

Karathanasopoulou, Evi and Williams, Helen (2023) Podcasting as a feminist space for the disclosure of trauma and intimate embodied experience: The Heart as a case study of quiet activism. Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio Media.

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Podcasting as a Feminist Space for the Disclosure of Trauma and Intimate Embodied Experience: *The Heart* as a case study of quiet activism

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INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT AND CASE STUDY

In this chapter, we look at how podcasting, in its emergence as a medium, is quickly becoming a space of social significance for innovation and change. We explore how the intimate qualities of audio media become extended, reshaped, repurposed and renewed, as private, on-demand modes of listening allow for audiences and producers to connect through storytelling. More specifically, we concentrate on factual production and its ability to function doubly, as a current, intimate connecting line between people with shared experiences; and as an oral history locale which preserves those experiences as embodied, tactile, intimate sonic objects. The latter allows for a further connection, through time, between generations of people who, we propose, will be able to connect in a more immediate way than they would through other media, texts or artefacts. We suggest that podcasting affords women a safe space for intimate, embodied expression, connection and activism.

Our case-study is Kaitlin Prest's series *No* (2017), which is part of her podcast *The Heart*. The podcast's webpage tells the listener that "*The Heart* is a podcast about intimacy and humanity. It's comprised of a community of writers, radio makers and artists who make personal documentary work about bodies, love, power dynamics and all of the invisible things in the air between humans" (theheartradio.org). *No*, is a mini-series of the podcast from 2017, comprising four episodes in which "Kaitlin explores her sexual boundaries from youth to adulthood" (theheartradio.org/no-episodes). She explores a particularly affecting experience with a friend, Jay, and includes frank discussion of her sexual experiences and the consequences of sexual coercion. Radio scholar Neil Verma succinctly describes *No* as "a highly personal exploration of consent" (2018, p.2).

Using radio and podcast studies along with gender studies, we explore how podcasting here becomes a feminist space for the discussion and disclosure of trauma, particularly in connection to bodily boundaries and sexual autonomy. We aim to add to a growing body of interdisciplinary work, which reveals podcasting as an important cultural force.

SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXTS

Historical understandings of female sexuality position ideal women as servile, docile, compliant, and passive sexual partners (Bay-Cheng & Eliseo-Arras, 2008). Thus, active female desire has been treated as suspicious, criminal or indicative of insanity through time. While we might not continue to send unmarried mothers to asylums or believe that we can identify a sex worker by her pubic hair (Lombroso & Ferrero, 2004), suspicions around women who are believed to be incorrectly, inappropriately or excessively sexual persist. This, despite a lack of consensus as to what ‘proper’ sexuality really entails for women.

The social regulation of female sexuality coupled with the prevailing belief that men are biologically driven to pursue sex creates an environment in which sexually-motivated crime is rife. The majority of sexual offences worldwide are never reported to police, so accurate prevalence rates are impossible to obtain (World Population Review, 2022). It is also difficult to compare conviction rates between countries due to the difference in legal definitions for sexual violence however, as a global trend, when cases do enter a criminal justice system, the chances of a conviction are extremely low. Current conviction rates for sexual violence in England and Wales have reached an all time low despite an increase in reported offences (Ministry of Justice, 2021), leading the Victim’s Commissioner to describe a cultural and judicial climate in which rape is, in effect, ‘decriminalised’ (Baird, 2020). Statistics from the National Crime Victimization Survey (Department of Justice, 2020) in the United States suggest a conviction rate of just 2.5% for all sexual violence. Yet, the World Health Organisation (2021) acknowledge that a lack of legal punishment is an important risk factor for perpetration of sexual violence creating a scenario where offences are committed with impunity. Shame, rape myths and victim-blaming permeate public and private discussions of sexual violence. Previous research has focused on many victims’ inability to speak about their experiences of sexual violence or the ways in which these experiences are invalidated during disclosure (Mendes et al., 2019). Despite activist campaigns aimed at increasing awareness and destigmatising rape and sexual assault, evidence suggests that speaking about these experiences, whether to police, partners, family or friends, can have deleterious effects on survivors resulting in secondary victimisation (Lorenz et al., 2018; Pemberton et al., 2019). Thus, a culture of silence prevails.

