

## **AWGSA's Guide to Ethical Conference Participation**

*AWGSA acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters where we live, study and work. We pay our respects to ancestors and Elders, past, present and future.*

The Australian Women's and Gender Studies Association (AWGSA) is the peak body representing researchers, academics and students of Women's Studies and Gender Studies in Australia. This guide aims to help participants at our conferences share intellectual space with others in accordance with the core ethical principles of inclusivity, accessibility, intellectual generosity and respect. We ask that conference attendees keep these core values in mind.

While conferences are vital spaces for academic community and intellectual exchange, they must also be able to accommodate difference and diversity in ideas and identities. AWGSA recognises that individual and organisational dynamics can exclude and marginalise conference participants, and that the language we use can reinforce social structures of domination related to race, Indigeneity, ethnicity, ability, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, body size, age and other axes of identity.

We know that in general, feminist scholars are highly aware of the reproduction of social inequality in everyday life, but we also see the practical value of a guide to ethical engagement, because it is important to us that all participants feel safe and included at AWGSA conferences.

## **Inclusive Language**

AWGSA is an inclusive feminist organisation that:

- endorses the use of language that recognises and respects the distinct identities of Australian Indigenous cultural language groups. We also recognise the multiplicity of Indigenous peoples and languages connected to a single expanse of Country (e.g., Kulin Nation; Boon Wurrung people).
- endorses the use of language that reflects the social reality of race and ethnicity in white-dominant societies and colonised lands (e.g., Black, Indigenous, First Nations, Asian Australian, Pacific Islander, non-Indigenous Australian, white). We also accept the use of 'people of colour' to refer to people minoritised through their race and ethnic social locations.
- supports the use of the word 'woman' to refer to cisgender and transgender women.
- recognises trans and nonbinary identification.
- preferences the terms 'sex work' and 'sex workers' except in historical scholarship where 'prostitutes' and 'prostitution' may be appropriate terminology.
- accepts both person-first and identity-first descriptors (e.g., people with disability/disabled people; people with autism/autistic people/autistics).

*Suggestions on pronouns:* If you are asking a question or introducing a speaker and you want to use a pronoun (e.g., she; they; he), it is courteous to ask the person what pronoun they prefer.

If you are a speaker in a session, please advise the chair of your preferred pronouns before the session begins.

### Accessible Communication

Inclusivity requires accessibility. We ask that all conference participants consider the following methods to ensure universal access to communication:

- If microphones are provided, make use of them, even if you think or have been told that your voice is 'loud enough to hear'.
- If there are sign-language interpreters, make sure they are able to hear you, and remember to face the person to whom you are speaking (rather than the interpreter).
- In audio-visual presentations and hand-outs, use large sans-serif fonts (14 pt minimum), generous spacing and descriptive captions for your images.
- Close all blinds and use low lighting, if possible, to accommodate attendees with light sensitivity.

### Intellectual Generosity

The academic conference is, ideally, a space for rigorous intellectual conversation, exchange and critique; however, we feel that the traditional adversarial model of conference criticism is outdated and limited in its utility. We prefer to emphasise instead the principle of intellectual generosity. Intellectual generosity is about being generous in your reception of a person's ideas, even if you don't agree with them, and offering a response that is genuinely helpful, rather than dismissive. Although most AWGSA attendees will be highly conversant with this principle, we offer some suggestions for phrasing critical feedback, which may help to support participants who are new to academic conferences.

*Suggestions for phrasing critical questions:* 'Thank you for your paper. I was interested in your thoughts about  $x$ , but have you perhaps considered  $y$ ?'; 'Thank you for your paper. I have some concerns about the claim that  $x$ . It may indicate  $y$ . It might be worth thinking about whether you could reframe this to incorporate  $z$ .'

Intellectual generosity also refers to inclusive citation practices. Citation is vital to intellectual inclusion in giving due acknowledgement to those whose work has been traditionally excluded from mainstream scholarship.

*Suggestions on citation:* We ask that all presenters consider the expert and leading voices in the field and to refer to those with lived experience.

- If you are writing about a community of people (e.g., queer, trans, people of colour, sex workers) and you are not part of that community, please cite the work of scholars and activists who are.
- If you are writing about Indigenous peoples, please state whether or not you are Indigenous, and, if possible, identify your mob. Please cite Indigenous scholarship.

### Dignified interactions

Be intentional and deliberate in engaging in language and actions that dignify your peers and colleagues at the conference. You are encouraged to cultivate an environment where dignified interactions become intrinsic to the collective experience to ensure that the conference serves as a platform for meaningful dialogue, mutual respect, and the advancement of feminist ideals. In this way, we all contribute to making the conference a living narrative, a gathering where the nuances of humanity converge to shape a story of dignity, inclusivity, and respectful interactions.

Suggestions for dignified interactions include

- Not 'monopolizing space' during Q& A time,
- not interrupting others when they speak
- avoid aggressive body language (e.g., sighing, eyerolling) as others share their thoughts and experiences.
- Challenging stereotypes if they come up in your interactions
- Avoid gossiping or talking about your peers or colleagues as that might make them feel excluded.

