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Kaitlyn Poole

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Tapestry of Tales: Women's Collative Writings as Legal Storytelling

Kaitlyn Poole

Abstract, This article presents an exploration of the storytelling as a feminist practice generating a counternarrative to law, with particular focus on narrative forms that center the collation of women's stories, examining the practice from the 1400s to contemporary microbiographies on TikTok. I focus on the literary mode of biographical collection. In doing so, I assert that it is the weaving and compounding of multitudes of stories that give rise to the challenging of law's normative, masculinized narratives. Seemingly inconsequential, isolated biographical narratives are given larger social meaning when read together.

Keywords, biography, feminist, narrative, legal storytelling, literature, women's writing, social media

INTRODUCTION

In the reading of a thousand stories, I have lived a thousand lives. I have come to know the anger, the anguish, of another and in doing so have come to the recognition of my own. I am haunted by the ghosts of Hill House and the terror of the way that the domestic consumes the lives of women.[1] I feel the weight of Offred's red cloak and grieve the loss of her name for that of a man's.[2] I have wondered what I was made for with the accompanying existential dread of the realisation that I was designed to be in service of male comfort and achievements.[3]

Narratives generate cultural interpretations of events and facilitate our reflection upon our individual and collective lived experiences.[4] They function as a mechanism by which we reflexively contextualise events and generate an understanding of ourselves in the broader social. Narrative is thus fundamental to our production of meaning and the sense-making processes we undertake to interpret the world.[5] It is through narrative that we understand both our own autobiographies and the

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collective biographies to which we identify or draw upon as frames of references for ourselves. As we tell stories of our own pasts, our own experiences, we engage in a process of sense-making by which we assign meaning to these experiences.[6]

If we read stories as interpretations of law and justice, we catch glimpses of our foundational assumptions underlying both law and justice. It is upon these assumptions that the law as a system is given normative authority.[7] That is, stories we tell generate our foundational assumptions of law and justice which subsequently becomes our legal nomos. Equally, we may tell stories that reveal narratives of the law that challenge the law's normative authority. Stories can render visible injustice as equally as they are capable of providing an account of what justice is assumed to be. Stories work to pull at the threads of our expectations and assumptions. In doing so, these narratives can operate to dismantle, reshape, and reimagine the law. These constitute our counter-stories. The telling of counter-stories, thereby, may have a destructive function over the law,[8] just as stories may have a reinforcing effect.

This article presents an exploration of the storytelling as a feminist practice generating a counternarrative to law, with particular focus on narrative forms that center the collation of women's stories from the 1400s to contemporary micro-biographies on TikTok. I focus on the literary mode of biographical collection. In doing so, I assert that it is the weaving and compounding of multitudes of stories that give rise to the challenging of law's normative, masculinized narratives. Seemingly inconsequential, isolated biographical narratives are given larger social meaning when read together. The practice of collating women's experiences is an example of what Catharine A MacKinnon describes as 'butterfly politics':

> Butterfly politics, applied to change in the gender system, including through law, means that the right, small intervention in the structure of an unstable political system can ultimately produce systemic change … The early openings of the butterfly's wings on sexual harassment were the legal, political, and conceptual innovations of the 1970s, setting the stage for the collective social interventions of the #MeToo movement that is shifting gender hierarchy's tectonic plates.[9]

A story in isolation, may not be sufficient to challenge the structure of a political system, but the collection of stories, as we will see in the works of Christine de Pizan and Mary Hays may be enough to unfurl a wing. The practice of gathering women's stories becomes entrenched in history, cumulating in, as MacKinnon identifies in the above, the 1970s with consciousness raising sessions. It is a flutter that gathers as a hurricane in the digital age.

Collective writing is a form or method of feminist storytelling. It is a mechanism by which feminist storytellers and activists can demonstrate the structural

nature of women's experiences and draw correlations between these experiences and the politics of gender. This is particularly the case when accompanied with feminist reading. Feminist reading, as I use it, is an interpretive lens through which stories are received that challenges normative, masculinized modes of communication and views other voices as valuable political contributors. Throughout this essay, I assert that there is a need for the law to listen to these stories and read them as feminist jurisprudence.

I use the metaphor of weaving throughout this paper; the idea that we start with seemingly isolated pieces of thread that we can then weave together into something larger and more interconnected. We continue weaving until we eventually step back and see a full image, or rather imagining, in a tapestry. The tales discussed are not disparate stories but rather part of a larger, interconnected sociohistorical context.