This changed following the allegations against Harvey Weinstein in 2017, and the resulting #MeToo movement normalised women acknowledging their experiences of rape, sexual assault and harassment in the public sphere. It served to underline the universality and pervasiveness of such experiences and the underlying gendered, raced and classed power dynamics which have created and maintained a culture of silence. These “digitized narratives of sexual violence” (Mendes et al., 2019, p.1290) create a connection that can surpass bodily limitations and a community beyond geography. Disclosures of sexual violence to peers or family members often elicit

unhelpful responses such as blame, disbelief or anger (Lorenz et al., 2018) yet the #MeToo movement established disclosure via social media as mainstream and offered participants a platform to share experiences, receive support and feel part of a group of like minded individuals. The context of #MeToo puts previous or established behaviour under the microscope and enables individuals to reflect on what has happened to them. Similarly, online disclosures were found to create a safe space in which individuals were emboldened to disclose after reading the disclosures of others (Gallagher et al., 2019). It is also a way of putting what has been socially constructed as a shameful private experience, into the public domain. The series *No* preceded the start of the #MeToo movement by a few months, but it seems derived from the same need - a public, unapologetic demand for reckoning.

PODCASTING AS AN INTIMATE, POWERFUL SPACE FOR DISCLOSURE

Podcasting takes the move into the public one step further, by adding the physical immediacy of the act of speaking rather than the delayed, conscious act of typing. The disclosure of deeply personal, traumatic or intimate information can be cathartic for the speaker, particularly when this goes against a dominant culture of silence (Gallagher et al., 2019). As Prest finds, it is “validating to hear experiences reflected back at me” (*No*, Episode 1). If the use of #MeToo allowed individuals to see themselves constructed as a contributor in a much larger narrative of endemic sexual harassment and inequality, *The Heart* offers listeners the opportunity to participate in, witness, challenge and empathise with one person’s experience. The disembodied nature of audio media allows for contributor anonymity and it also allows for the listener to connect to these voices unhindered by image and any preconceptions this might have otherwise reinforced. Given the themes explored in the piece, the absence of the image also allows to bring the listener into situations that would have been hard to otherwise show on-screen. Prest does this through dramatisation but also through actual recordings of herself interacting with sexual partners. As we will be seeing later in this chapter, the listener is placed intimately and, at times, uncomfortably close to the contributors.

The Infinite Dial survey in the USA showed that, in 2022, 53% of online audio listeners listen alone (Edison Research, 2022). Thus, listeners of *The Heart* are most likely not sharing their listening experience with someone else. We also know that podcasting listening most often happens through headphones. In the UK, Rajar reported in 2016 that 90% of podcast listening happens via headphones (Berry, 2016, p.3). In the winter of 2021, the same survey found that of the weekly headphone listening reported, 59% was to podcasting, and that 94% of listeners listen alone (RAJAR, 2021). Spinelli and Dann have termed headphone listening as “hyper-intimacy”, “because the voice you hear is in no way external, but present inside you”(2019, p.84). Thus, before Prest even begins to talk, the listener is most likely to be alone and receiving the audio in an embodied manner. Yet, these would not be the only ingredients in order to achieve the intimacy and impact that Prest’s

work achieves. Prest, we argue, enhances and adds to these inherently intimate technological aspects of podcast listening. Prest uses these elements in order to bring the listener into the room with her and, on the flip side, the voices in the piece become re-embodied within the listener (Spinnelli & Dann, 2019, p.102). In this chapter we will be unpacking the mechanisms of production and storytelling within *No* that make Prest's work significant on three levels: oral history, audio production and gender studies. We will now start with the latter.

ACQUIESCENT SEX IN PREST'S 'NO'

The Heart is principally concerned with sexual experiences which may be described as acquiescent – that is, sex which is unwanted by one partner but which is not actively resisted (Liu et al., 2022). This includes sex as the result of coercion, persuasion, manipulation, guilt, to maintain a relationship and sex to avoid potential unpleasant consequences (Brooks, 2020). Acquiescent sex has been associated with understandings of heterosex as fundamentally unequal, that female sexual pleasure is both troublesome and unimportant. Similarly, sex has been historically constructed as part of a woman's role as a good wife or partner, another duty alongside cooking, cleaning and raising children (Weiss, 2009). When there is little desire and little expectation of pleasure, it becomes a service that is performed to please others (Brooks, 2020).

