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ONLINE ANTI-RAPE ACTIVISM

EXPLORING THE POLITICS OF
THE PERSONAL IN THE AGE
OF DIGITAL MEDIA



RACHEL LONEY-HOWES

Online Anti-Rape Activism

EMERALD STUDIES IN CRIMINOLOGY, FEMINISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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Online Anti-Rape Activism: Exploring the Politics of the Personal in the Age of Digital Media

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Praise for *Online Anti-Rape Activism: Exploring the Politics of the Personal in the Age of Digital Media*

“Dr Loney-Howes’ thoughtful and thought-provoking work on digital feminist activism around sexual violence is sorely needed. Where most accounts focus on prominent moments and famous hashtags, this book offers the voices and perspectives of activists who working far from the spotlight to support survivors, raise consciousness and change minds. Based on careful and extensive empirical work, it offers reflections on the strengths and limitations of this activism that will be useful for anyone interested in contemporary feminism, sexual violence or digital organizing. The book is impressive in its scope, placing contemporary activism in a historical context of feminist organizing on sexual violence, and offering unique insights into the extraordinary work that goes into trying to change sexual cultures and achieve justice for survivors of sexual violence.”

—*Tanya Serisier, Senior Lecturer, Department of Criminology,
Birkbeck College, University of London, UK*

“In the wake of mainstream movements such as #MeToo, this timely book showcases the important contribution of anti-rape activist initiatives which came before, paving its way. Drawing from eight case studies and 10 years’ research of digital anti-rape activism from around the world, this rigorously researched book highlights the importance of listening and recognition when it comes to rape testimonies, and the power that speaking and listening hold for finding healing, solace and the search for justice. For anyone interested in the role that digital technologies can and have played in online anti-rape activism, this book is a must-read. Highlighting the important work activists and survivors have done to bring (and keep) sexual violence at the forefront of public and political agendas, Loney-Howes leaves readers in no doubt about the usefulness of online spaces and tools for furthering anti-rape politics.”

—*Kaitlynn Mendes, University of Leicester, UK*

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About the Author

Dr Rachel Loney-Howes is a Lecturer in Criminology in the School of Health and Society at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Her work explores the use of digital media for anti-sexual violence activism, including mapping the digital footprint of the #MeToo movement in collaboration with other leading international scholars. Alongside Dr Bianca Fileborn, she is the co-editor of the collected edition *#MeToo and the Politics of Social Change* (2019).

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Acknowledgements

This book began its life as a PhD thesis on Wurrundjeri land and was completed on Dharawal Country. As part of my commitment to social justice, I would first like to acknowledge the traditional sovereign owners on whose land I was able to carry out and complete this project, as well as remind readers of the tireless work carried out by Aboriginal, Indigenous and First Nations women around the world to keep their communities free from violence. We must not lose sight of the enduring impact of colonisation in relation to women's experiences of sexual violence and need to find better ways to create space for their voices to be incorporated into prevention strategies.

In the months that followed the completion of my PhD, the #MeToo movement happened, and suddenly, everyone was talking about the power and potential of digital media for feminist activism. This presented a great challenge for me. I was unsure if publishing the PhD in the form of a book was a good idea – there seemed to be so much chatter in the wake of #MeToo that I thought my contributions would get lost in the frenzy. However, what the data I had collected revealed to me was importance of listening to and honouring the voices of those who were doing this work long before #MeToo emerged; to focus on the voices and efforts of activists and survivors who were, and will continue to remain, in the trenches long after sexual violence is off the public agenda. I am, therefore, deeply indebted to those activists who gave up their time to speak about their work and to complete surveys. Without you not only would this book not be possible but indeed the #MeToo movement itself.

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When I wrote my PhD thesis, I dedicated it to the memory of my grandmother who passed away shortly before it was completed. I decided to do that based on a conversation we had had before she died: one day during lunch, she asked what my PhD was about. I said in very simple terms that it's about how people use the internet to talk about rape. Her response was to suggest that anyone who has been raped should be ashamed of what happened and to therefore never speak of it. In the intermediary years, I have thought a lot about the power of listening – and how powerful simply listening to survivors and activists without judgement can be. One of the outcomes from the #MeToo movement was the validation that (some) survivors received when they spoke out, many doing so for the first time, about their experiences of rape and sexual assault. People listened (again, I say this not uncritically) to and believed them. Therefore, I want to dedicate this book to those who listen to and believe survivors. In particular, I want to thank those who believed me without questioning what I had to say – my mum, my sister and my best friend. Thank you.

 *The ebook edition of this title is Open Access and is freely available to read online.*

Chapter 1

Introduction: Keeping Rape on the Public Agenda

It's nearly 30 years since that happened to me and society is still blaming women for rape, instead of blaming men. My daughter is facing the same dangers I faced: a 25% likelihood that she will be raped or sexually assaulted in her lifetime. If that does happen to her, like her mother, she's statistically unlikely to report it – only 10–15% of rape victims file a report. If she does, she's got only a 6% chance of seeing her rapist found guilty in a court of law. When it comes to rape, not much has changed for women in nearly three decades.

(Hypatia, author of the blog: *Herbs and Hags*)

Rape is a discourse that incites outrage, trepidation and disbelief. There can be no doubt that feminist activists have carved out substantial space for the recognition of rape as an abhorrent wrong in the public sphere since at least the 1970s. However, legal, political and sociocultural responses to victim-survivors who speak out about their experiences or feminist arguments about the existence of rape culture continue to be viewed with caution, suspicion, denial and blame. While most people would not admit to being pro-rape, they may outwardly hold rape-supportive attitudes, as evidenced by long-standing community attitudes surveys in Australia and around the world about gender-based violence. These attitudes persist despite decades of activism seeking to end sexual violence as well as reform criminal justice institutions - reporting rates remain low, attrition rates high, and cases that do enter the criminal justice system continue to be harrowing experiences for many victim-survivors (Campbell, 2006; Gotell, 2012; Jordan, 2008; Millstead & McDonald, 2017). In addition, statistics from the 1970s that first sought to capture the prevalence of rape remain close to contemporary ones, with

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the World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) estimating that one in six women globally have experienced at least one completed or attempted rape in their lives since the age of 18.

In this sense, as the above quote from Hypatia – who was involved in this project – reflects, the anti-rape movement has been a ‘successful failure’ (Corrigan, 2013). Although activists have fought hard to challenge social, cultural, political and legal responses to rape, and to demonstrate that *personal* experiences of sexual violence are caused by the *political* conditions of women’s lives in which they lack sexual autonomy, very little has apparently changed. These claims speak to suggestions that anti-rape activism has ceded ground to a neoliberal carceral agenda, whereby the initial goals of the movement that sought to ‘eliminate rape’ have been replaced with an overemphasis on criminal justice reforms and increasing convictions (Bumiller, 2008; Gotell, 2012).

However, these arguments fail to acknowledge the broad spectrum of efforts involved in keeping rape on the public agenda. The anti-rape movement, which emerged with initial goal of ‘abolishing rape’, now encompasses a ‘wide constellation of actions, activities, activists, organisations and writings’ that centre specifically on ‘eliminating, attenuating, preventing or responding to rape’ (Bevacqua, 2000, p. 8), and has brought about numerous changes at the level of the law, victim-survivor support services and sociocultural attitudes. Certainly in relation to the criminal justice system, feminist-inspired law reforms have led to redefinitions of rape and the criminalisation of rape in marriage in many (but certainly not all) jurisdictions. In addition, improvements have been made regarding the treatment of victim-survivors engaged with criminal justice institutions, and there has indeed been a significant amount of law reform in most Western contexts that has sought to shift the definition of rape and sexual assault as well as what constitutes consent (although this is not universal). Concerning support services, activists have been successful in setting up and maintaining crisis centres to help support victim-survivors who have experienced rape (although funding remains precarious). Activism too has been instrumental in shifting public and political consciousness about victim-survivors as well as the causes of rape. More recently, the prevalence and uptake of digital technologies to engage in anti-rape activism helps, as Hypatia has done with her blog and as the #MeToo movement has to some extent encouraged, to demonstrate the connection between personal struggles and experiences to broader, networks of power and inequality.

Thus, while some may claim that the anti-rape movement has been a ‘successful failure’ (Corrigan, 2013), there has been sustained pressure placed on public and political agendas to address sexual violence, and the ways in which activists and survivors respond to rape, generate discussions and mobilise their claims have undergone significant transformations – bolstered now by the use of digital media. This book therefore explores the nature, use and scope of online spaces, including the *Herbs and Hags* blog authored by Hypatia introduced at the beginning of this chapter, for anti-rape activism. I position them as ‘creative possibilities’ and projects that ‘challenge the centrality of law reform’ in anti-rape activism (Gotell, 2012, p. 244), paying particular attention to the tensions underscoring the politics of the personal in the age of digital media. This introductory chapter canvases the background against which this book is situated.

A quick note on language: By focussing on ‘anti-rape activism’ in this book, I do not mean to reinforce rape’s exceptionalism or deliberately focus on what is sometimes considered the ‘worst of crimes’ (see Halley, 2008). Rather, I use ‘anti-rape activism’ and the ‘anti-rape movement’ in the online sphere as a vehicle for exploring the extent to which these digital campaigns create spaces for discussions about a spectrum of sexually violent experiences, and the complexities regarding how or whether these campaigns also reify hegemonic assumptions about rape, trauma and victimisation. This includes, for example, examining how these spaces represent experiences of and engage in discussions about extended histories of violence and abuse, including child sexual abuse, intimate partner violence and sexual harassment. In this sense, I seek to understand how online anti-rape activism in the case studies presented in this book open up and close off the potential for capturing the ‘continuum of sexual violence’, which describes how all forms of gender-based violence are derived from attitudes and assumptions that normalise and enable them to occur (Kelly, 1988). This process is supported by the ‘cultural scaffolding of rape’ whereby rape and other forms of sexual violence are positioned as ‘normal’ or ‘just sex’ (Gavey, 2005). Throughout this book, I refer to ‘victim-survivors’ and ‘survivors’ interchangeably to reflect the spectrum and fluidity of self-identification relating to these labels, as well as to avoid gendering all victim-survivors as women. This is not to deny the fact that women are overwhelmingly represented as victim-survivors of sexual violence, but rather to foster a sense of inclusivity and highlight the broad spectrum of individuals who have experienced rape and sexual violence.

Anti-Rape Activism in the Age of Digital Media

When second-wave feminists declared that the ‘personal was political’, they were doing two things: they were exposing a previously concealed reality of a political economy based on the subjugation of women, and they were also announcing a radical feminist politics that would change the meaning of what it means to *be* political. Although, as Alison Phipps (2016) notes, this sentiment was not necessarily original, the emphasis placed on personal experience by second-wave feminists as the source of truth offered an emancipatory political promise for women’s liberation. In relation to rape, the notion that the personal is political sought to illustrate the ways in which personal experiences of violence, inequality and subordination were not just individual had but part of a boarder sociopolitical fabric in which violence against women is condoned – or at the very least tolerated. Underscoring these feminist efforts to demonstrate that the personal is political was their attempt to reveal a pervasive culture of victim-blaming that perpetuates assumptions that victim-survivors are ‘asking for it’, fuelled by a denial of the existence of rape culture.