This draws upon the metaphor of quilting imagery used in feminist research and textiles themselves as a feminist research method.[10] Lori E. Koelsch describes both quilting and data as being better understood when they are presented in their socio-historical context and that the quilting metaphor can be used as a counter to abstract theorisation.[11] Maura C. Flannery uses the metaphor of quilting to challenge the masculinised metaphors used in scientific inquiry that alienate women's experiences to present a more inclusive metaphor.[12] Whilst following a similar rationale, I use the metaphor of tapestry rather than quilting to pay homage to the origin point of this paper's analysis; the 1400s text *Le Livre de La Cite des Dames (The Book of the City of the Ladies)* by Christine de Pizan. There are records of tapestries based upon Christine de Pizan's work, in yet another manifestation of storytelling.[13]

I will first account for law's narrative possibilities and its openness to feminist reading. We will then analyse Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* tracing the history of collative stories as a feminist practice, before continuing the examine the evolution of this practice in digital spaces with TikTok's microbiographies.

PIECES OF TWINE: LAW AS NARRATIVE

Let's consider our starting position; the first pieces of twine that we require so that we may follow the threads of storytelling throughout history as they weave together and form a narrative tapestry. Our preliminary assumption is that the law is narrative. It is built upon the telling and receiving of stories. When a lawyer presents a legal argument in court, they are plotting a sequence of events framed by given evidence. The legal elements in precedent and case law are points, or conventions, of plot around which the story must be told. The lawyer's role, in part, is to convince the judge or jury of their story. Testimony is,

ultimately, storytelling given meaning by the law's formal requirements. Precedent is a story of legal history; it is prequels and sequels and spin-offs.

Within the law, then, there is narrative transmission and transaction which is received and rendered operative by various legal actors.[14] Legislatures, judges, juries, lawyers, and policy makers all participate in the sense-making process, telling and translating law's stories to render them comprehensible. If the law is narrative then, naturally, it may be read. Just as there are normative methods of storytelling, there are normative ways of reading.

There is a distinction between the narratives told by dominant groups which reinforce the hegemonic identity as it relates to marginalized groups and provide an expression of reality which is seen as natural in its superiority, and counter-stories told by marginalized groups challenging these assumptions of "natural superiority."[15] That is, the reality that is enforced as being the normative narrative or nomos in contrast with those stories that deconstruct this normativity. If we read the law, then we can reveal the nomos of justice, or injustice, and the ways in which the law scripts these in its regulation of social relations.[16]

Groups whose perspectives have been suppressed, devalued and abnormalized can utilise stories as a counter-reality to the dominant version.[17] So just as stories construct the reality of our lived experiences, they may also unravel that construction and weave a new one in its place. It is a constant battle for which threads are added to the tapestry to construct it is overall, dominant image.

The law's scripts of reception, however, often excludes or restricts the ability of such groups to share their stories in a way that is recognized. Narrative requires transmission and transaction, but what is deemed as appropriate transmission is governed by ideologies around how narratives should be designed.[18] The difficulties faced by women expressing their stories and having them received under traditional legal discourses is well documented.[19] The framing of legal issues and how experiences of these issues may be told can obscure, erase, or render inaccurate the experiences of women.[20] As a result, law's methods of eliciting story may limit the possibility for justice that recognises voice and, instead, reproduce power structures that silence groups.[21] This is particularly the case in the context of gendered violence, including but not limited domestic and sexual violence. The ways in which the law elicits stories of women's experiences of gendered violence has oft been cited as perpetuating further trauma and reproducing normative narratives around gender that prevent women from accessing justice.[22]

It is here that feminist legal storytelling exists as a destructive force over the law's gendered normative narratives. Lindsey Martin-Bowen highlights that a feminist storytellers' goal is to incite debates about the legal system's status quo, its nomos.[23] In doing so, they weave in the stories that challenge the dominant legal narratives by providing an account of the feminine lived experience that challenges a nomos constructed upon masculine stories. This is but one side of

dialogical relationship. There is a need for the dismantling of the framework within which stories are being told that continues to perpetuate women's stories as being outsider.[24] Feminist storytelling may subsequently only have an unravelling impact upon legal nomos if it is read feminist. It is a dialogic relationship in which there must be teller and listener.