The very notion of acquiescent sex troubles our understanding of rape and consent – we are left, not with an easy to grasp dichotomy of yes/no, but a continuum with enthusiastic consent at one end and violent rape at the other. This grey area in the middle proves problematic in both a social and legal sense - acquiescent sex can have serious consequences and may be as traumatic as so called 'real rape' (Brooks, 2020; Estrich, 1987) yet in the absence of resistance a perpetrator may assume consent. Prest describes this as, "he didn't force me to do anything, but I nevertheless felt I had no choice" (episode 2). The expectation that an unwilling partner would actively resist unwanted sexual contact continues to permeate legal understandings of rape and means that other strategies of self-preservation during traumatic experiences are ignored (Burgin, 2019). As Prest states when considering the key incident which led to the podcast, "The problem is that we don't have a vocabulary around emotion that would let me describe with any sense of legitimacy the totally invisible things that happened between us that night" (episode 2). What results is a disconnect between how the event is experienced by both parties and this is explored in *The Heart*.

Bart and O'Brien (1984) contend that 'seduction' as a romantic concept is steeped in the ideology of female reluctance and the powers of male persuasion. Male persistence in the face of repeated refusals is a key facet of many romantic books and films (Lippman, 2015) resulting in the conditioning of boys to understand that 'no' actually means 'try harder' (Perry, 2008, p.202). The notion that women have to put up some resistance to avoid accusations of promiscuity is prevalent (Weiss,

2009). Clearly, there are some forms of coercion which are socially acceptable (Muehlenhard & Peterson, 2004). Yet, 'seduction' in practice is less about the irresistible nature of men's advances and more about women's decision to "put up with it" (Bart & O'Brien, 1984, p.89). Prest initiates conversations on sexual consent with friends, family members and (former) partners. Thus, while she collates personal testimony and the perspectives of others to make sense of intimate incidents, she demonstrates the multi-layered and highly subjective nature of consent in the context of gendered power dynamics. Experiences of acquiescent sex are described in 'No' using terminology that likens women's negotiation of sexual boundaries to a battlefield - talk of fighting, giving up, wearing down, feeling defeated. In the same vein, male contributors describe "a clear mission", "the end goal" and being unable to "deprogramme". The well worn understanding, that sex is something that men want and women guard, is clear (Peterson, 2008).

The motivations for acquiescent sex are also discussed when Prest interviews her female friends and family members. There is acknowledgment of activity which is absolutely unwanted but which is engaged in to please the other person or to keep the person interested - what has been termed 'altruistic sex' (Bart & O'Brien, 1984). There is also sex to avoid a potential uglier, more forceful situation or because there may be negative consequences to refusal, termed 'compliant sex' by Bart and O'Brien (1984). In the podcast, this is described by one commenter as "using sex as the social currency to stay safe" (episode 2). The psychology of this is also explored in episode four as Prest deconstructs her reluctance to use the descriptions 'rape' or 'violation' about her experiences. The connotations of victimhood associated with these words are profoundly troubling to Prest, thus it seems safer to construct these instances as ones of 'bad sex' rather than assault. It is also important to acknowledge the cumulative nature of boundary transgressions over a lifetime. The rhetoric that women should 'just say no' is roundly discredited here, as Prest details the many times when saying no was just not enough. She details many such experiences over the series and while this repeated pattern of male behaviour has been normalised to a degree, it is perhaps the enactment by someone considered a close friend which is most upsetting about her time with Jay.

The inclusion of heterosexual, cis-gendered men's perspectives on coercive sexual behaviour is important and offers an insight into some of the key discourses at work. Comments such as "I'm like 'no, she just doesn't know better for herself", and Raoul's response when Kaitlin suggests she has been persuaded to do something she did not want, "how do we know what we want?" uphold outdated and obviously inaccurate views that women do not know their own minds. Similarly, responses such as "I just wanted what I wanted and I wasn't really thinking about her", "Once you are in that end goal state, you've got a clear mission in hand" and "You are just completely taken over by your dick and you don't deprogramme" reinforce the so-called biological imperative and the primacy of the male sex drive (Hollway, 1984). These contributors describe deeply embodied physical needs which are, it seems,

entirely divorced from clear-thinking, empathy and care. These militaristic analogies and adversarial narratives seem ridiculous when removed from the actual context and this has an awareness-raising effect conducive with activism.