The politics of the personal in relation experiences of rape and the significance of digital media in bolstering anti-rape activism manifested most prominently in the #MeToo movement, which emerged on the 15th of October 2017. Hollywood actress and self-proclaimed feminist, Alyssa Milano, issued the following tweet on Twitter to draw attention to the widespread problem of sexual harassment and assault:

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If you've been sexually harassed or assaulted write 'me too' as a reply to this tweet.

Me too.

Suggested by a friend: If all the women who have been sexually harassed or assaulted wrote 'Me too' as a status, we might give people a sense of the magnitude of the problem.

Over 500,000 tweets and 12 million Facebook comments, reactions or posts were made within 24 hours from around the world highlighting that rape, sexual assault and sexual harassment remain common experiences in women's lives, and that men continue to remain unaccountable for their actions (CBS, 2017). The resonance of the #MeToo movement manifested in the translation of the hashtag into multiple languages and its use in over 83 countries (Lekach, 2017) and was described as a watershed moment for igniting a global consciousness about the widespread nature of sexual harassment, sexual assault and rape (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019).

However, putting aside the significant public response, the #MeToo movement was not the first time that digital media was used to draw attention to the pervasive nature of rape and persistent presence of rape culture. In 2011, for example, the *SlutWalk* movement emerged in response to comments made by Toronto Police Constable, Michael Sanguinetti, who stated that 'women should avoid dressing like sluts in order not to be victimized' (Kwan, 2011, cited in Mendes, 2015, p. 1). Although the movement culminated in mass off-line protests around the world, *SlutWalk* also went 'viral', attracting significant publicity on popular feminist blogging sites, such as Jezebel and Feministing, which helped to generate renewed discussions about sexual violence and feminism online (McNicol, 2012; Mendes, 2015).

Shortly thereafter, other examples of survivors and activists harnessing the power of digital media and communications technologies emerged around the world for personal and political purposes (see Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2020 for a timeline). The same year that *SlutWalk* emerged, Savanah Dietrich utilised Twitter to garner public support following the lenient sentences given to two young men from her high school who raped her, recorded the assault and distributed the offence online (Salter, 2013). In a different case, the hacker group 'Anonymous' threatened to expose online the extent to which a school in Steubenville Ohio had protected perpetrators in a case similar to that of Dietrich. Other examples of the use of digital technologies to facilitate discussions about 'rape culture' – a term I unpack in more detail in Chapter 2 – include the hashtag #WhatIWasWearing from 2014, in which @steenfox asked her followers on Twitter to respond to the question of what they were wearing when they were raped. Many responded with images or comments indicating their clothes had been very ordinary – pyjamas and track suit pants, for example – rather than the 'slutty clothes' envisaged by those who believed that survivors were "asking for it" because of how they were dressed at the time. Also in 2014, the hashtag #BeenRapedNeverReported emerged, in which survivors revealed why they chose not

to formally report their experiences of sexual assault to the police highlighting the prevalence of victim-blaming and disbelief underscoring frontline criminal justice responses to rape survivors. The tweet was used over 8 million times in the first 24 hours of circulation (Gallant, 2014). Lastly, and post-#MeToo in 2018, following the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh to the Supreme Court in the United States, the hashtag #IBelieveHer circulated on social media in support of Professor Christine Blasey Ford who testified that Kavanaugh had raped her when they were in college. Many people, including the US President Donald Trump, asked why she did not report her experience at the time, prompting a heated debate about whether Ford was lying – and if she was not lying, why did she take so long to speak out about what happened?

In addition to these very popular hashtags, there are hundreds, if not thousands, of anti-rape campaigns and sites of resistance to rape culture taking place in digital spaces all over the internet. However, little is known about the practices and processes that sit behind the use, nature and scope of digital platforms for engaging in anti-rape activism. Nor is the potential, nuances and complexities of online anti-rape activist praxis from large-scale movements such as #MeToo, to smaller everyday efforts to speak out about experiences and challenge rape culture fully understood. This book fills this gap drawing on eight case studies of digital anti-rape projects from around the world, acutely highlighting the fluid and shifting nature of contemporary social movements and the diversity of online feminism.

Contemporary Social Movements

The social movements that emerged in the 1960s were charged with an ‘emancipatory promise’ (Fraser, 2000, p. 107). As opposed to earlier forms of collective action that focussed on employment conditions or other elements associated with the redistribution of resources and capital, these ‘new’ social movements sought to uncover and reconfigure relations of power in terms of access to social and political resources, and control over the appropriation of discourses (Melucci, 1985, 1989). New social movements were and remain characterised by a desire to challenge the logics that govern the ‘production and appropriation’ of social codes seeking to expose the power structures that determine:

Who decides on codes, who establishes rules of normality, what is the space for difference, (and) how can one be recognised not for being included but for being accepted as different ... Movements present to the rationalising apparatuses questions that are not allowed. (Melucci, 1985, p. 810)

New social movements thus seek to make power and the production and reinforcement of hegemonic discourses visible, and ‘announce to society that something else is possible’ (Melucci, 1985, p. 812). The anti-rape movement has historically

(and continues) to challenge the ways in which the criminal justice system, for example, has denied victim-survivors of rape access to justice, as well as reconfigure the causes of rape by highlighting and attempting to subvert the existence of ‘rape culture’ and ‘rape myths’. In addition, activists remain steadfast in pushing back against attitudes about ‘real’ rape and ‘real’ trauma because they perpetuate narrow and problematic assumptions about victims, violence and perpetrators that do not reflect the dynamics of sexual violence. In this way, the anti-rape movement propagates another way of understanding and responding to sexual assault.

Social movement scholars typically focus on the causes, emergence and outcomes of social movements, specifically analysing the civil unrest and mass mobilisation following a breakdown or crisis in the social or political order (Melucci, 1985, 1989). Yet, this kind of approach tends to position an understanding of social movements in terms of ‘success’ or ‘failure’ and overlooks the deeper dynamics, continuities and challenges social movements face as they evolve over time (Gornick & Meyer, 1998). In this sense, social movements are more than just an empirical concept that refers to moments of mass protest. Social movements also involve forming, maintaining and sustaining networks between individuals (Diani, 1992, p. 17). By focussing only on periods of mass mobilisation, scholars ignore the importance of networks that sustain social movements when they have gone into abeyance (Melucci, 1985; Taylor, 1989). It is therefore necessary to explore the ‘submerged networks’ associated with social movements which help to sustain conversation and actors’ engagement with the issue between periods of mass mobilisation (Melucci, 1989). These networks are embedded in everyday life and made up of formal and informal relationships as well as ‘systems of exchange’ (Melucci, 1985, p. 800).

The rapid changes in digital communications technologies over the past 20 years have dramatically altered the way social movements organise, mobilise and sustain collective action (Wolfson, 2012). While social movements, particularly online social movements, ‘may energise disorganised crowds’, their power resides in their ability to ‘activate the in-between bonds of publics, and ... enable expression and information sharing that liberate the individual and collective imaginations’ (Papacharissi, 2015, pp. 8–9). In other words, it is the generation and sustaining of ‘submerged networks’ which transcend time, space and place, as well as their capacity to foster an emancipatory collective imagination, that make digital social movements significant, compelling and important sites of inquiry.

The case studies presented in this book were mobilising between two significant periods of mass protest on sexual violence: *Slut Walk* (est. 2011) and *#MeToo* (est. 2017). As such, this book goes beyond examining pockets of mass mobilisation and widespread public interest in sexual violence to explore the “in-between-moments” – or submerged networks – in digital social movements, demonstrating the challenges associated with keeping discussions about sexual assault on the public agenda once social and political interest fades away. Throughout this book, I demonstrate the variety of ways these in-between-moments and submerged networks influence the way people talk about the causes of sexual violence, generate cultures of support and solidarity within and across these activist spaces and

unpack the politics of recognition within online anti-rape campaigns, much of which takes place in counter-public spaces.

Networked Digital Counter-publics

Online spaces offer a unique opportunity to examine the complexities associated with social movement networks, particularly digital spaces that disrupt or subvert the dominant 'social codes' and established hegemonic norms, through the principles associated with 'subaltern-counter publics.' Coined by social theorist, Nancy Fraser (1990), the term 'subaltern counter-publics' is used to describe sites of discussion that fall outside of, or are in direct opposition to, the dominant discourses circulating in the 'public sphere'. At its most basic level, the 'public sphere' refers to the coming together of private citizens to form a public outside the gaze of the state, to discuss and debate matters of public concern (Habermas, 1989). These matters of public concern refer to the impact of decisions made by the state on public and civic life, such as laws and policies, as well as economics. The public sphere 'is the space in which citizens deliberate about their common affairs' (Fraser, 1990, p. 57); an autonomous space and an integral element of civil society whereby new forms of discourse and solidarity are formed in order to challenge modalities of power and the production of knowledge (Cohen & Arato, 1992).

The constituents and even the location of the 'public sphere' have changed over time. Historically, the 'public sphere' was comprised of social institutions such as coffee houses and salons, in which individuals physically met to discuss matters of public interest or philosophical ideas (Habermas, 1989). The development of the printing press and the relatively quick dissemination of news media enabled the 'public sphere' to diversify its reach beyond physical interactions and encourage broader participation in civic life (Habermas, 1989). In the contemporary context, the internet, as the latest rendition on the 'public sphere', has been praised by some for its inclusivity and ability to transcend time, space and place in ways that have been previously impossible (Dahlberg, 2007), paving the way for a democratic utopia. Social media by extension is considered to be instrumental tools for 'help[ing] strengthen civil society and the public sphere' (Shirky, 2011, n.p.).

Habermas' concept of the 'public sphere', however, has been subject to significant critique – the most notable of which surrounds its exclusionary nature that only included men (Fraser, 1990). The notion that the 'public sphere' is singular or unified category is also limiting, because it fails to account for the multitude and unequal status of a variety of publics that exist in civil society (see Fraser, 1990). Nor does it speak to the dynamics underlying how and why some publics become more visible or popular than others do. Moreover, the 'public sphere' also reifies legal, political and economic discourse in a way that only serves the interests of (mostly) white, middle-class, European/Anglo-Saxon men. In this sense, feminist discourse and activism is inherently 'counter-public' because of their agonistic challenges to hegemonic power relations (Shaw, 2012). Subsequently, the nature of counter-publics, specifically networked counter-publics (Keller, 2012; Papacharissi, 2015), is central for understanding the use and use

and potential of digital technologies used by feminist activists, as well as the development of anti-rape networks more specifically.

According to Michael Salter (2013, p. 226), online counter-publics used for anti-rape activism function as spaces ‘in which allegations of sexual violence are being received, discussed and acted upon in ways contrary to established legal and social norms’. Online counter-publics are therefore important sites for challenging dominant public and institutional assumptions of sexual violence (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2020; Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2019; O’Neill, 2018; Powell, 2015; Rapp, Button, Fleury-Steiner, & Fleury-Steiner, 2010; Rentschler, 2014; Salter, 2013; Sills et al., 2016). What is also significant about online counter-publics used for speaking out about sexual violence is the diversity that exists in relation to their level of ‘publicness’. Although some counter-publics operate within the public sphere itself, others are more hidden intimate counter-publics, some of which require passwords or permission to participate (see Harrington, 2018; Khoja-Moolji, 2015; O’Neill, 2018; Powell, 2015; Salter, 2013, for examples). The ‘publicness’ of these online counter-publics plays a significant role in the way the politics of the personal play out, particularly around visibility and ‘going viral’, which I discuss in Chapter 3.