This gives rise to a call to expand what we conceptualise as legal form. Literary narratives, or as I will more specifically focus on, biographical narratives, are capable of rendering what is excluded from legal convention into existence.[25] These literary forms may subsequently become a site of jurisprudence; a location within which law's possibilities are imagined, reshaped, and critiqued. More specifically for our purposes, it is a site of feminist jurisprudence – feminist literary jurisprudence constituting an examination of gendered issues within stories as a critique of patriarchal law and a reimagining of law's futures.[26]

Women's narrative and the emotional affect that lies within, requires a reading that challenges the conventions of who gets heard and the circumstances in which they are heard. It requires a reading from the assumption of credibility to avoid the erasure or delegitimization of the voices within. Speaking on anger specifically, Kimberley Killen asserts that:

> By treating women's relative conformity to normative expectations as the benchmark for being perceived as politically legitimate, we limit our understanding of what constitutes "successful" politics and the ways in which power incentivizes the legitimation of some speakers to the exclusion of others.[27]

Having one experience read as legitimate is contingent upon a political matrix that is temporally contingent.[28] Some voices and methods of speaking are deemed more credible than others, measured on an intersecting matrix of race, gender, sexuality, class, religion, and ability. The call then, is not simply to tell feminist stories, but to read feminist too. By reading feminist, we interrogate and question the basis of this matrix. Feminist reading and feminist storytelling thus have a symbiotic relationship. Feminist reading interrogates the underlying foundations of normative narratives, questions the mechanisms that silence some voices whilst projecting others, and approaches counternarratives articulating nonnormative experiences with an ear to listen. It is a form of reception.

If there are no efforts made to read feminist, then feminist legal stories will continue to be pushed to the edgeways by dominant interpretive traditions. Relationally, feminist legal storytelling can function as a way to learn how to read feminist. Feminist legal storytellers have subsequently turned to the compounding of voice, the collation of stories en masse, to produce a shift consciousness and an opening of feminist reader reception.

There is a significant history of feminist legal storytelling founded upon the raising of consciousness.[29] The raising of consciousness involves a disillusionment of our assumptions about gender as formulated and reproduced by institutions and actors such as the law. That is, a deconstruction of the nomos. The raising of consciousness generates a resonance; a series of echoes and connections that are created when particular narratives of experience are heard through which audiences are able to identify shared experience.[30]

Feminist legal storytelling or, alternatively, feminist literary jurisprudence, articulates counternarratives that raise consciousness as a challenge to the normative assumptions about gender within and reproduced by the law. The identification of shared experience within feminist legal storytelling generates a resonance which subsequently becomes a form of "social knowledge,"[31] a summoning of consciousness to power inequalities. One method, or style, of this feminist legal storytelling is the collation of women's lived experiences.

Collative mediums constitute a counter-narrative to the dominant cis-heteropatriarchal narratives through the gathering of what would otherwise be isolated, individual experiences. Biography provides contextualisation for the experiences of gendered injustice that grants greater authorial agency than what may be permitted within the formal bounds of law.[32] In this gathering, these collative biographies demonstrate the structural experiences of gender and articulate them in a way that the law is otherwise unequipped to receive. It is not one, singular experience constrained to an isolated event but rather a routine experience of womanhood that has been pushed to the edgeways by dominant, masculine narratives that the law has facilitated the projection of.

The precise form of collection is contingent on time and place, but this storytelling practice of collating women's lived experiences within narrative to raise consciousness has endured for centuries, pointing to the perseverance of feminist legal storytelling across time and place. The collation of women's lived experiences as feminist legal storytelling and a destructive force upon the law's nomos is powerful enough to endure silencing practices and alter its formats to continue raising consciousness across time and place. Like Louise D'Arcens and Anne Collett, this is not to a "specious assumption of transhistorical female experience,"[33] but rather an assertion that women's biographical storytelling exists in continuity. We stand upon its cumulative effects; the voices added throughout history and the momentum gained in the accumulation at pertinent points of feminist sentience.