Prest also interviews her father about his experiences of pushing sexual boundaries as a younger man and about her own experience with Jay. We propose these are some of the more disturbing contributions as Prest describes her feelings about what happened and tries to get her father to understand how upsetting this was for her. Phrases such as “I warned you about that sort of thing”, “you have to be more wary” and “I have always told you, you are naive” suggest that Prest should bear responsibility for being careless. There is explicit reproach, “That’s where I think you were being unfair, you were being selfish because you wanted to snuggle but they wanted something else” and finally the dismissive, “shit happens”. This demonstrates how pervasive discourses about men, women, sexuality and rape are and how intrinsic these understandings are to an individual’s ontology. It may be expected that Prest’s father would react with outrage or concern as she speaks about feeling sexually violated, yet his words are attempts to rationalise and to excuse Jay’s behaviour. So dominant are these discourses, so naturalised and normalised, that they take precedence over a paternal, protective instinct - note that her father characterises Prest as selfish because she did not want to have sex, rather than the male who pushed for this regardless of the cost. It might be argued that Prest’s father reacts to her disclosure as a man primarily, that this identity supersedes that of father.

Prest goes on to interview Jay, the friend in question. At the time of the incident, Prest and Jay had been friends for eight years and while there was no physical force or violence in the encounter, Prest experienced it as violent. After that night, Prest avoids Jay, refuses to attend events when she knows he will be present, ignores his messages and they eventually lose touch. The exchange in the podcast is understandably awkward but what stands out are Jay’s attempts to deflect, to minimise the incident and defend his behaviour, with Prest commenting on his “accusatory” tone. As Prest tries to explain how the incident affected her, he asks, “Doesn’t it feel like such a small thing?” and later “Can’t we just move on? Is it really that big of a deal?”. Given that the whole point of the interview is to talk about the impact this night had on Prest, such comments seem a deliberate attempt to detract from the seriousness of the incident. He tries to absolve his behaviour by noting he was drunk, admitting to being “super pushy drunk hook up guy”. Jay also references their close relationship as a way to construct a narrative that sees him as the injured party and Prest as overly dramatic, “In all of our friendship, knowing what you know about me, don’t I get a pass?” and “How bad do I have to feel about this?”. The interview takes place years after this particular night and that Prest is still angry and upset about what happened is testament to the impact it had and continues to have on her. There is little acknowledgement from Jay that at least part of the reason that Prest is so affected by what happened between them, is *because* of their long

friendship (and its concomitant associations of love and care) and not in spite of it. Similar to Prest's father, Jay reacts to Prest through the discourses of male sexuality primarily, his care and support as a friend comes second.

These exchanges are so impactful primarily because these stories are rarely elicited. Acquiescent sex has become normalised for women (Brooks, 2020) yet it is often unspoken. Simply discussing this topic constitutes an act of activism. Little academic research offers an insight into the perspectives of men who have their sexual behaviour challenged and, while it may be accepted that overt victim-blaming is unfair, shining a light on the subtleties of how coercive acts are minimised, justified, and excused as part of 'natural masculinity', underlines the pervasiveness of these viewpoints. When this is done by loved ones, it is all the more shocking. It is this that constitutes feminist public scholarship - the amplification of seldom-heard perspectives to produce new knowledge and present this in accessible ways.

PODCASTING PRACTICE: DISCLOSURE TO EDUCATE

Prest manages to create work that can be seen as quiet activism and public scholarship using audio production and the medium of podcasting. Here we will be looking more closely at some of the ways that she achieves this, while situating her work within a relevant radio studies context.

Radio has long been considered intimate. Karathanasopoulou's own research has found that there are in fact several types of *intimacies* when it comes to audio media (Karathanasopoulou, 2015). Some are inherent to the production, dissemination and listening technologies used, and some that are performative – meaning that they are more relevant to how producers (and presenters) record, edit and present their work, and thus *amplify* the intimacy of an already intimate medium.

Podcasting is now emerging as a medium in its own right (Llinares et. al., 2018) and as such it is also recognised for its intimacy. This is not surprising of course, as podcasting shares many of radio's attributes; listening is, for instance, a mostly solitary activity and the mode of address tends to be perceived as more personal, with presenters talking to the individual listener. Similarly to radio's intimacy, some of those intimacy generators in podcasting are inherent in the technology and some are amplifications of the medium's inherent intimacy, through production choices, use of voice, editing and recording techniques. Podcasting has unique intimate modes that separate it from traditional radio, and the next section explores how Prest's work incorporates some of them:

1. Headphone Listening: intimate, private listening (Berry, 2016; Copeland in Llinares et al., 2018; McHugh, 2021; Spinelli & Dann, 2019)

2. On Demand Access: The ability to listen in more environments and situations to suit the listener.
3. No regulation on language or thematology, which allows for more personal and/or difficult themes to be explored and enables more personal expression.