Digital Protests, Discursive Activism and Online Anti-Rape Activism

Much scholarship investigating the use of digital media for mobilisation is concerned with how this translates into offline action. In this sense, the emphasis is less on the sites of online assembly and more on the possibilities afforded by digital tools to facilitate activism and protest offline. The upshot of such approaches reinforces assumptions about the corporeal nature of activism involving mass crowds and demonstrations as *real* activism (Mendes, 2015). This is in part due to some of the criticisms levelled at online activism as ‘clicktivism’, ‘slacktivism’ or ‘armchair revolutions’ (Gerbaudo, 2012; Glenn, 2015). In addition, many digital protests, particularly ‘twitter storms’, can be ephemeral – as quickly as they may ‘go viral’ they disappear into the ether. Similar concerns have been raised about the direction and impact of digital feminist activism (Gill & Scharff, 2011), with feminist scholars also questioning the long-term efficacy of online feminism given that it routinely fails to critically reflect on and connect with historical claims-making (Fenton, 2008). These are coupled with arguments that suggest neoliberalism has ‘sold’ women empowerment in ways that ultimately reinforce their subordination reflected in online (and offline) movements, such as *Slut Walk*, because of the ways popular culture rewards women for promoting their sex appeal (Baer, 2016). Certainly, these are important observations and should not be dismissed. However, such perspectives overlook the variety of forms of activism taking place online and the diversity of digital platforms being used to cultivate and disseminate feminist ideas and identities (Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019; Shaw, 2012), as well as foster networks of solidarity and communities of support (Fileborn, 2014; O’Neill, 2018; Rentschler, 2014; Wångren, 2016). In this sense, online spaces do important

personal and political work in facilitating discussions about sexual violence and rape culture on micro and macro scales.

Like new social movements that seek to disrupt the hegemonic codes that structure social, cultural and political life, feminist activism seeks to challenge power relations and knowledge about women's lives (Maddison, 2013). Similar to consciousness-raising in the 1970s, which through the sharing of experiences women challenged the dominant public narratives about their experiences, the use of digital media by activists and survivors to transform discourse about experiences and the causes of sexual violence is significant. This happens in a variety of different ways assisted by differing forms of 'platform vernacular', which 'emerge from the affordances of particular social media platforms and the ways they are appropriated and performed in practice' (Gibbs, Messe, Arnold, Nansen & Carter, 2015, p. 257). In other words, platform vernaculars are the rules, logics, interfaces and functionalities that structure how people engage with, respond to and interact with different digital media platforms.

There exists a broad spectrum of digital tools with differing platform vernaculars employed by anti-rape activists, and their use and potential has become of significant interest to feminist scholars in the past decade. Many of the tools discussed here reflect those used by the activist spaces explored in this book and these these platforms reveal the traces of the digital footprints that paved the way for the #MeToo movement to emerge. Blogging has been identified as the earliest and most significant tool for reigniting feminist consciousness in the mid-late 2000s, with the blog *Hollaback!* being the most well-known and established (since 2005) designed to document experiences of street harassment (Fileborn, 2014, 2016; Fleetwood, 2019; Wångren, 2016). Shortly thereafter, the blogs *Feministing* and *Jezebel* were launched, exposing a new generation of girls and women to feminist ideas and helping to reshape their relationship between the personal and the political (Harris, 2008; Keller, 2012, 2016; Mendes, 2015; Shaw, 2012).

More recently, social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook have become important sites for challenging rape culture and speaking out about sexual violence. Hashtag activism on Twitter, in particular, has become an important tool for 'talking back' to rape culture and misogyny espoused in the public sphere (Horeck, 2014; Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2016; Mendes & Ringrose, 2019; Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019; Rentschler, 2014; Sills et al., 2016). The vernacular of Twitter enables activists to cultivate networks through handles that begin with an '@' sign, and use hashtags to generate topics and trends. Tweets can then be shared, liked or retweeted along with links to websites and articles (boyd, 2010). Hashtag activism was instrumental in the development of the *ShutWalk* movement in 2011 as well #BeenRapedNeverReported and #WhatIWasWearing, as previously mentioned in this chapter.

Instagram too is an increasingly important site of resistance, whereby activists have used the medium to 'objectify back' after women have been sexually harassed online (Vitis & Gilmour, 2016). Through the affective witnessing enabled by networked counter-publics on Twitter, survivors are provided with support and solidarity, and enables them to push back against myths and popular misconceptions about

sexual violence (Keller et al., 2016; Mendes, Ringrose, & Keller, 2018; Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019; Rentschler, 2014), as well as challenge misogyny and inappropriate and unwanted sexual attention (Vitis & Gilmore, 2016).

YouTube, Tumblr and other popular social media spaces are also important digital locations in which activists engage in discussions about rape culture and speak out about their experiences. ‘Survivor selfies’ and ‘pain memes’ on Tumblr (a photo blogging website) and YouTube are two of the ways survivors share snapshots of their experience (Harrington, 2019; Loney-Howes, 2015; Mendes, Belisário, & Ringrose, 2019; Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019; Wood, Rose, & Thompson, 2018). These photographs often include a poster describing an element of their experience of sexual assault, the reactions from people they told or the shortcomings of the criminal justice system. These creative approaches to speaking out about sexual violence are part of a long history of the use of art and other creative approaches to disrupt rape culture (see McGovern, 2019).

Some scholarship on the use of digital media for speaking out about sexual violence has turned towards thinking about these practices of speaking out as alternative forms of justice (Fileborn, 2016; Powell, 2015; Salter, 2013; Wood et al., 2018). This research draws on the work of feminist scholars who have identified voice, validation and recognition, control, community protection and retribution as key elements of survivors’ justice needs (Clark, 2010, 2015; Holder & Daly, 2018). The interactive functionalities of digital media means that voice and validation are afforded to many survivors enabling them to speak in their own voice in a way that makes sense or is meaningful to them. (Fileborn, 2016; O’Neill, 2018; Powell, 2015; Wånggren, 2016). Yet, as I illustrate throughout this book, not all survivors are seen or heard equally – a significant problem also identified by others (Fileborn, 2016; Serisier, 2018). Moreover, the logics underscoring the platform vernaculars of many online spaces are further limited in both their form and governance. I explore the impact of these issues vis-à-vis the extent to which online spaces used for anti-rape activism facilitate justice at a collective and individual level in detail in Chapter 6.

It is clear that while digital media has provided an unprecedented platform to engage in anti-rape activism, there also exist significant tensions within these spaces. Throughout this book, I offer a detailed, nuanced insight into the politics of the personal in relation to anti-rape activism in the age of digital media. As Bianca Fileborn and I have highlighted in relation to the #MeToo movement (2019) and Tanya Serisier (2018) has made starkly clear regarding the long-standing practice of speaking out, many of these tensions are not new. What is new, and requires attention, is the arguments about the increasing influence of ‘neoliberalism’ on anti-rape activism (Bumiller, 2008), and claims regarding the movement as a ‘successful failure’ (Corrigan, 2013) – as Hypatia framed the situation in the opening of this chapter. There is merit to such arguments, and I discuss these further in chapter 2. In this book, however, I am primarily interested in the complexities that manifest in doing anti-rape activism online, and the ways projects take up, resist, manipulate or avoid engaging (knowingly or otherwise) with discourses associated with ‘neoliberalism’, along with investigating

the diversity of non-carceral claims-making that seeks to highlight the prevalence of prevent rape and other forms of sexual violence.

Methodological Approach

Before proceeding with the substantive chapters of this book, I wish to introduce readers to the case studies and methodological approach that underscores this research project as they offer a unique insight as to how I sought to understand the politics of the personal in the context of online anti-rape activism. Following Mendes (2015) and Mendes, Ringrose, et al. (2019), it utilises case studies to provide a cross section of different online anti-rape campaigns, which enabled me to undertake a multifaceted and in-depth investigation into this unique phenomenon (Feagin, Orum, & Sjoberg, 1991). The analysis of the case studies is underscored by a methodological approach comprising of an online ethnography as well as a cyberfeminist perspective. The online ethnographic approach sought to illuminate the *technosocial* nature of the online spaces involved in this study (Wajcman, 2009), with the cyberfeminist perspective providing a framework of analysis for unpacking the tensions emerging in the way these online spaces operated.

By technosociality, I am referring to the ways digital technologies are embedded in our everyday lives, blurring the boundaries between ‘online’ and ‘offline’ (Powell, Stratton, & Cameron, 2018). At the same time, thinking through online anti-rape activism in terms of technosociality helps to illustrate the significance of digital tools in fostering a collective consciousness about rape, shaped by ‘offline’ experiences. Specifically, this study sought to understand the mediated nature of these online spaces taking an ‘in situ’ approach, which seeks to capture ‘the processes and understandings of new media ... within the context of their use’ (Gray, 2009, pp. 126–127). In this sense, the study sought to go beyond examining why and how people are engaging with online spaces for the purposes of anti-rape activism and to understand people’s experiences engaging with digital media for anti-rape activism. Utilising a cyberfeminist approach helped to understand the ways online spaces are simultaneously charged with emancipatory potential for women to subvert their patriarchal realities (Plant, 1997) and develop a ‘digital sisterhood’ (Fotopoulou, 2016), and at the same time, are engaged in a ‘double talk’ whereby digital spaces reproduce and reinforce hierarchies of gender, class, sexuality and race (Daniels, 2009). This is important in the context of anti-rape activism given the long-standing tensions surrounding the politics of representation, which I explore in Chapters 4 and 5 in particular.

The methodology was supported by a triangulated method comprising of semi-structured interviews with eight managers and creators of online anti-rape activist platforms, surveys with those who engaged in these spaces and a content analysis of the social media pages and websites attached to the campaigns. The case studies ranged from highly visible campaigns that received state funding and support, through to grassroots and informal activists who used Tumblr or Twitter to engage in activism and smaller less visible or ‘hidden counter-publics’ on blog sites such as WordPress and Blogger. These case studies are not meant to provide

a comprehensive overview or understanding of online anti-rape campaigns. However, they do reflect a diverse range of contexts in which sexual violence occurs – from ‘every-day’ rape and rape culture, to sexual violence perpetrated in conflict and post-conflict societies. The diversity among the case studies enabled me not only to capture a cross section of individuals engaged in anti-rape activism online but to unpack the complexities of making the personal political in a variety of social and political settings. The sample in this study also sought to capture a spectrum of ‘feminist identities’; from those who considered themselves overtly feminist to those who were not quite sure or rejected it entirely. Lastly, the case studies also reflect a spectrum of activism taking place online – from high-profile public campaigns, to more ‘quiet’ forms of activism that are less visible or even recognised as forms of activism (Maddison, 2013; Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019; Shaw, 2012).