In perceiving feminist legal storytelling in a cumulative state rather than as categorized waves, we ourselves are granted consciousness as to the vastness of feminist storytelling traditions. We recognise the fluidities of history. We perceive the threads of individuals stories weaving together into the tapestries of feminist

legal narratives from which we construct our collective feminist nomos and selves. As Sara Ahmed identifies:

> Feminism involves such histories of contact; feminist is shaped by what is it against, just as women's bodies and lives may be shaped by histories of violence that bring them to a feminist consciousness.[34]

There is an acknowledgement of these histories of contact through the incorporation of intertextuality in the works discussed by this paper. By the very nature of being a collative medium, within which the biographies of women writers and artists are often told, these are intertextual works. They exist in conversation with the stories told by and of women before them, the stories told by and of women around them, and the stories told by and of women in the future. In drawing upon this intertextuality, the storyteller demonstrates feminist reading. They have heard other feminist stories, read them as both legitimate and significant, and worked to project these stories in the undertaking of their own feminist storytelling. I asserted at the commencement of this essay, that in the reading of a thousand stories, I have lived a thousand lives. So too have our feminist storytellers and readers.

The collective sharing of women's experiences through storytelling is a long-held feminist practice that draws upon biographical sharing and collating these to identify the collective experiences of women as social rather than isolated.[35] In doing so, they present a counter-narrative, an opposing dialogue, to the dominant voices that shape social systems and structures, such as the law. In its dynamic transformations, the malleability of feminist resistance is revealed. Women's stories, particularly the usage of women's voices to counter dominant legal narratives that seek to control the lives of women as a product of cis-heteropatriarchal culture, are enduring. To demonstrate this, we will examine different forms of collative biographical forms, commencing with Christine de Pizan's *The Book of the City of Ladies* in the 1400s and concluding with TikTok's microbiographies in contemporary day.

WEAVING THREADS: FEMINIST BIOGRAPHY ACROSS TIME

In the 1400s, Christine de Pizan wrote *The Book of the City of Ladies*.[36] *The Book of the City of Ladies* is a biographical catalogue on an array of famed women from history, theology, and mythology such as Mary Magdalene,[37] Sappho,[38] Medea,[39] and Dido.[40] It constitutes an early form of the collation of women's life stories to demonstrate individual experiences as collective and

social, one of the fundamental tenants of the consciousness raising sessions that we will see centuries later in the 1960s and 1970s. As one of the earliest surviving texts written by a woman about women, its form is a thread from which feminists of modern history will weave their threads.

The Book of the City of Ladies opens with our protagonist, character Christine, lamenting at the stories of women, told by men, that surround her. She knows in herself that these dominant accounts are inaccurate and yet she despairs at them. Christine is then visited upon by Ladies Reason, Rectitude and Justice who commence her re-education as to the virtues of women. It is in this re-education process that the biographies of women are shared. Pizan implements this frame-tale narrative, popular at this time, to recount these biographical stories.[41]

The Book of the City of Ladies provides a counter-narrative to the society of the 1400s, in which Pizan holds a dialogue with the dominant discourses of her lived context.[42] In presenting these collected voices of women, Pizan challenges the normative political and legal assumptions of women as citizens. The title itself conjures the Polis, subverting the Aristotelian through the presentation city State constituted by women. Political possibilities are reimagined through the matriarchy.

Pizan also collates lived experiences from numerous different forms of recording and study, from the poetic to the theological. This in of itself demonstrates the malleability of form within feminist storytelling, subsequently revising the history of women that has been written by men who had "given women a history."[43] In doing so, Pizan writes what Adrienne Rich would later describe as revision.[44] Centuries before it would be given theoretical articulation by Rich and popularized by authors such as Angela Carter,[45] Pizan undertakes an act of looking back on these biographies and examines them with new perspective.[46] In telling these histories from a new perspective, Pizan identifies sources of oppression and the mechanics of their reproduction, thereby opening the past to alternative stories and forming new conceptions of justice.[47] Pizan's biographical catalogue is thus inherently political in its engagement with the previous accounts of women's histories.

In describing Pizan's political writing, Kate Langdon Forhan asserts, "Christine wrote from a deeply rooted sense of her own vulnerability, and thus of the contingent nature of life."[48] This is not an unusual tradition within women's writing, that is writing as an expression of one's vulnerability. It is, rather, one of the characterising features of feminist legal writing that may be utilized in defining its genre and a practice that endures in contemporary feminist legal storytelling. *The Book of the City of Ladies* opens with that vulnerability, the sensations of despair experienced by character Christine as she reflects upon her

contemporary, popular depictions of women. It is in this moment of vulnerability that she is visited upon by Reason, Rectitude and Justice.