Kaitlin Prest's work has already been noticed by academics in the field for its intimate approach and the way it uses the medium to connect with the audience. Copeland, writing about Prest's practice, remarks that "The amplified voice through podcasting as an intimate aural medium carries with it the possibilities for a deep affective experience for both the creator and the listener" (in Llinares et al., 2018, p.209). Copeland is pointing out here that Prest's work functions intimately in a variety of ways in terms of its affect. Here we will be looking more closely at some of those mechanisms of intimacy at play, which require more detailed analysis.

The use of voice, montage, and choice of themes explored are of particular interest here. The very intimate scenes Prest presents in this work would be hard to broadcast on the radio - this is a different kind of intimacy. In the past, traditional radio phone-ins were seen as the most intimate radio genre. Listeners might have called in anonymously to discuss difficult or taboo subjects, such as their sex life, most seminally in Anna Raeburn groundbreaking *Anna and the Doc* on Capital Radio (Lloyd, 2019), or their own alcoholism (Victoria Derbyshire, 2011). And yet academic criticism has questioned some elements of the performance of a two-way conversation in the phone-in. Barnard has termed phone-in intimacy "spurious" and called into question the forced informality and a false equality between caller and called (2000, p.181). Shingler and Wieringa saw the phone-in as an illusion of a private conversation where the producer retains control and the audience often identifies with the caller:

"Only a small minority of the listeners who regularly tune in to certain radio phone-in programmes will actually avail themselves of this opportunity (and only a few of those who try will actually get through and on to the airwaves". [...] Therefore, the appeal of these programmes for the majority of the phone-in audience comes from listening to others participate in radio talk (on behalf of, or as representatives of, the listening community as a whole)" (Shingler & Wieringa, 1998, p.114)

Legendary presenter Anna Raeburn herself remarked that privacy in the phone-in is somewhat of an illusion and that callers get advice but at the cost of the radio presenter "exploiting their privacy" (Graff, 2006).

Prest's work, while retaining some elements of radio as a confessional medium, is a departure from this sense of spuriousness and somewhat shifts the power dynamics

between producer and listener. The removal of power structures inherent in radio programmes hosted by big networks, and the freedom and independence that podcasting affords, means that, while retaining full control of the content, Prest unapologetically also puts some of her own vulnerabilities on the line and immortalises these moments in the audio on-demand format. The audience, while warned at the beginning of the programme, finds themselves relating and feeling empowered through what at times may be seen as the flip-side of intimacy: being *too close* for comfort (Shingler, 2000: 206). While these are not phone-in discussions, rather online calls that Prest specifically describes as *interviews*, when it comes to the listening experience, the intimacy and informality in tone is reminiscent of phone-in conversations. The obvious difference here is that the two people in the call are not strangers. In fact, they are the opposite, they know each other very well. And yet the narrative device of the 'call', is one that both creates intimacy but also allows for a safe space, for distance to be created between her and some of the men she talks to. In a way these calls contain an element of separation which has allowed the phone-in in the past to reveal difficult truths about the caller, through the relative anonymity that audio media afford. Phone-in pioneer Raeburn remarked that: "In an ideal world the conversations that I have would be one to one, there wouldn't be a microphone. The illusion is that it is one to one", and she continues on to say that callers "used to say 'I just want to talk to Anna' and my phone operators would say: 'But you're not just going to speak to Anna. You are going to speak to Anna on the air'" (Graff, 2006). The men in *No* speak openly and honestly about their experiences of being sexually coercive. This may be attributable to the illusion of a private conversation that Prest has retained by having some of these discussions with them remotely. The familiarity between them and the disembodied, 'blind' nature of audio media may also play a part (Crisell, 1994).

Prest's own openness with her interview subjects further allows for a sense of sincerity. The power dynamic here is interesting. While Prest, like any radio presenter, retains ultimate control, the freedom she has to talk openly about her own experience makes her more relatable. It also creates a level playing field, creating some distance from what we have known in the past from the radio phone-in. The freedom that podcasting can afford in terms of content and Prest's own frankness and positioning of herself within her storytelling is a departure from any perceived "spuriousness" or illusion of intimacy.