The anti-rape movement, including the #MeToo movement and *Slut Walk*, has been criticised for focussing on speaking out about the experiences of white, middle-class, heterosexual women. Although the history of anti-rape activism is more complex than this position, the prominent public image of sexual violence survivors and activists involved in the anti-rape movement remains white, heterosexual women (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). While the case studies presented here do not overtly or deliberately exclude women of colour or other marginalised survivors, many of the spaces remain predominantly white and use English language only – although not exclusively. In selecting my case studies, I also sought to capture activist projects addressing sexual violence in the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) community; however, as I explore in Chapter 5, there was some resistance to addressing this gap in representation – particularly towards transgender women. The exclusion of diverse communities in this study was not deliberate; rather, it reflects the broader complexities pertaining to historical and contemporary assumptions about sexual violence, feminism, gender, sexuality, race and class in relation to the politics of visibility, which I address throughout this book.

Table 1 below highlights the eight case studies used in this project, including the methods used, the geographic location and the differing platforms they engaged with.

Using this multipronged approach to explore the case studies in this project enabled me to understand the complexities associated with making the personal political in the age of digital media. All interviewees and survey participants signed informed consent forms, and throughout this book, I use pseudonyms when quoting from interview material, and survey responses are simply identified as ‘survey respondents’. However, the responses are not detached from the case studies to which they are associated – all participants consented to this approach. A total of 74 people completed the survey, which was posted on four campaign platforms: *This is Not an Invitation to Rape Me, Not Ever*, the *International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict*, the *Herbs and Hags* blog, and circulated through my own social media networks. All data used from websites and social media pages come from public spaces and are either anonymised or described rather than given a pseudonym in order to protect and respect the identities of those who made comments or contributions to the content.

Table 1. List of Case Studies.

Case Study	Organisation (Where Applicable) and Physical Location	Scale and Scope of Activism	Methods Used
This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me and Not Ever	Rape Crisis Scotland, Scotland	Public online campaign funded by the Scottish Government	Semi-structured interview via Skype, survey with users, content and textual analysis of comments sections
The International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict	Nobel Peace Laureates, Ottawa, Canada	Public social media and offline campaign funded by the Nobel Peace Laureates	Semi-structured interview via Skype, surveys, content and textual analysis of website only
Project Unbreakable	United States	Registered non-profit Tumblr blog run by volunteers	Semi-structured interview via email, content and textual analysis of Tumblr page
The Pixel Project	Malaysia	Registered non-profit social media campaign run by volunteers around the world	Semi-structured interview via Skype, content and textual analysis of website
Herbs and Hags	United Kingdom	Blogger	Semi-structured interview via Skype, survey with followers, content and textual analysis of blog posts
These Are Not My Secrets	United Kingdom	Blogger	Semi-structured interview via Skype, content and textual analysis of blog posts
Healing Courage	United States	Micro-blogger in Twitter under the twitter handle @couragetriumphs	Semi-structured interview via Skype
YesWeSpeak	United States	Blogger	Semi-structured interview via Skype, general comments about the content of the blog prior to its removal

Structure of This Book

Drawing on the rich data generated from the multipronged methodological approach described above, this book interrogates the politics that underscore the ways these online spaces are governed and their attempts to facilitate social change. On the one hand, in striving to make the voices of those who are participating or represented heard and seen, activists can and do destabilise popular sociocultural and legal assumptions about rape, violence and trauma. Yet on the other hand, these spaces can be (and indeed some are) restrained by external and internal regulatory discourses that seek to curtail or curate a particular message in the framing of their claims in particular ways – as well as having to contend with public sentiment that continues to be sympathetic to victim-blaming and rape myths. In this sense, the tensions between the personal and the political within online anti-rape activism are compelling and complex and are taking place on multiple different levels beyond simplistic readings of the movement that position it in terms of ‘success’, ‘failure’ or having ceded to a neoliberal carceral feminist agenda. The chapters that follow in this book seek to highlight these nuances.

Chapter 2 engages with the key debates in feminist theory surrounding the politics of the personal as they relate to the anti-rape movement. I begin with an historical timeline outlining the different approaches to anti-rape activism since the 1970s and explore the critiques that have arisen in response to those efforts. This provides a framework to map the proceeding chapters onto, whereby I interrogate the ways these tensions and challenges manifest within the online anti-rape activist projects involved in this study.

In Chapter 3, I discuss the ways these online campaigns facilitate the development of anti-rape networks through consciousness-raising. In particular, I explore the potential for digital, networked consciousness-raising for engaging people in conversations about rape culture, the tensions and limitations associated with using personal experience as a driving force for discussion and the challenges that come with sustaining these online spaces. In doing so, I also illustrate the amount of labour involved in creating and sustaining these online spaces and the challenges involved in ‘going viral’.

Chapter 4 then considers how these online campaigns enable victim-survivors to challenge and rewrite the traditional rape script through speaking out online about their experiences, and the politics of witnessing within digital spaces governed by the platform vernaculars of these case studies. I investigate the ways these online platforms also create space for other survivors to claim their experiences, but similar to Chapter 3, highlight the amount of labour involved in bearing witness to their testimonies and other claims being made by activists in these spaces, particularly around what I describe as ‘negative witnessing’.

In Chapter 5, I interrogate the modes of representation in the online campaigns investigated in this research, examining the discursive conceptions of ‘victimhood’ and ‘survivorship’. I interrogate the ways in which these online campaigns resist or subvert the logics of ‘good’ victimhood and discuss the politics and role of feminism as it plays out in online anti-rape activism. This leads to a discussion about the different victim-survivors represented in these spaces, such as male survivors and LGBTQ survivors, and the impact of the continued

failure to acknowledge their experiences has on perpetuating heterosexual norms pertaining to sexual violence.

Chapter 6 provides a critical discussion about the notion of ‘justice’ and explores the various ways it is both conceptualised and sought online. In particular, I explore the ways victim-survivor use digital spaces to informally report sexual violence, as well as reflect on the practices and ethics of naming and shaming online, and the extent to which these online networks are used to call out the shortcomings of the criminal justice system.

Finally, in the Conclusion, I offer a discussion about the future of anti-rape activism given the complexities inherent in making the personal political. Specifically, I consider the impact of the #MeToo movement on bringing the issue of sexual violence back into the public sphere, the (dis)location of feminist histories and the significance to social media in creating new platforms for speaking out. I also offer suggestions for activism and research moving forward.

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Chapter 2

The Contours and Critiques of Anti-Rape Activism: A Brief History

Introduction

The anti-rape movement has a rich, complex and nuanced history. Activist projects have suffered from numerous critiques including internal conflict and external backlash, support services have had to contend with financial precarity and some feminist-inspired law reforms have fallen short of their desired intentions or outcomes. In this chapter, I trace the historical trajectory of the anti-rape movement from the consciousness-raising sessions in the 1970s through to the development of digital anti-rape activism, with two main objectives. Firstly, to offer a critical discussion of the tension between the personal and the political as it has played out in anti-rape activism historically and contemporaneously through developing a broad timeline of activist projects that encompasses grassroots activism, service provision and legal reforms since the 1970s when the widespread nature of rape was ‘discovered’ through consciousness-raising sessions. This timeline is somewhat one-sided given that most of the published literature is focussed on the US context, although where possible I point to other sociopolitical and legal contexts. Secondly, this chapter explores the critiques of anti-rape praxis as they manifest in the movement. In particular, I analyse the tension surrounding the development and deployment of the term ‘rape culture’ by anti-rape activists and scholars, as well as critically reflect on arguments made by feminist scholars about the impact of ‘neoliberalism’ in both broader politico-legal assumptions about rape, service provision and activist claims making. These issues relating to neoliberalism have become particularly problematic in the context of digital media, which some have argued fosters a culture of narcissism and individualism in which political from social justice issues, such as gender-based violence, are recast and presented as personal ones. However, I suggest that anti-rape activism has sought to (although at times has struggled)

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address this tension, and that claims suggesting the movement has ceded ground to neoliberalism fails to take account of the diverse ways in which activists engage with and resist these particular discourses.

The ‘Discovery’ of Rape in the 1970s

Rape and sexual violence have always been central in feminist attempts to demonstrate the source of women’s oppression (Horeck, 2004, p. 17), however, this claim was significantly bolstered by second-wave feminists. As such, rape and sexual violence were seemingly ‘discovered’ in the 1960s and 1970s via consciousness-raising sessions in which women exposed the widespread nature of sexual violence and other ‘bitter experiences’ (Sarachild, 1968 cited in Gleeson & Turner, 2019, p. 56). Through the collective sharing of experiences, these women revealed that rape was perpetrated predominantly by husbands, partners or family members (Estrich, 1987); they were ‘not exotic, quite legal and unavoidable for too many of us’ (Barker, 1978, p. 1). Women engaged in consciousness-raising thus sought to alter the terms upon which rape was socially and legally understood and to dispel myths surrounding the authentic rape victim narrative, which typically positioned rape a violent physical act committed by a stranger (Stanko, 2002).

The revelations of rape in consciousness-raising sessions, specifically those emerging from high-profile groups such as West Village I, resulted in the publication of numerous texts to help further anti-rape activism. In 1974, for example, New York Radical Feminists published *Rape: The First Sourcebook for Women*. The purpose of the book was to generate a strong awareness about the political causes of rape, outline the legal challenges associated with addressing rape and provide practical advice on how to support survivors. At the time of the sourcebook’s publication, rape had emerged as a significant issue for second-wave feminists in response to two things. First, the highly publicised reporting on violent rapes in print media (Barker, 1978). Second, the exposure of the prevalence and commonality of rape and other forms of sexual violence in women’s lives exposed through consciousness-raising sessions (Barker, 1978; Connell & Wilson, 1974). Subsequently, the ‘discovery’ of rape being common – ‘not just an individual and unique experience’ – required an interrogation into the political and psychological structures that maintained women’s subordination, undermined their experiences and silenced their voices (Connell & Wilson, 1974, p. 4).

However, the issue of rape was far from ‘discovered’ in the 1970s. Women have long supported each other through the process of bringing rape to the attention of the public and have sought to highlight in particular its use by men to control women. Through her archival work on the legal responses to rape in the United Kingdom and Europe during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, feminist historian Joanna Burke has identified numerous examples of women supporting each other as they took their cases to court. Although these might not necessarily be classified as ‘activism’, they nonetheless demonstrated the potential for the formation of solidarity on the issue of rape (Bourke, 2015). African-American scholars have also fought tirelessly for recognition of the use of rape and other

forms of sexual violence experienced by African-American women forced into slavery. Ida B. Wells, for instance, was instrumental in bringing to light the widespread use of rape by slave owners and by other white men to control and terrorise African-American women. But despite her efforts, attention was focussed on white women's experience of rape perpetrated by (often falsely accused) African-American men (Davis, 1978; Feimster, 2009). The erasure of women of colour and their experiences of sexual violence has contributed to an ongoing lack of recognition of the broader structural violence inflicted upon African-American women, including police violence (that also includes sexual violence), and failure to acknowledge the tireless efforts of activists working within these communities to support victim-survivors. Sexual violence was also a tool of domination, oppression and genocide in processes of colonisation, with many First Nations women around the world subjected to rape as part of the establishment of 'the nation' and European imperialism (Moreton-Robinson, 2000).