As many women would make explicit in the coming centuries with their biographical sharing, there is an intricate link between emotional valiancy and law. Evoking emotion can be demonstrative of the experiences of justice, or more precisely, injustice, and law's exercise over every day lived experiences.[49] In personifying Justice as a character visiting upon Christine, Pizan explicitly draws this connection between her anguish at the injustice experienced by women and the law's stories about gender. Justice as character reimagines law's possibilities and narrates its truths as theory. The ladies, Reason, Rectitude and Justice, instruct Christine not to dwell on the normative narratives that she has been told about women, but rather, reflect upon her own experience of womanhood as truth – a counternarrative.[50] In doing so, Justice as character forms a critique of the normative assumptions surrounding justice as an institution of male design, thereby questioning the legitimacy of such normative understandings of the law. We as audience are subsequently prompted to read Christine's emotions as a 'rational expression of injustice'[51] rather than an illogical or irrational response that the law should be immune from. They are transformed to a measurement from which we may understand harm. Further, it is the precise expression of emotion contextualized by injustice that may be flattened or rendered illegible under the law's frames of reading.

The Book of the City of Ladies is, of course, to be read in the context of its time. Whilst Pizan provides a counternarrative to the dominant gendered narratives of medieval Europe, it does so within the scope of the social, economic, and theological milieu of the era, and thus focuses on women's "virtues" rather than presenting explicit radical reform of gender roles. Nonetheless, these virtues, the collective private virtues of women, are expressed as having a public effect.[52] Pizan wrote of women, in the language of women, for women.[53] It is from here that we build our storytelling practice.

Continuing in following the threads through time, women of the 1700s and 1800s were letter writers, journal keepers, biographers, and essayists. These writings were utilized as a method of exploration of the self in relationship with social conceptions of femininity and female identity.[54] These were deeply personalized accounts. In reflecting upon the everyday life of womanhood and femininity, these women engaged in political, legal, and social debates. A canon of feminist literary writing takes shape. These writers craft a collective memorialisation of womanhood during the era that regulated such memorialisation to the edges whilst simultaneously countering the dominant narratives that had shaped femininity's performance.[55] By collating women's life experiences in letters, diaries, memoirs and biographies, women participated in the writing of history; these women make linkages to the personal every day experiences of womanhood

with their social context of the time, resisting erasure of what may be considered the historical.[56] They constitute a highly intimate alternative model of historiography founded upon the collective experiences of women, peeling back the curtain to reveal the everyday as political.[57] Such an act is a foundational tenant to the feminist legal storytelling tradition and perseveres in feminists' blurring between the domestic and public spheres of life.

In 1803, Mary Hays published her *Female Biography; or, Memoirs of Illustrious and Celebrated Women, of All Ages and Countries*.[58] Like Pizan nearly four hundred years before her, Hays collates the lives of women in a biographical catalogue. Hays details the lives of three hundred women[59] and, just as Pizan does, includes a wide array of women from Anne Boleyn to Sappho.[60] Hays presents these through what may be described as a feminist lens by which she evokes the sympathies of the reader to demonstrate the inseparability of emotional analysis from intellectual debate.[61] Emotion is significant to her political critique.

Emotion transgresses the differing lived experiences of circumstance between reader and subject, and further, the differing subjects themselves, to identify with the lives of the women Hays details.[62] The reader is drawn into the narratives of the subjects through the crossing of a bridge between the differing lived experiences of the two, the bridge structure engineered from the steel and concrete of this emotional evocation. As with Pizan, emotion is not irrational but rather an effective means of political realization. It is an account of justice, or rather injustice, that is not deemed measurable by the law rendered into a unit of measurement – the female populous.

In collating these lived experiences, Hays demonstrates the sociocultural and political pressures exerted over women's lives whilst simultaneously evoking a connection between her readers of the 1800s with the female subjects.[63] The demonstration of these pressures facilitates a reflection within the reader on their own formation of the female self under their own social conditions.[64] We identify our resonance. Emotion mediates the relation between the subject and the collective through the provision of a grounds for critique and may be translated into the collective movement.[65] The collation unifies the private and the public, bringing insight into the private lives, the inner emotional lives, of women and, in the very act of cataloguing these experiences, shows the ways that they are public.[66]

Such a practice was subsequently employed by the Second Wave Feminist Movement to demonstrate the personal as political and present feminist legal counternarratives acting in opposition to the masculinized legal narratives formulating the nomos. This practice additionally challenges the assumptions that law, and legal storytelling, is to be emotionally unaffected as an indicator of impartiality – that emotion is an indicator of bias and injustice.[67] Rather the politics of the self, and law's exercise over this, is an inherently emotional experience. Emotions become an indicator, a warning, that injustice has been

experienced and poses questions to law's restorative capabilities.[68] They challenge the normative assumptions as to what this can look like and presents new possibilities of law as a reparative institution.

