forgetting of Women in Popular Music". *Journal of Popular Culture* 44/2: 398–416. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-5931.2011.00839.x>
- Taylor, Verta and Nancy Whittier. 1995. "Analytical Approaches to Social Movement Culture: The Culture of the Women's Movement". In *Social Movements and Culture*, edited by Hank Johnston and Bert Klandermans, 163–87. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.