The experiences and practices of resistance carried out by women of colour, however, are often glazed over in historical reflections on anti-rape activism, with scholars and activists positioning rape as something that was seemingly *discovered* in the late 1960s and early 1970s following the arrival of second-wave feminism. What was significant about this time period, however, was the increased attention paid to the relationship between the personal and the political, which sought to highlight the extent to which women's political, social and legal subordination was the driver of their experiences of violence which, at the time, received little to no legal recognition or protection. At the same, the slogan positioned women as theorists of their own experiences and through consciousness-raising networks, women began to erode normative assumptions about sexual violence bringing to light the widespread nature and experiences of 'little rapes', such as sexual harassment, unwanted sexual contact, unwanted sexual advances – and rape (see Kelly, 1988).

Yet while consciousness-raising sessions might have offered women a new political interpretation for their lives, it did not provide a framework for women to understand the extent to which structural dynamics, such as race or class, also shaped women's experiences of violence (hooks, 1984). It's important to note here the debt second-wave feminists (who were mostly white and middle class) owe to African American civil rights activists (particularly women) for the development and success of consciousness raising, which is rarely if ever acknowledged. Thus, as Alison Phipps (2016, p. 305) highlights, "the fact that we associate the politicisation of experience with second-wave feminism speaks to the structural racism of the feminist movement." As such, emancipation was only available to *some* women and the nuances underscoring experiences rape were recast in very narrow terms that failed to account for the multiple and intersecting political facets in women's lives that render certain individuals more vulnerable to sexual assault. Moreover, a clear roadmap or trajectory from consciousness-raising to collective mobilisation and social, political and legal change was – and remains – unclear. In this sense, while consciousness-raising may have provided a platform for the collective sharing of experiences of rape, the deployment of these experiences for collective mobilisation was, and has never been, fully achieved. In addition, those experiences that have been used

to engender collective mobilisation created a number of issues that reinforced problematic assumptions about victims, victimisation and offenders that continue to haunt the anti-rape movement (Brown, 1995; Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019), and I explore these issues later in the chapter.

Getting Publicly Active

Notwithstanding the critiques mentioned above regarding consciousness-raising, some of these private revelations did help to bolster public strategies to develop a societal rape-consciousness. Given the reluctance of many political and legal institutions around the world to respond to or take rape seriously, women took it upon themselves to highlight the prevalence and impact of rape, and the poor treatment of rape victim-survivors within the criminal justice system and society more generally. Yet the tactics employed by anti-rape activists did not focus on violence in the home but were aimed at arming would-be victims from an attack perpetrated by a stranger in a public setting. Vigilante activism, in particular, was part of early strategies deployed by anti-rape activists to prevent 'stranger rape'. Surviving archival material in the form of pamphlets and magazines indicates that activists intended to instil fear in potential rapists, specifically that they should be fearful of what might happen to them if they attempt to rape a woman – notably castration (Gavey, 2009, p. 100). Drawing on the discourses of radical feminism, terms such as 'disarm rapists' and 'smash sexism' featured in underground feminist magazines, and anecdotes from women themselves in these publications describe the physical fighting responses women can perform when 'under attack' (Bevacqua, 2000, p. 103; Gavey, 2009, pp. 100–101). By encouraging women to learn self-defence and fight back against their attackers, anti-rape activists were challenging the sociocultural scripts about women's physical weakness and sexual passivity, and men's physical aggression and sexual agency (Cahill, 2001; Gavey, 2009). In doing so, activists sought to disrupt the hegemonic rape discourse, or the 'gendered grammar of violence', in which women were socially and legally constructed as vulnerable to rape and positioned as 'already raped or inherently rapable' (Marcus, 1992, p. 387). Early activists also distributed lists of known sex-offenders in certain areas to break the silence that protects perpetrators of rape and instigated public forms of collective action. Marches such as *Take Back the Night* that began in the 1970s, for example, sought to draw attention to the dangers faced, and self-surveillance undertaken, by women when out at night (Gavey, 2009), and these strategies have become a reoccurring response to incredibly public acts of violence against women.

'Breaking the silence' is also a ubiquitous feature of anti-rape activism. Through 'speaking out', activists have sought to not only shed light on the widespread nature of rape but also highlight the various strategies and tactics that seek to maintain the silence on sexual violence. Such efforts have culminated in the popular practice of victim-survivors publicly 'speaking out' about their experiences (Serisier, 2018) as a way to convince society to take rape seriously, with the New York Radical Feminist sourcebook mentioned earlier in this chapter emerging as a direct response to women speaking out publicly about their

experiences of rape. In a similar approach to consciousness raising, speak outs thus attempted to reposition rape as a product of a broader, underlying pattern of gender inequality, rather than an isolated, individual experience (Alcoff & Gray, 1993; Alcoff, 2018; Heberle, 1996; Serisier, 2018). Speak outs also sought to reveal the harms of rape, with the disclosure of violence and trauma a strategic tactic of the anti-rape movement, seeking to ‘break the silence’ surrounding the taboo on sexual violence and empower victim-survivors (Alcoff & Gray, 1993; Alcoff, 2018; Heberle, 1996).

Yet these structural critiques surround the causes of sexual violence received – and continue to receive – heavy criticism and resistance. Moreover, while speaking out might have been, or continue to be, *personally* empowering for victim-survivors, survivor speech has not necessarily been *political* transformative. In some ways, survivor speech has been appropriated and recuperated by elements of popular culture, particularly during the late 1980s and early 1990s (Plummer, 1995). Television and print media, for example, have often used survivor speech for ‘shock value’ that borders on voyeurism and has the effect of positioning speakers as passive, vulnerable victims (Alcoff & Gray, 1993). In these instances, expert mediators were often called upon to judge acts of ‘speaking out’ to validate experiences and prescribe a course of ‘treatment’ – namely through therapy (Alcoff & Gray, 1993; Mardorossian, 2002). These recuperative response to speaking out have not helped to transcend hegemonic discourses about rape, because of the way speak outs have had a tendency to represent victim-survivors as ‘irremediably and unidirectionally shaped by the traumatic experience of rape’, who are ‘incapable of dealing with anything but their own inner turmoil’ (Mardorossian, 2002, p. 768). In doing so, potentially transgressive political speech acts were pathologised and recast as personal problems. Focussing on the trauma of rape also perpetuated dominant representations of women as controlled by their ‘inner’ and ‘complicated’ emotions that ‘require *personalised* self-help rather than *political* transformation’ (Mardorossian, 2002, p. 758 – my emphasis). Through this, the capacity for solidarity has been undermined, and the anti-rape movement has come to be positioned as ‘in need of therapy rather than renewed political emphasis’ (Mardorossian, 2002, p. 760; see also Phipps, 2016).

The emancipatory promise of speaking out is also highly paradoxical. On the one hand, feminist activists have used the practice of ‘speaking out’ to draw attention to the widespread nature of sexual violence, mobilising an assumption that breaking the silence will end the violence. On the other hand, many public survivors who have spoken out about their experiences do not necessarily identify as feminists – or at least do not draw on the language of feminism to articulate their experiences (Serisier, 2018). Underscoring this tension between the personal and the political in speaking out is ways the politics of recognition is geared towards focussing on the experiences of white, middle-class, cis-gendered, heterosexual, able-bodied women – something the anti-rape movement continues to struggle to address (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). In addition, decades of feminist activism have attempted to shift the vocabulary or the script of rape away from dominant assumptions about the over-exaggerated prevalence of stranger rape, towards marital rape, date rape and acquaintance rape revealed

in consciousness-raising sessions in the 1970s to be far more pervasive yet legally and culturally lacking in recognition. However, in the genre of speaking out, stranger rape continues to garner significantly more public recognition reinforcing its position as the most 'authentic' and easily recognisable experience of rape, especially if it is accompanied by visible signs of struggle, physical violence along with a traumatised victim-survivor (Serisier, 2018; Stanko, 2002). Anything that falls outside the parameters of this is considered to be 'just sex' (Gavey, 2005; Kelly, 1988; Mackinnon, 1983).

Establishing Formal Crisis Services

Out of consciousness-raising and other public forms of activism, women began to establish formal support services for victim-survivors. Rape crisis centres were established in the early 1970s and offer a nuanced insight into the complexities of balancing the personal and the political in anti-rape activism and advocacy. The founding document from the Washington Collective, *How to Start a Rape Crisis Centre*, was widely circulated not just in the United States but throughout the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, with the goal to 'abolish rape in our lifetime' (D.C. Rape Crisis Centre, 1972, cited in Bevacqua, 2000, p. 76). The first rape crisis centre was opened in Washington D.C. in 1972, with the first crisis centre in the United Kingdom establishing itself in London in 1973 (Jones & Cook, 2008). Early rape crisis centres were entirely run by volunteers – most of whom were victim-survivors – independent from state-provided services attached to the criminal justice and health systems and provided support services via phone and face to face for women and some men (Bevacqua, 2000). Volunteers would also accompany victims to the police station to make statements, as well as to hospitals for medical examinations. Crisis centres provided emergency housing for women who had been assaulted. In addition to support services, rape crisis centres were actively involved in delivering community education seminars and supported activist initiatives, such as *Take Back the Night* marches, while also lobbying for legislative reform (Campbell, Baker, & Mazurek, 1998). Thus, rape crisis work is historically grounded in providing support for individuals, as well as addressing a broader social, legal and structural change (Vera-Gray, 2019).

Rape crisis centres that emerged in the 1970s were founded on the principles of participatory democracy, operating as collectives in a non-hierarchical fashion. The dual function of crisis works as both support-orientated and focussed on political transformation made for a tense relationship with the state. However, once formally established, crisis services felt pressured to relent on their repressive attitude towards the state in order to continue to receive funding (Matthews, 1994).¹ As a result, some crisis services adopted a more business-like approach in structuring

¹Despite the growing demand for support, rape crisis services in the United Kingdom had their funding halved between the 1980s and 2000s (see Westmarland & Alderson, 2013), and the number of crisis centres operating in the United Kingdom currently sits at 44 when there were 68 in 1984 (Whitfield, 2018, cited in Vera-Gray, 2019, p. 2).

their organisations (Gornick & Meyer, 1998; Matthews, 1994). The effect of which was the professionalisation of services (Corrigan, 2013), with the prerequisite for being a victim-survivor lessening and survivors becoming more like ‘victim-helpers’; naturally their influence over the direction of the centres waned (Corrigan, 2013; Largent, 1985). Nancy Matthews (1994) highlights, for example, the ways in which the introduction of professional training for phone crisis counsellors in different services in Los Angeles made the anti-rape movement exclusive and meant that survivors became less involved in support services. Survivors (and feminists who were not survivors but committed to grassroots activism and support) were historically positioned as best placed to provide advice to other survivors because of the emphasis on personal experience in second wave feminism. However, the professionalisation of services enabled appropriately trained staff to work directly with victim-survivors in order to prevent survivor-activists from burning out. Nonetheless, this tension between activism, support services and ‘survivor status’ persists, and I address this in relation to online spaces in Chapters 3 and 4. Other organisations, as a result of the increased pressure to seek funding to support their work, affiliated themselves with established social support services to remain viable (Byington, Yancey Martin, DiNitto, & Maxwell, 1991; Campbell et al., 1998), while some formed alliances with other services enabling different services to speak as a united front in their political lobbying (Matthews, 1994).