Continuing to weave our threads, the late 1960s saw consciousness raising sessions spread throughout the UK and USA,[69] constituting one of the common practices of the Second Wave Feminist Movement. These consciousness raising sessions focused on the collective sharing of the experiences of women with other women through an oral tradition of personal storytelling. Through the provision of spaces for collective storytelling, women were able to make connections between individual autobiographies and the biographies of women around them, highlighting the structural nature of these experiences.[70] Significantly, these oral storytelling sessions revealed incorrect assumptions about sexual violence as physically violent, rare, and perpetrated by strangers outside of the domestic sphere.[71] That is, the stereotype of the 'monster' that had so powerfully proliferated the media as the dominant narrative of violence. Perpetrators were, and often continue to be, constructed as sexual predators by which their behaviour is symptomatic of abnormal psychology.[72] This stereotype contributes to the concealment of sexual violence by asserting that it is irregular, unpredictable because of this abnormal "monstrous" psychology and part of women's innate subordination rather than attributable to rape culture.[73] The collective sharing of experiences illustrates the importance storytelling became as a feminist practice, utilising a form of biographical sharing to identify the experiences of women and the social responses to these collective experiences. In doing so, such narratives of sexual violence as physically violent, rare, and only committed by monstrous perpetrators were challenged. As a result, we can trace the source of this mythological monster and reveal the truth lurking behind it. We reconstruct the normative narratives told within and by the law forcing the law to commence its rewrite. The collating of women's personal, biographical stories in an oral tradition subsequently became a weapon, a counternarrative, working to unravel the dominant stories told by the law that continued to support violence against women. We slay the mythological monster and set our sights upon the accountability of men.

The collectiveness of consciousness raising sessions was demonstrative of the ways in which listening to the inner emotional worlds of women and their experiences of their private lives can be utilized as a mechanism of legal change. This is what Ahmed describes as the reading of "the relation between affect and structure, or between emotion and politics in a way that undoes the separation of the individual from others."[74] In storytelling and reading, we are presented new possibilities for the ways in which the law may be capable of responding to structural issues and violences disproportionately impacting women. The law need only take up this process of reading – that is reading feminist legal storytelling in the way that

feminists themselves read; with attention to emotional affect to reflect upon the social conditions that dictate the lived experiences of womanhood.

THE TAPESTRIES: MICROBIOGRAPHIES IN CONTEMPORARY DIGITAL SPACES

The process and extension of invitation to read feminist legal storytelling through a feminist readership continues beyond the Second Wave Feminist Movement into the social media era. There have been several instances in which women's lived experiences have been catalogued in digital spaces, constituting a form of legal storytelling, and gaining momentum to form a feminist counter-movement to the dominant legal stories told about and to women. They also track the process of feminist reading in the response to the feminist legal storytelling contained in digital collation. An archive in real time of which we are the authors and archivists. One of the most notable of these "movements" is the #MeToo movement.

As Sharp notes:

> social media storytelling … can give rise to a collective narrative that questions the efficacy of law in our society … [and] demonstrates that social media narratives can render visible the ways in which legality is actively at work in our culture and consciousness.[75]

Me Too as a movement was initiated by Tanara Burk in 2006 as a reflection of the intersections of gender, race and the creation of solidarity within the intersectional experiences of systems of oppression.[76] The movement and its affiliated hashtag exploded with Alyssa Milano's tweet on the 15th of October, 2017.[77] Hashtags create a mechanism for cataloguing and identification of not only information but the micro-biographies that may be encapsulated under the hashtag. I use micro-biographies here as an adaption of Sharp's usage of hashtags as a form of microblogging.[78]

#MeToo holds power in "mutual recognition and mutual vulnerability."[79] It is this extension of mutual recognition and vulnerability that constitutes an act of feminist storytelling and invites a feminist reading. #MeToo is the gathering together under the hashtag and the acknowledgement of a shared experience that is gendered and socially constructed. As highlighted in our discussion of Pizan writing in the medieval era, women's biographical storytelling often evokes vulnerability and emotion in constructing its counter legal narrative. The micro biographies shared under #MeToo are no different in this sense, inviting a sense of mutual vulnerability and in turn highlighting the prevalence of sexual violence

against women, echoing the practices of the consciousness raising sessions of the sixties and seventies.

