

## **Policy reports on contemporary social justice issues from the Race, Sexuality and Gender Justice module on the LLB programme at Kent Law School**

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### **Introduction**

This Special Section showcases Policy Reports prepared by (then) final year LLB students on the *Race, Sexuality and Gender Justice* optional module in Kent Law School during the 2024-25 academic year. On this module, students engage with a range of theoretical frameworks to better understand the concepts of race, sexuality and gender, exploring how the concepts intersect with each other and other social relations. Historically, this module was delivered through two options – a *Gender, Sexuality and the Law* module, and a *Race, Religion and Law* module. However, colleagues at Kent Law School came to see two separate modules as pedagogically undesirable, given the increasing focus on taking an intersectional approach. A commitment to intersectionality is therefore central to the module and has, in more recent years, encouraged the inclusion of additional lenses and issues, such as disability/ablism and poverty/social class.

Throughout the module, various issues of social justice are examined, with students considering legal and policy responses to contemporary issues, such as pay gaps, unequal access to healthcare, and the limits of anti-discrimination frameworks. In sync with the wider emphasis on critical legal education at Kent Law School, law is studied both as part of the problem of social justice phenomena, as well as for its potential to deliver – or more likely, ‘jostle’ – solutions to the problems and challenges faced by society. After laying the foundations for how to approach, investigate and understand issues pertaining to race, sexuality and gender, as well as other social relations in society, the module provides an opportunity for students to prepare a Policy Report on a contemporary social justice issue of

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their choice. In so doing, students are invited to co-create knowledge on matters of concern to them and to explore potential solutions.

Given the routinely high quality of student Policy Reports submitted on the module, the *feminists@law* Editorial Board decided in 2025 to invite students, on an annual basis, to submit their Policy Reports for possible publication in the journal in a dedicated Special Section. The Editorial Board thought this was a timely and important initiative for a few key reasons. First, we think it is important that feminist legal academics stay attuned to the social justice issues that capture the attention of the students we teach. There may be important points of continuity and discontinuity, as well as new and differently focussed issues coming to the fore. Building this collection up over annual publications of *feminists@law* – a fully open-access journal – will be a useful archive of insight into student concerns. Second, students value additional opportunities to work with academic staff and be involved in academic life, a huge part of which is publishing and scholarly editing. However, as time is as precious for students as it is for academic colleagues, we deliberately built this initiative on an existing and innovative summative assessment, rather than the more usual activity of inviting students to submit an essay on a pre-defined topic or write a stand-alone reflection piece or review of a new case, piece of legislation or legal development. In involving students in the work of *feminists@law*, we hope they take away something meaningful about the value of open access scholarly publishing. Third, we want the published papers to provide a snapshot of how undergraduate students take up the concepts, theoretical approaches and core issues that tend to be included on optional modules in the field of race, sexuality and gender justice. For example, in our experience, few students object to the idea that taking an intersectional approach to matters of social justice is important; but how does this commitment play out in their analyses of social justice concerns? What is taken as a given, and what is hard to grapple with? How are issues of marginality addressed by law students who can see the connections between social concepts such as race, sexuality and gender, and social justice problems? And importantly, how does a critical understanding of the role of law in society inform the policy proposals that they devise?

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We introduced *feminists@law* and the Special Section initiative to the 2024-25 module cohort and invited them to submit their Policy Reports for consideration. Five were selected for publication in this Special Section and a further two for inclusion in a forthcoming Special Section on the concept of *Reproductive Justice*. The Policy Reports selected address a wide array of contemporary social justice issues, using various theoretical frameworks and conceptual tools. The papers help extend feminist legal debates by addressing under-explored topics in innovative ways. **Amber Hobbs'** paper contextualises the recent use of AI in a long timeline of various forms of image-based sexual abuse, importantly shifting the analytic and 'solution' lens away from individual rights and towards proactive institutional regulation (rather than neglect). **Caitlin Saunders'** paper focuses on marginalised experiences of homelessness amongst LGBTQ+ Youth. Explicitly deploying an intersectional analysis, she shows how legal and policy frameworks (with the nuclear family at their core), fail to 'see' their experiences and provide meaningful support. **Deborah Ogunsola** encourages us to think about the gender pay-gap in the under-explored area (at least for feminist legal scholarship) of football, and the historical legal prohibitions relating to women and football which may have set the scene for the pay gap. Access to IVF for same-sex couples is perhaps more familiar terrain for feminist legal debates, but **Ella King's** Policy Report works through the operation of contemporary, subtle and little discussed barriers – relating to geography, technology, and variable national criteria – devising a number of recommendations to help increase access, including one akin to a Lifetime ISA (Individual Savings Account) to help with costs. Finally, in his exploration of how law and policy should respond to male experiences of rape and sexual assault, **Samson Oteniya** draws on the concept of substantive equality to consider how law and policy can better countenance men's experiences, while importantly still acknowledging the gendered nature of rape and sexual violence.

As well as extensive academic and policy-based research on each topic, students have used important conceptual and theoretical tools. They have also unpacked the role that the concepts of gender and sexuality, in particular, play in the contemporary social justice issues selected. In addition, **Caitlin Saunders** further considers the concepts of race and age in her Policy Report, given the intersectional focus of her analysis. The two Policy Reports selected

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for inclusion in the forthcoming Special Section on the concept of *Reproductive Justice* also more firmly focus on the concept of race by addressing disparities in Black women's experiences of gynaecological and reproductive healthcare (**Zarreena McKenley-Osbourne**) and maternal healthcare (**Eden Abay**). We look forward to sharing these papers with you in a future issue, and in the meantime, hope you enjoy this year's instalment of student Policy Reports and find them a useful source for discussion with your own students, peers and collaborators.