It is important to note that the challenges relating to funding also arose because services actively refused to work with police or pressure victim-survivors into formally report. Again, Nancy Matthew’s study of the history of rape crisis in Los Angeles reveals crisis workers were staunchly opposed to victim-survivors engaging with law enforcement given poor policing practices in relation to the treatment of survivors. Moira Carmody and Kerry Carrington (2000) note a similar approach taken by rape crisis services in Australia, who actively resisted the involvement of police in some instances because of the disrespect they showed towards survivors. The tension in crisis and activist work around whether victim-survivors are obligated to report their assaults to the police continues in the present context. Indeed, as I discuss in Chapter 6, the case studies involved in this research questioned the value of formally reporting rape and sexual assault to the police given the continued poor police practices when working with victim-survivors, yet they also acknowledged the importance of using the statistics associated with reporting rates as a significant element of their claims making. Despite these challenges, crisis services remain committed to providing support for victim-survivors (Campbell et al., 1998; Vera-Gray, 2019), as well as play a role in helping survivors to develop activist identities (Baker & Bevacqua, 2018) even in the face of precarious futures. The late 1980s and early 1990s, however, brought a suite of new challenges for anti-rape activism and survivors speaking out.

Backlash in the 1990s

The popular narrative underscoring some of the changes within anti-rape activism, and feminism more broadly mentioned in the previous sections, came to a

head in the late 1980s and early 1990s in various forms of backlash. 'Backlash' refers to the response experienced by women when they are poised to make genuine social and political gains; it is an attempt to push women back into 'acceptable' social roles (Faludi, 1993). In the late 1980s, for example, women experienced not just private patriarchal backlash but also backlash from 'public patriarchy', with the slashing of welfare services predominantly used by women by neoliberal governments around the world (Walby, 1997, p. 164), including the aforementioned rape crisis services. Backlash also manifested directly in response to claims made by activists and researchers, as well as internally to the anti-rape movement and within feminist scholarship over how best to represent differing claims, socio-political positions and subjectivities.

Some of this backlash emerged in response to the widespread publication of the findings from a groundbreaking study in the 1980s conducted by Mary Koss and her colleagues, who revealed that one in four women on college campuses in the United States had experienced rape. The study was initiated following a short article published in 1982 by *Ms.* magazine, which revealed a different kind of rape to that 'discovered' in the 1970s, namely marital rape, towards rape that occurred between young men and women who knew each other in some capacity; what came to be colloquially known as 'date rape' or 'acquaintance rape' (Warshaw, 1988). *Ms.* magazine then commissioned Koss and her colleagues to conduct a survey with college students enrolled in 32 different institutions in the United States, seeking to understand the prevalence of sexual violence.

Over 6,000 students responded, and what was significant about the research was that the survey did not ask direct questions, such as 'have you ever been raped?', but rather framed the questions in ways that sought to understand the prevalence of coercion, force and violence in sexual relationships. Questions such as 'have you ever had sexual intercourse when you didn't want to because a man used some degree of physical force?' became a way of determining not whether someone referred to their experience as 'rape', but the degree of sexual aggression in relationships (Koss, Gidycz, & Wisniewski, 1987, p. 165). Responses to the questions were then mapped onto legal definitions of rape or attempted rape. The study found that 53.7% of women reported experiencing some form of sexual violence in their lives, and Koss and her colleagues determined that 27.5% of college women reported acts of sexual aggression that met the legal definition of rape.² The 27.5% statistic (or 'one in four', which became the catch phrase at the time), Koss et al. (1987) argued, was significantly higher than national reporting rates of rape to the police at the time, which was considered to sit at 5%. The research therefore confirmed that a significant number of women do not disclose their experiences or, importantly, do not describe their experiences as rape. Koss referred to these women as 'hidden rape victims' (see Koss, 1985; also see Gavey, 1999).

Koss and her colleagues' research reinforced the arguments of earlier anti-rape activists by demonstrating that rape was not random or uncommon and

²At least 7.7% of college men also reported experiencing forms of sexual aggression that met the legal definition of rape.

that it existed on a spectrum of coercive and violent behaviours and further supported claims that rape is far more likely to be perpetrated by someone known to the victim. The study was further popularised in journalist Robin Warshaw's book *I Never Called It Rape* in which she substantiates the discussion about the 'epidemic' of date and acquaintance rape through the use of numerous personal testimonies and was instrumental in initiating significant public discussion on the topic in the United States in particular.

The pushback against these shifts in the discourse relating to rape, however, was fierce. Camille Paglia, Katie Roiphe, and Christina Sommers wrote scathing, well-publicised reviews in response to Warshaw's book and Koss' study.³ In particular, Roiphe (1993) suggested that the numbers of women who claimed to have experienced rape were inflated, and that the focus on 'date rape' detracted attention from the 'real victims' of rape, namely victims of violent stranger rape. Roiphe (1993) suggested that women will cry rape at what was just 'bad sex', and that they 'play the victim' rather than take responsibility for their own safety and actions. Roiphe's claims followed those made by Camille Paglia (1992), who claimed that male sexual aggression is 'normal' and thus women should accept rape and other forms of sexual violence as a natural result of courtship. The claim that there are 'real' or more deserving victims of rape was also echoed in the work of Sommers (1994, p. 220), who argued that rape was a problem fabricated by white, middle-class women to 'gain moral parity with the real victims in the community'.

This backlash against date rape and acquaintance rape also brought to fore significant debates about personal responsibility, sexual safekeeping and the existence of 'rape culture', which fully entered the anti-rape lexicon in the early 1990s.⁴ Generally speaking, 'rape culture' sought to, first, describe how the political, legal and cultural subordination of women creates the conditions for rape to occur and, second, to illustrate the extent to which the experiences of rape survivors who speak out are undermined by the prevalence of rape myths and victim-blaming (Buchwald, Fletcher, & Roth, 1993). Rape culture too refers to how male sexual aggression and female sexual passivity are constructed and naturalised, as well as seeing to challenge the idea that the actions of individual men are the cause of rape and sexual violence, and the systematic ways sexual violence is condoned or at least tolerated by society (Gavey, 2005; Guckenheimer, 2008; Keller, Mendes, & Ringrose, 2016; Phillips & Chagnon, 2018). Another element of rape culture is the notion of the 'rape apologist'; an individual who make excuses for, or denies the prevalence of rape and sexual violence (Stiebert, 2018). A rape apologist may reject claims about rape and sexual violence in certain contexts by denying its' severity in relation to 'real' rape and 'real' victimisation, or defend alleged rapists

³These accounts are well dissected by Stringer (2014), Gavey (2005), Bevacqua (2000) and Atmore (1999), so I do not wish to reproduce their arguments in full.

⁴'Rape culture' had been a term used by some activists in the 1970s (see Griffin, (1971/1977) and Connell and Wilson, (1974)). However, it was not until the late 1980s and early 1990s that the term became more widely used in activism.

on the grounds that they are ‘good guys’. In this sense, the development of the term ‘rape culture’ aimed and continues to address the broader sociopolitical environment in which victim-blaming, ‘rape myths’ and male sexual aggression are considered ‘normal’.

The ‘rape myths’ feminist activists began highlighting (and continue to push back against) since the 1970s include the normative attitudes or stereotypes that govern narrow and misguided cultural assumptions about what ‘real’ rape looks like. Initially, activists, through consciousness-raising, were focussed on addressing the myth of stranger rape that is inherently violent and perpetrated by a social deviant, rather than someone acquainted or intimately known to the victim-survivor (Burt, 1980; Estrich, 1987). In the 1980s and early 1990s, activists began to tackle other ‘rape myths’ heavily associated with victim-blaming attitudes and responses from a spectrum of individuals and institutions that continue to undermine victim-survivors when they came forward. Some of these victim-blaming attitudes spouted by rape apologists include ‘she was asking for it’ based on what she was wearing or if she was out late at night, ‘she was too drunk’, ‘women can’t be raped by their husbands/partners’, ‘men can’t control themselves’ or ‘women like being raped’ (Buchwald et al., 1993; Burt, 1980).

The new vocabulary of ‘rape culture’, however, was (and remains) highly contested (Phillips & Chagnon, 2018). In the 1990s it was staunchly resisted, and victim-survivors who experienced sexual harm outside the confines of ‘real rape’ were faulted for failing to take personal responsibility for preventing rape and sexual assault – or these experiences were not considered rape at all. Critics of rape culture applied the aforementioned rape myths to college-aged women, in particular, suggesting that these ‘bad sexual experiences’ were to be expected as part of the campus experience (Paglia, 1992; Roiphe, 1993). These critical responses to feminist activism around rape also influenced a public backlash against women’s organisations, citing victim-feminism’s paternalistic approach to violence prevention and ‘excessive’ focus on women’s powerlessness and vulnerability as a reason to reject its politics (Bevacqua, 2000). However, reducing the critiques of the anti-rape movement and research to ‘backlash’ and individual responsibility fails to account for the broader shifts within victim identity politics, and an increased focus on punitive responses to rape and violent crime more generally (Atmore, 1999; Phillips & Chagnon, 2018), driven by the impact and influence of neoliberalism, to which I now turn.

Feminism, Rape and Neoliberalism

So far, I have outlined a broad spectrum of practices associated with, and theoretical analyses of, the anti-rape movement. However, some argue that the anti-rape movement has channelled its efforts too much into criminal justice interventions, with anti-rape activists taking advantage of the broader strategy in law and order politics that emerged during the 1980s and 1990s which generated a ‘generalised fear of disorder and the image of habitual and recalcitrant criminals’ (Bumiller, 2008, p. 7).

At its most basic level, neoliberalism is politico-economic project in which economic growth, individualism, personal choice, self-empowerment, self-transformation, self-discipline and self-surveillance and entrepreneurialism are prioritised over collective needs (Brown, 2006; Gill, 2016; Gill & Scharff, 2013; McRobbie, 2008). By extension, neoliberal principles encourage individuals to conform to market ideals, engage in self-management (i.e. risk management) and take responsibility for their own well-being (Brown, 2006). The state simultaneously withdraws from intervening in social problems, positioning individuals as responsible for their own well-being and, importantly, preventing crime (Brown, 2006; Gotell, 2015). At the same time, the state pushes a punitive, carceral agenda in response to the breakdown of social order (Brown, 2006) and increases the regulation of populations and punishing those who fail to conform to social norms or take responsibility for managing their own risky behaviours – what Foucault (2002) termed biopolitics. While many elements of neoliberalism are traceable to liberalism, what is ‘neo’ is the reach and influence the ideology has on a broad spectrum of social, political and legal institutions. Thus, neoliberalism is more than just a series of ‘free-market policies’ that attempt to dismantle the welfare system, replacing them with privatised services and deepening wealth disparities around the world. Rather, neoliberalism is a ‘political rationality’ that normalises itself by disseminating its logics across a variety of institutions disciplines, such as public health, the criminal justice system and various discourses within psychology/psychiatry (Brown, 2006).