With the rise of technology and social media, feminist anti-sexual violence movements were able to challenge the institutional actions and undermine the power structures that typically function as gatekeepers through individual and collective validation of experiences,[80] using these technologies to spatially cross the boundaries between domestic and public spaces and draw upon narrative forms as acts of resistance. Contemporary movements challenge the ways in which public knowledge about sexual violence is constrained, constructed, and reinforced by political, legal, and cultural actors and institutions.[81] They draw upon affective resistances to oppose discursive silencing through storytelling, sharing the lived experience of the individual to cross into the social experience,[82] and providing tangible ways of tracking feminist legal reading. It does so in such a way that resists silencing practices, the prevalence and distributability of social media becoming a wave of noise, of thousands of women's voices.

Popular cultural sites such as online mediums have the potential to become spaces of socialisation.[83] However, being seen and being heard by the broader public remains determined by the parameters of socially approved relations, interactions, and scripts.[84] The conversation, for example, continues to be dominated by white, middle to upper class women. That is, the experiences of these white, middle to upper class women are constructed as the dominant culture by which the unique experiences of women of colour and Indigenous women are routinely dismissed and silenced.[85]

The racialized cisheteropatriarchy relies on various points of oppression. White, post-feminism continues to perpetuate these intersecting systems of oppression such as race and class through its disengagement with the structural inequalities perpetuating them and their uneven visibility in pop feminism.[86] Post-feminism may also construct oppressive ways of thinking as women's issues to justify such attitudes. The construction of what it means to be a woman, for example, has historically and continues to exclude women of colour and queer women, particularly trans women.[87] In some instances, it even justifies the exclusion and oppression of these groups as a women's issue in which it is necessary for the protection of women and the maintenance of their rights. Popular cultural sites, as a result, may be sites of amplification as equally as they may perpetuate silencing. It thus becomes significant to use these sites to amplify intersectional voices and deconstruct the socially approved relations and scripts that prioritise the voices of white, cis, straight, and abled women and to approach them with feminist legal reading that enquires into intersectional experiences. In doing so, we ask whose stories are amplified and listened to more than others and how is this a reflection of the law's normative narratives about gender, sexuality, race, and class. We consider how to read feminist just as equally as we practice feminist storytelling.

As feminist movements have progressed over time and transitioned into different media forms, the notion of narrative, of legal storytelling, has continued to be central to feminist resistance and its practices.[88] The formats may have shifted, transitioning from the consciousness raising sessions of the sixties and seventies, to collective storytelling online with collative formats of hashtags, but the central importance of storytelling remains. Taking the baton, or should we say keyboard, from the Gen X and Millennial women on Twitter and Facebook in the 2010s, we will now turn to Gen Z women and their digital activism on the audiovisual platform, TikTok, where they continue in constructing the tapestry of feminist legal storytelling.

TikTok, like its social media predecessors, utilises hashtags to collate information, but expands this practice to also use 'sounds' which can be searched independently and utilized as another form of collation. The song *Labour* by Paris Paloma has 49.3K videos catalogued under the 'sound' with the clip of its music video having 1.2 M likes, 233.6K saves, and 106.4K shares.[89] Paloma's TikTok profile itself has 649.5K followers and 17.5 M likes.[90] The song was used to accompany clips of women sharing their own experiences of disproportionate emotional and household labour thereby linking it to the structural violence exercised over women; their experiences of sexual harassment and violence; or to share and amplify the stories of historical women.[91] The song forms the background of their videos, usually accompanied with in-text storytelling recounting experience.

The "trend" represents the usage of both popular culture and storytelling as protest.[92] Artist Natalie Bennet, for example, uses the song in the background whilst showing the process of creating *Nemesis Against the Overturning of Roe v Wade.*[93] Bennet creates an intersection between art and activism layering upon intertextuality. The painting draws upon ancient Greek mythology of the goddess Nemesis with the imagery of the handmaids of *The Handmaids Tale* in a baby mobile gripped by the goddess.[94] It uses visuals associated with US legal and political institutions emphasising its engagement directly responding to and engaging with the law.[95] By utilising the TikTok sound *Labour,* which may be searched separately in the app, Natalie Bennet is also engaging in the collective activism sparked by the song. This cataloguing, akin to the microbiographies of #MeToo, the biographical collections of Pizan and later Hays, demonstrates the structural nature of violence and oppression against women both in contemporary society and throughout history.