The way Prest uses the sound of these calls exposes some of her own vulnerabilities too, but ultimately her voice-over commentary and editing of them creates a very empowering experience for both her and for the listener. She uses voice over to analyse her own reactions within these conversations, gaining back control and asserting herself. She recognises when her voice in these conversations reveals trauma or vulnerability and she talks about that. She does voice-over commentary on what these men are saying, affording her and us, the listeners, a second, deeper, reading of these interviews. She uses montage and music in order to create

evocative soundscapes that place these voices within the wider context of her own experience. The listener here is likely to identify with her not only because she is narrating her experience, but because she allows her own voice, as producer, to be as revealing as any other voice within the piece. She is allowing herself to be as vulnerable as a listener might have felt when going through similar experiences. She masterfully balances between her own vulnerabilities and a discussion with the male contributors as equals, but ultimately retaining full control of the narrative.

Prest's audio practice borrows a lot from radio art and the avant-garde, non-mainstream part of radio practice and theory. The idea of discomforting closeness is common in the radio avant-garde of the past. The on-demand element only adds to this. Spinelli and Dann, talk about the paradox of radio being considered a disembodied medium (particularly within the avant-garde), when headphone listening is the epitome of embodiment:

“Earbuds push intimacy inside a body—they are, in very real sense, about re-embodiment of the voice. This observation cuts against a discourse familiar to media writing for nearly a century which described radio as a “disembodied voice”” (2019, p.102).

Podcasting is primarily a headphone medium. In that way, the content here becomes even more embodied and pervasive, because it happens within the listener's head. We encounter here what is a recurring theme in the avant-garde - we are experiencing radio as an embodied practice that can, at the same time, be two seemingly opposing things, both intimate and painful.

“Radio is intensely present tense, yet speaks from outside of time. And while the press of its muzzle against the ear may be intensely intimate, we only know the bodies of our interpolators through the body of their voices”.
(Whitehead, 1989, p.11)

Gregory Whitehead, talks about a ‘physical’ kind of intimacy, suggesting an element of unsettlement. And yet, this is not unsettlement for unsettlement's sake.

When Prest plays a recording of her in bed with a man she says she did not really want to sleep with, the disembodied sounds of their voices play out in the listener's head, placing them very close to what is happening to Prest. She is describing the most embodied experience in the most disembodied of media. As is evident from the last episode in the series, where Prest asks listeners for reactions, this allows for empathetic reflection and the processing of one's own experiences. But it may also be argued that it brings listeners face to face with difficult realities and thoughts. Such intimacy contains the potential to create change. In the words of Whitehead, this change comes from an unprecedented embodiment: “Distinct from any other entrance to the human body, the ear is a hole we cannot close, permitting a level of

intimacy among perfect strangers which in other media would be literally unheard of” (Whitehead, 1989, p.12).

This quote perhaps hits too close to home when we consider the thematology of Prest’s work. Yet, it is applicable to the potential of the work to offer learning and understanding through close, intimate, unfiltered discussion. Verma, aptly taps into *The Heart*’s ability to educate through empathy but also through unsettlement. Quoting from the work of Kate Lacey (another seminal scholar in the wider field of radio studies), Verma reflects:

“Listen to these pieces, and it feels like your earbuds are doing something that matters, for once. The show lends force to Kate Lacey’s idea that the ethics of speaking suggests an ethics of listening (Lacey 2013, pp.182-99). We have a responsibility not just to “listen in”, Lacey argues, but to *listen out* for voices that aren’t so easy on our ears, to travel away from the self. Nothing makes for better radio than empathy, but nothing is worse than empathy as a mere alibi—empathy that flatters us and affirms our values but at the end of the day asks nothing of us.” (2018, p.2)

Verma continues: “*The Heart* rarely makes that error” (2018, p.2). Prest’s work is a participatory event. Its significance does partly lie in the unprecedentedly frank discussion that Prest has recorded and contributed to today’s cultural moment of reckoning and to the education of future generations. But it also lies in the way that *No* engages, and eventually educates the listener through a paradox of unsettling intimacy.