The impact and influence of neoliberalism – and subsequent critique – in relation anti-rape activism takes multiple forms. Commentary regarding the emphasis on increasing criminal justice responses to address sexually violent crimes posit that activists have strayed too far from their historical claim to ‘abolish rape in our lifetime’ (O’Sullivan papers, 1972, cited in Bevacqua, 2000, p. 76). Instead, arguments claim that they are too focussed on seeking punitive law reforms and individualistic therapeutic interventions at the cost of political lobbying and collective claims making that address the structural causes of sexual violence (Bumiller, 2008; Corrigan, 2013; Gruber, 2009, 2016; Mardorossian, 2002). Rape is reinforced as something caused by personal circumstances and individual choices – for instance, the victim wore ‘slutty’ clothing, was drunk, had led the offender on or was out late at night – rather than structural inequalities and vulnerabilities. Subsequently, survivors are either blamed or disbelieved, and for those few survivors who are able to demonstrate what Lise Gotell (2012) describes as ‘sexual safe-keeping’ (also see Vera-Gray, 2018). Rape then becomes construed as something to be legally and therapeutically repaired, not something that can be ‘fought’ or prevented (Marcus, 1992), perpetrators are positioned as deviant sexual predators, or ‘opportunists’, and the cultural and political environment in which men are given permission to have unbridled access to women’s bodies remains unchallenged (see Darmon, 2014; McNicol, 2012).

By engaging with neoliberal discourses, feminists have been accused of expanding the power of the state to intervene and criminalise certain sexual behaviours as rape that might otherwise be described as ‘deviant’ or ‘risky’ (Halley, 2006, 2008). Much of the backlash directed at the #MeToo movement is predicated

on assumptions that it has gone ‘too far’ towards demands for criminalising awkward or negligent sexual behaviour (see Fileborn & Phillips, 2019). Critics argue that feminist-inspired law reforms have utilised a law-and-order approach to tackling crime and offering (individual) therapeutic solutions to ‘large-scale cultural problems’ (Corrigan, 2013, p. 3; see also Bumiller, 2008; Gruber, 2009, 2016). Feminism has supposedly cast perpetrators of sexual violence as the ‘lowest form of criminals ... deserving of the most brutal forms of punishment’ through heavy gaol sentences (Gruber, 2009, p. 584). Anti-Rape law reform projects have been argued to entrench assumptions about perpetrators of rape as monstrous socio-paths whose behaviour can only be addressed through incarceration and further modes of regulation and surveillance, such as sex-offender registries (Bumiller, 2008). These perpetrators are overwhelmingly men of colour, from lower socio-economic backgrounds with mental health problems. Thus, feminist engagements with law reform are supposedly responsible for generating moral panics about sex crimes and intensified the surveillance and management of victims and perpetrators (Bumiller, 2008).

A further consequence of neoliberalism has been the increased privatisation of public services as the state sells them to private companies seeking to make a profit. For the anti-rape movement, the decline in state funding and the privatisation of services resulted in the recasting of the women’s movement as a ‘special interest group’, with sexual violence vanishing as an ‘object of public policy’ (Brodie, 1997 cited in Gotell, 2007, p. 128). Funding becomes increasingly precarious and contractual in nature, leading to the ‘discursive disappearance of sexualised violence’, whereby rape is cast as just *another* crime because of the ways the gendered nature of sexual violence is erased (Gotell, 2007). This is part of a broader trend within liberal feminist discourse, which tends to view rape as a gender-neutral assault on individual autonomy, which effectively erases the gendered power dynamics around men’s sexual entitlement to women’s bodies. In casting sexual violence as a genderless crime and positioning the women’s movement as a ‘special interest group’, the state leaves it up to non-profits, such as rape crisis centres, to provide support and services for victim-survivors, who are at the whim of public funds and private donations.

As I outlined earlier in this chapter, for the anti-rape movement to attract funding, some crisis centres abandoned their collective, anti-hierarchical organisational structure (Gornick & Meyer, 1998, pp. 386–390). Those who were unable to secure money had to partner with other organisations with whom they were not necessarily familiar in order to attract funding (Byington et al., 1991). In the case where public funds are available to provide support to victim-survivors, there are limitations (particularly in the US) on who is eligible for support services based on income and insurance policies (Bumiller, 2008; Corrigan, 2013). It is worth noting, however, that this is not a blanket experience, as many rape crisis centres and activist groups still try to operate as collectives, and work hard to provide support to as many survivors as they are able (Vera-Gray, 2019). Indeed, Rape Crisis Scotland and the Nobel Women’s Peace Initiative, who were both part of this project, operate according to the principles of collective decision making and have a governance structure only to satisfy the conditions of their funding bodies. Moreover, as Bevacqua (2000) points out that many rape crisis centres are unable

to apply for funding alone, meaning they often make joint applications with hospitals or police departments whom they have already tense relationships (p. 148).

In those spaces where grassroots activism intersects with institutional reforms, Gruber (2016) takes aim at the anti-rape movement on US campuses, suggesting that it draws on the language of ‘crisis’ and ‘epidemic’ generated by the discourse of ‘rape culture’ to push through tougher policies to punish perpetrators. Certainly, the US government under the Obama Administration was quick to push through amendments to Title IX, and many universities updated or instigated policies to better respond to rape on campuses following the release of the *Hunting Ground* documentary in 2015. However, Gruber (2016) claims that the discourse surrounding Title IX and revamped university policies to address sexual violence are overly reliant on the ‘trauma’ narrative, positioning students – both women and men – as incapable of self-management, and ‘repackage[ing] feminist energy and female empowerment as sexual victimhood’ (p. 1049). Yet, Gruber (conveniently) underestimates the influence of ongoing anti-feminist sentiment within university administrations in the United States that severely hinders the capacity of these changes to Title IX to have any real effect (see Serisier, 2018, pp. 145–175). There is little evidence to suggest that administrative processes associated with Title IX are effective in supporting survivors making complaints to universities, and Gruber’s analysis overlooks the strength and courage of anti-rape campus activists, many of whom are survivors, to speak out and push back against university administrations’ attempts to block access to justice for victims.

In addition to these issues at the level of feminist engagements with the state and institutional reform, questions have been raised about the political nature of contemporary activism and feminism, which is heavily geared around celebrating individualism and personal empowerment at the cost of addressing structural inequalities and social justice issues (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Gill, 2016; Gill & Scharff, 2013). This neoliberal sensibility in feminist discourse has culminated in what has been described as ‘post-feminism’. Once used as a way of describing the period *after* feminism following backlash in the 1990s and early 2000s, contemporary academics now view post-feminism as a gendered form of neoliberalism that celebrates individualism, personal empowerment and self-transformation through consumption (Gill, 2016; Phipps, 2016). The political is subsequently recast in personal terms – women under post-feminism can be personally empowered but not politically due to what Angela McRobbie (2008) describes as the ‘double entanglement’, whereby (predominantly white, cis-gendered, heterosexual) women, in exchange for participation in public life, reserve their critiques of patriarchy and the existence of structural inequalities (Negra, 2009). Freedom, liberation, empowerment and recognition of harm or violence can be brought for the right price rather than through collective political action (Mendes, 2012).

Interrogating the Neoliberal Politics of the Personal

The aforementioned criticisms of anti-rape activism and issues relating to neoliberalism and post-feminism are further scrutinised in the online sphere, compounded by issues pertaining to digital activism being perceived as ‘slacktivism’

and digital tools themselves functioning as an extension of the neoliberal ideals of self-cultivation, narcissism and individualism. However, as I outlined above, the anti-rape movement has consistently engaged in a variety of strategies that have sought to advance rape-consciousness in the hopes of eliminating rape, including legislative reforms, although not exclusively. Indeed, much of the activist work discussed in this book suggests that many anti-rape activist projects online actually generate affective cultures of support and response-ability (see Rentschler, 2014) in the sharing of personal experiences of rape and sexual assault. These digital spaces are also crucibles for challenging rape culture, rape myths and victim-blaming attitudes, as well as sites to speak out against patriarchy and masculine privilege (Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019; Sills et al., 2016). In this sense, these projects emphasise care and support and are ‘anti-carceral’ in nature through the way they give voice to violence and foster cultures of witnessing (Rentschler, 2017).

To suggest that the movement more broadly has ceded ground to the neoliberal and post-feminist discourses of individualism and punitive law and order politics overlooks the diversity of practices carried out by activists involved in the anti-rape movement (Baker & Bevacqua, 2018). Such arguments do not account for the nuanced ways activists and practitioners actively *resist* neoliberal discourses – but also utilise them in strategic ways. It is evident that activists have fought hard to ensure support services have remained available for victim-survivors to access, as well as engaging in political lobbying and grassroots activism (Bevacqua, 2000). Support services, in turn, have done vital political work for some victim-survivors in developing their identities as ‘survivor-activists’ (Baker & Bevacqua, 2018) and situating the harms of rape beyond the ‘trauma paradigm’ to place them in the context of the personal, cultural, social and structural dynamics of survivor’s lives (Vera-Gray, 2019). Activism in practice is thus diverse and multi-faceted and highlights not only the complexities involved in managing this balance but also the capacity of social movements to move between the competing demands of the personal and the political. This may involve seeking individual rape justice through legalistic processes or simply hearing, seeing and believing victim-survivors when they speak out, alongside collectively challenging socio-cultural attitudes about rape culture. This tension is what makes the anti-rape movement compelling. The intricacies of the anti-rape movement are even more pronounced in the context of the online sphere given some of the criticisms discussed here that illustrate the need to take a nuanced approach to understanding these new social movements as they move between the personal and the political.

Although the ascendancy of neoliberalism has shifted the terrain upon which feminism and the anti-rape movement have had to operate, I contend that this is more likely a reflection of the power of neoliberal discourses to manipulate and repackage ideas as ‘feminist’ (see Fraser, 2009) rather than the effect of deliberate decision-making on the part of activists. Furthermore, one of the greatest paradoxes of anti-rape activism’s relationship to carceral neoliberal politics is the way in which the criminal justice system is simultaneously called upon pronounce judgements and rejected as the appropriate site in which rape justice is arbitrated (Serisier, 2018). In this sense, criticisms of the anti-rape movement fail to acknowledge the ways neoliberal discourses have appropriated feminist attempts

to influence law and policy, as well as the intense contradictions within feminist praxis itself. In addition, critiques of the so-called carceral agenda often fail to acknowledge the extent to which feminist reform-activists have had to compromise with a state and public hostile to feminist ideas more generally.