The interactions in comment sections of TikTok's sharing the microbiographies, gathered under the sound, can be evidence of feminist reading. They track engagement with the feminist storytelling and present avenues for feminist discussions, with women and allies often challenging the normative stories attempting to reinsert themselves.

In full circle, a sound from Paloma's song, *As Good a Reason,*[96] has been used to share the biography of Christine de Pizan:

> Christine de Pizan's "Book of the City of Ladies" is a great work of medieval literature, but I love why it was written. She wrote it as a response to the misogyny of Jean de Men and now, more modern readers are familiar with her work than his.[97]

Labour and *As Good a Reason* are examples of how emotional storytelling portrayed online can be productive as emotions such as anger and outrage are critical in forming affective counter-publics.[98] Online presence allows for a transition or movement from the domestic sphere into the public realm through its ability to negotiate and transgress space.[99] It may take place in the domestic sphere, an area of life rendered "invisible" to the eye of the outside world, but cross into the public domain in which is viewable without limitations of place. Online activism often maintains the intimacy typically associated with the consciousness raising sessions of the early Second Wave Feminist Movement through personal-sharing but make it largely distributable for feminist reading.[100] This can create a resistant subculture that pushes against social norms and form new languages, vocabularies and communitive modes of social, political, and cultural engagements and mechanisms of resistance.[101] Online activism can, ultimately, be a source of education.[102]

Like autobiography collections, such as those of Pizan and Hays, and the oral tradition of consciousness raising sessions, online microbiographies are more readily accessible than traditional legal scripts and modes of communication. These microbiographies articulate theories and critiques of justice that are not restricted by the taxonomies of law and traditional jurisprudence. They speak in the language of the everyday. In doing so, they present legal accounts that are not exclusively for the reception of the law as an institution. It is feminist literary jurisprudence for lay people, significant as it is lay people that form substantial shifts in law. It is the populus largely without legal education that we draw our voters for democratic processes and election of policy shifts. They are the jury of our peers. Digital feminist microbiographies therefore take critiques of justice and render them legible to broader communities. Online presence thus can constitute a method of feminist legal storytelling and reception.

CONCLUSION

What remains to be woven into our tapestry? Whilst there is an endurability to women's storytelling, there is still a need for the law to study a feminist reading, that is to listen to women's narratives.[103] This involves a consideration of not only the response to women's narratives, but which narratives are given amplification based upon the intersecting relations of power between class, ability, race,

ethnicity, gender expression and sexuality. Additionally, there is a need to consider women's position in the sharing of their biographical stories. Whilst the usage of biography without consent is long standing, particularly the co-opting of biographies of women of colour, disabled women, LGBTQIA + people and women of low socioeconomic background, modern digital activism has compounded such a practice.[104] As Sarah Ailwood asserts, this in of itself is a gendered harm within which women are denied consent over narrative.[105] It is thus important to consider how biographical storytelling as feminist exists within structures of power and the implications this has as a potential reproducer of such structures of power.

Feminist legal storytelling as a practice is centred upon its cumulative effects of drawing upon the emotional affect of women's biographical experiences thereby demonstrating the political nature of the female self. In tracking feminist legal storytelling as historically and narratively accumulative, we can perceive its endurability in challenging the law's cisheteropatriachal nomos by presenting its own counter-narrative that resists silencing practices. We awaken to our own consciousness regarding the vastness of feminist legal storytelling and are better capable of picking up the threads to continue the weaving of this tapestry, to continue the telling of feminist stories, and of preserving the biographies of the feminist legal storytellers that have come before us as its own act of feminist legal storytelling. Not only is this an act of feminist legal storytelling, but an act of feminist reading. It is through feminist legal storytelling and reading that we present new possibilities, imagine new futures, for the law. We embolden the law to enquire into new imaginings of justice informed by feminist practices.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

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Kaitlyn Poole is currently an Associate Lecturer in Law at Western Sydney University. Her research interests focus on the relationship between law and popular culture, engaging broadly with the fields of law and literature, cultural legal studies and sociolegal studies.

ORCID

Kaitlyn Poole http://orcid.org/0009-0006-2327-6095