Interestingly Prest’s work is also being discussed within different academic disciplines (not just radio/audio studies) for its potential to educate. Sandie Pendaz-Foster talks about how she uses a reversioning of *No*, retitled *In the No*, for popular USA podcast *Radiolab* (2018) along with the novel *What Red Was* (2019), to teach consent in women’s studies and sex and gender courses (2021, p.113). While recognising limitations Pendaz-Foster remarks:

“Both the novel and podcast can be used, in part or whole, in classes beyond women’s studies and sex and gender. Courses on social deviance, social problems, drugs and alcohol in society, and intersectionality with class and race are some of the more likely applications”. (2021, p.115)

Pendaz-Foster’s point is made specifically about Prest’s work, but Sean Richardson and Heather Green, writing from a modernist studies perspective, acknowledge that podcasting as a medium itself carries a “feminist potential”. They consider the *Modernist Podcast* (their case study) as an “an alternate model of scholarly production [...] as both a method of knowledge sharing and a pedagogical tool” (2018, p.282). Richardson and Green’s article, while not considering Prest’s work,

offers a wider perspective to Pendaz-Foster's application of Prest's work in her teaching. Richardson and Green remark that:

"The spoken voice is able to push beyond the margins, beyond the lineation of the page. Moreover, as women and gender-minority scholars working within the sphere of feminist modernist studies, the sound of our voices opens sites of resistance, communication, collaboration and critique that play with the borders implicitly set by the written text." (2018, p.289)

It is this pairing of education and resistance that encapsulates our argument for podcasting more generally, and Prest's practice more specifically, as a site of quiet activism. This quiet, yet aural activism, we argue, expands across time and generations and inherently carries the potential to not only educate, connect and disrupt here and now, but in the future too, in the form of oral history.

ORAL HISTORY

Looking at this from an Oral History perspective, we see that this type of work retains more than just information, voices and ideas for future generations. It also immortalises an embodied experience from which we can learn by empathising. It uses the anonymity of the audio medium for people to express themselves more freely and breaks down barriers to disclosure for victims/survivors.

The last episode of the series solicits contributions from the audience, bringing them into the discussion, adding their own experiences and gauging reactions to the piece. This closes the loop between producer and audience and creates feelings of intimacy, immediacy and inclusion which mitigate the disembodied nature of the podcasting medium. This disembodiment offers an opportunity for women to be freely creative and expressive with the aural space, whether that is the traditional broadcasting 'air' or today's wireless 'cloud'. In 2000 Caroline Mitchell, one of the pioneer academics in the area of Women and Radio wrote that "Women can use radio, as both listeners and programme makers, to subvert, manipulate and play with that space and their identities" (2000, p.6). In the last 20 years, women have continued to push the boundaries of mediated self-expression, enabling them to widen the scope of oral history.

Podcasting allows for the audio piece to become an intimate aural object that the listener can download, own and carry through space and time - sustaining the movement of stories through history. No preserves a snapshot of how sexual experiences, sexuality and sexual trauma can be understood, discussed and processed, and captures the dominant cultural themes of the current climate, namely the vocal challenging of male violence and a refusal to be silenced. Yet, while Prest's

work highlights the universality among women of similar coerced and acquiescent sex, it also suggests a timelessness. It is well documented that, historically, women have been subjected to assumptions, norms and social regulations regarding sexual expression and that men have felt entitled to take their own pleasure with impunity. Despite #MeToo and other activism, we are still no closer to eradicating sexual violence although Prest's podcasting contributes to changing the dominant narratives of silence, shame and stigma.

It is in this sense that despite being an aural medium, the podcast series, *No* represents quiet activism. There are no placards, no noisy demonstrations, no disruption, no blockades (Pottinger, 2017). Yet, simply talking about these experiences, recording this to be passed to future generations, highlighting the unfairness and the gendered inequality that remains entrenched in sexual relationships constitutes a revolutionary act.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has used the podcast series *No* as a case study to illustrate the ways in which podcasting can be a method of feminist activism. We have argued that Prest's use of podcasting to talk about sexual coercion challenges dominant narratives of stigma and victim-blaming prevalent in Western society. The podcast becomes an educative tool preserved for subsequent generations of listeners - a piece of oral history that captures embodied experiences in a disembodied medium.

By being invited into the room as Prest negotiates sexual encounters, has sex and discusses her subsequent feelings, the listener is invited to consider their own past experiences of potentially manipulative, coercive or forced sex. The result can be profoundly discomforting but also emancipatory. By making private, intimate experiences public and centering female perspectives, *The Heart* highlights the disparate, gendered perceptions of the same interaction in nuanced ways. In the same way that #metoo underscored the universality of women's experiences of male harassment, *The Heart* is an example of both 'quiet activism' and public scholarship.

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