### Consent and boundaries

This serves as the unspoken agreement, the silent understanding that personal spaces and interactions are approached with care and respect. In this space, the principles of consent extend beyond traditional notions of physical touch to encompass a spectrum of interactions, discussions, and engagements.

Participants are encouraged to express their limits, whether related to the topics under discussion, the depth of personal sharing, or the nature of interactions. This proactive approach empowers individuals to navigate the conference with a sense of control, ensuring that they are comfortable and able to fully engage in a way that aligns with their personal boundaries.

Suggestions for consent and boundaries include

- Be mindful of trauma dumping- Before you share a deeply triggering experience, first, check that it is safe to do so and that others around you have capacity to hold that experience to avoid re-traumatisation
- Give people space if they need to sit alone during lunch or break time
- Check if people feel comfortable with hugs and physical touch
- Don't pressure your peers or colleagues to drink

### Respect

We ask that conference participants remember that in feminist intellectual spaces, we are often referring to people's real embodied experiences and lives, which obliges us to try to balance abstractive logic against the immediacy of personal experience. We therefore ask conference

participants to think carefully about how they speak about subjects of study in their work, as well as how they address the real people in the room. This is hard, and we don't always get it right. But that doesn't mean we shouldn't try to honour the thoughts and feelings of the person before us.

Suggestions for respectful interaction:

- Accept feedback from Indigenous scholars and scholars of colour with humility and acknowledge the value of their theoretical expertise and knowledge frameworks, which you might not know about.
- If you are writing about 'women' generally, consider letting people know at the beginning of your paper or panel whether you are mainly talking about cisgender women or transgender women, or both, to avoid confusion and offence.
- Stick to the allotted time limit for your presentation and keep your questions succinct to give others the chance to ask questions as well.

### Respect Online

COVID has changed the way we conduct conferences, which are now increasingly being held online. Here we provide helpful tips for navigating the ethical complications introduced by the online environment and digital sharing. We ask that all conference participants consider the following suggestions on appropriate behaviour and practices to ensure courteous and respectful interactions and participants' right to privacy.

Suggestions for online courtesy:

- Although the online space is virtual, participants should nevertheless acknowledge Country according to the Indigenous cultural language groups of the place where they are.
- If you are using a digital background, it is best to use something neutral in colour and theme that isn't too distracting.
- Remember to turn off your microphone while another person is speaking.
- If possible, turn your camera on when asking a question.
- If possible, attend the online conference in a quiet space with little background noise.
- If a chat function is in use for the conference, be considerate and responsible in line with the values of intellectual generosity and respect.
- If a chat function is in use for the conference, avoid private messaging unless you know the person or you have been asked to message them.

At the beginning of each session, presenters and audience members will be asked for permission to take and share photos and presentations through social media and other digital platforms. Please respect stated preferences in all your activity.

Suggestions for respecting people's right to privacy:

- Please ask permission before taking and sharing photos or other recordings at conference or conference-related venues.
- Please be mindful about sharing sensitive information (e.g., personal stories) publicly.
- Before you share, remember that all Indigenous stories and knowledges are protected by a Cultural Intellectual Property agreement. This protects Indigenous stories and culture as it exists. It is different to project intellectual property, which belongs to the project manager/owner.

### Advice for Session Chairs

Chairing conference sessions is not always an easy job, so we've provided some tips to help chairs moderate discussion more comfortably.

- If the session is to be recorded, please notify Indigenous participants. Before distribution, the recording must first be edited and approved by the Indigenous person/s supplying the information.
- At the beginning of the session, ask for presenters' preferred pronouns, and any other attributions/identifiers, and remind conference attendees to respect pronoun usage.
- If the session dialogue becomes heated or uncomfortable for presenters or audience members, remind the attendees of the principles of inclusion and respect. Chairs may refer back to this guide.

### Sexual Harassment

AWGSA has a no-tolerance policy on sexual misconduct, harassment and violence against conference participants. Sexual misconduct ranges from unwanted touching and sexual innuendo to sexual assault. Please respect people's personal boundaries, both inside and outside conference spaces. External sites include hotels, homes, Airbnbs, restaurants and other venues.

### Hate Speech

Hate speech is unacceptable. Hate speech refers to language or behaviour that oppresses, denigrates, stigmatises and dehumanises a person or group based on characteristics such as race, ethnicity, ability, gender, gender identity and expression, sexual orientation, body size and age.

*We gratefully acknowledge the Code of Conduct developed by FASSM: The International Faculty and Staff Sexual Misconduct Conference, which informed the drafting of this guide (<https://facultysexualmisconduct.com/code-of-conduct/>). We are also grateful to the members of the AWGSA community who contributed valuable feedback on the final draft and to those who participated in our open survey on the development of a Code of Conduct for AWGSA. This guide is for all of us.*