Still, reporting and conviction rates have not increased despite 40 years of activism, nor have public perceptions about rape and victim-survivors radically changed (Gotell, 2012). Conviction rates have actually declined in Australia, Canada, England and Wales, and many women continue to express dissatisfaction with the processes involved in taking a case to trial (Daly, 2011). As a result, many victim-survivors do not view the criminal justice system as an appropriate avenue for seeking justice. Thus, while critics of the anti-rape movement have suggested that law reform has contributed to an over-regulation of sexual behaviour, what is clear is that the goals of 'justice', in terms of eliminating rape and care for victims of rape, remain unmet. Moreover, Seidman and Vickers (2005) note:

While laws about rape have changed, attitudes about sexual autonomy and gender roles in sexual relations have not ... [And] Jurors, prosecutors and police are confused about the boundary line between sex and rape. (2005, p. 468)

This failure to distinguish between rape and sex, not just within courtroom processes but in wider society, is highlighted by Gavey (2005), who describes the *cultural scaffolding of rape* as the process through which rape becomes viewed as simply unwanted sex (see also MacKinnon, 1983). This is why some scholars have described it as a 'successful failure' (see e.g. Corrigan, 2013) – and indeed is why Hypatia, whom I introduced at the very beginning of this book, suggested that 'not much has changed for women'.

Yet rather than conceptualising the movement in terms of its 'success' or 'failure', I want to argue that it is more productive to consider how the movement and its agendas have evolved, been reshaped by and resisted particular modalities of power, specifically those within the disciplines of public health, crime prevention and victim identity politics. In taking this position, investigating the anti-rape movement thus reveals something about complex networks of power and the politics of recognition that are in constant negotiation and tension between the personal and the political. Restated, the anti-rape movement highlights the contentious relationship between feminism, the state, public institutions and popular cultural discourses.

What is clear, as I indicated in the introduction to this book, is that digital technologies have made it possible to examine the broad spectrum of anti-rape claims, as well as 'hear' the voices of victim-survivors to deduce the ways in which they develop their activist identities. Indeed, many of the participants in this study identified as having experienced some form of sexual violence, although this was not a prerequisite for participating. The danger with this lies in the possibility that their voices might reinforce particular assumptions about violence, vulnerability and trauma, rather than be socially, legally and politically transformative. Thus, what is needed are new ways to understand the personal and political and to

explore alternative innovative ways in which activists move beyond recuperation or reification of identity, which reproduce the very discourses that seek to regulate permissible speech acts, identities and assumptions about rape and rape culture. In the discussion that follows in this book, I highlight a spectrum of anti-rape activist practices taking place online. I demonstrate that the claims making and actions carried out by activists using digital technologies are not new, nor are they centred on law reform or criminal justice as the only or most appropriate response to rape. As such, these activist spaces offer new and nuanced platforms for listening, witnessing and responding to activists in ways that reshape our understandings of and the possibilities for social change.

Chapter 3

Consciousness-raising and Networked Anti-Rape Counter-publics

Introduction

On October 15 2017, the #MeToo movement erupted onto social media propelling sexual harassment and assault back onto the public agenda, and reigniting a level of consciousness raising that had arguably not been seen since second wave feminism. However, as I noted in the introduction, the #MeToo movement was not the first time digital communication technologies have been used to engender a societal consciousness about rape and sexual violence. The *HollaBack!* blog, which began in 2005, is considered one of the first collective efforts to use digital media to speak out about street harassment and abuse by activists, with individuals sharing stories, supporting survivors and speaking back to rape culture in an attempt to challenge the acceptance and frequency of these spatial and bodily intrusions (Fileborn, 2014).

Since at least 2005, there have been multiple efforts enabled by the affordances of digital platforms, including Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Instagram, YouTube and blogs, to engage in activism to speak out about experiences of rape and other forms of sexual violence and to challenge rape culture (see Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2020). Given the extent to which these spaces seek to challenge popular public discourse, scholars have described them as subaltern counter-publics. Some of these digital counter-publics seeking to challenge rape culture have gained substantial traction, such as *SlutWalk* (est. 2011; see Mendes, 2015), and the hashtag campaigns #YesAllWomen (est. 2014) and #BeenRapedNeverReported (est. 2014). Although they did not have the same level of engagement at the #MeToo movement, #YesAllWomen had 1.5 million uses within the first 24 hours (Thrift, 2014), and #BeenRapedNeverReported was used 8 million times within the same time period (Gallant, 2014). In this sense, digital platforms have been

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remarkably successful in helping to promulgate counter-public ideas into the public sphere. However, while popular hashtags, such as #MeToo and #BeenRapedNeverReported, may 'excite crowds' and stimulate short-term interest in long-standing feminist ideas, the grinding work of social and legal change is carried out in those networks that exist *in between* moments of mass mobilisation. It is these in-between networks seeking to sustain online anti-rape activism that is the focus of this chapter. These networks exist along a spectrum of 'publicness' in their counter-public claims, ranging from publicly funded campaigns, to grassroots activism backed by volunteers, to smaller 'tiny publics' such as blogs.

The use of digital media to facilitate change has faced polarising critiques, with both optimism and caution expressed about its' potential for feminist activism to generate meaningful engagement and social change. Historically, information communication technologies (ICTs) were heralded as democratic forms of communication that could connect women and feminist activists across time, space and place (Spender, 1995). Yet increasingly digital media and technologies are being used to facilitate violence against women (Dodge, Henry & Powell, 2016), and feminists or women who speak out about violence online are regularly targeted by 'trolls' and men's rights activists, subsequently subjecting them to further forms of violence and abuse (Jane, 2016; Lewis, Rowe, & Wiper, 2016). Digital activism more broadly has been criticised for fostering 'slacktivism' or 'clicktivism', in which social movement actors are accused of failing to critically engage with social justice issues by only 'liking' or 'sharing' posts on social media (Budish, 2012). Further complicating these challenges is the increasing spread of 'neoliberal' feminism, which too often divorces the personal from the political and subsequently has the potential to undermine collective efforts to keep feminist politics on the public agenda (Baer, 2016).

These competing perspectives reveal the nuanced, fluid, manipulable, complex and situated nature of ICTs (Wajcman, 2009), and the claims about the use of digital technologies to harass and perpetuate violence against women presents a significant affront to the emancipatory potential of online spaces. However, in this chapter I avoid positioning the case studies in this project in relation to the aforementioned readings of ICTs, nor do I reflect on them in terms of success or failure. As Papacharissi (2015, p. 8) notes, online activity should not be confused with impact/success – or lack thereof. Rather, this chapter explores the complexities involved in creating and sustaining the online anti-rape activist spaces. I show that online platforms are useful tools for reinvigorating consciousness-raising and networking, and demonstrate how online spaces provide new opportunities to debate issues pertaining to 'rape culture'. I also highlight the ways the ideas put forward in these networks are contested and the effort involved in sustaining collective engagement, specifically the emotional labour and effort required of managers and creators of these campaigns. I conclude the chapter by problematising critiques of 'slacktivism', illustrating the role low-impact elements of these activist projects play in helping these digital spaces to 'go viral'.

Cyberfeminism

Feminist scholars have had a contentious relationship with ‘techno-science’, ranging from negative, pessimistic attitudes, to enthusiastic calls for embracing the possibilities enabled by digital communications technologies. Some early science and technology scholars argue that Western culture has historically privileged masculinity over femininity through the perpetuation of binaries such as culture and nature, reason and emotion (Harding, 1986). Science and technology, as products of ‘reason’ or ‘rationality’ in (Western) culture, are thus coded masculine, resulting in the taken-for-granted gendering of machines, to which the internet and digital communications technologies are intrinsically linked. Technology was thus an extension of patriarchy and a tool to enforce women’s subordination (see Harding, 1986).

However, the development of feminist cyber studies in the mid- to late 1990s ushered in a new era of optimism. Drawing on Donna Haraway’s ‘Manifesto for Cyborgs’, which envisioned the possibilities techno-science might offer for transforming the material effects of gender, feminist cyber theorist Sadie Plant (1997) hoped that cyberspace would become a tool through which women could subvert their patriarchal realities. Cyberspace, Plant claimed, would free women from the subordination they faced in their everyday, offline worlds, as it provided them with the possibility of more fluid social and political identities; in effect, blurring the boundaries that defined embodied difference, which, she argues, forms the basis of women’s systematic subordination. Others, such as Spender (1995), viewed cyber technologies as instrumental in connecting women for the purposes of sharing their experiences in ways that transcend time, place and space (see also Hawthorne & Klein, 1999; Kirkup, 2000). Women creating their own networks were significant for Spender, because she noted that men’s voices dominated mainstream online discussion forums. For these cyber-feminist scholars, the internet was a tool for liberation and emancipation from the patriarchal gaze via new communication, interaction and political deliberation; channels through which social change can occur rather than the dissolution or transcendence of gender. While this optimism was present and justified at times within the case studies involved in this project, the capacity for these networked counter-publics to engender change through consciousness-raising, as I discuss below, is challenging and faces multiple obstacles to reach any emancipatory potential.

Consciousness-raising and Anti-Rape Networks

The transition to Web 2.0 in the late 2000s brought about a shift in the way online content was generated and shared. Under Web 1.0, content was characterised primarily by static websites, chat rooms and forums. However, the development Web 2.0 brought about a shift towards user-driven content and is often collaborative thanks to the platform vernaculars and affordances of social media (Gibbs et al., 2015). The explosion of different digital media platforms, including blogs and social media, has been instrumental in revitalising feminist political discussions (Taylor, 2011), particularly through the ways it has facilitated new opportunities to engage in consciousness-raising. Digital spaces have been

described as ‘Consciousness-raising 2.0’ through the ways in which they help to foster a ‘commons’, creating semi-closed spaces to discuss experiences and protect the information shared online (Wood, 2008). Blogging in particular as a form of ‘consciousness-raising’ is widely accepted among techno-feminist scholars, with a number of studies identifying motherhood (or ‘Mommy blogs’) as being the most popular topics of discussion among women online (Anderson & Grace, 2015; Lopez, 2009; Morrison, 2014). In the same way that consciousness-raising in the 1970s captured a broad spectrum of women’s experiences, these motherhood blogs also canvas a series of topics not just about parenting but also about women’s experiences of sex, relationships and violence, providing them with the space to test out ideas and engage in discussions about a variety of common concerns. Whether these concerns are raised under the banner of ‘feminism’ is another question, yet they nonetheless provide individuals with the capacity to engage with, respond to and address issues in their private lives – and that consciousness-raising in these digital spaces may, in fact, bring people to feminist ideas and provide them with a political interpretation of their personal experiences (Mendes et al., 2018; Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019).

The #MeToo movement, along with earlier forms of hashtag activism mentioned in the introduction of this book, provided a significant platform for the public to engage in discussion about sexism, patriarchy and other forms of gender-based violence (Mendes et al., 2018). The interview participants in this study also viewed the online space as vital for consciousness-raising about rape. Some had even used ‘Mommy blogs’ as a starting point for developing rape-consciousness. Hypatia, for example, had begun posting on *Mumsnet*¹ and noticed that a common thread raised by women was unwanted or negative sexual experiences with their husbands. Hypatia said:

Constantly on *Mumsnet* you get people coming on talking about their husbands and [saying]: ‘I’m really unhappy with my husband because this is what he did last night and they’re describing rape, you know, and it’s like “your husband raped you”’.

As such, Hypatia began using *Mumsnet* as a place to test out her thoughts about rape and rape culture before deciding that she needed more space to explore the issues in detail. Specifically, she said:

I’d been ranting on *Mumsnet* for a few years and I realised that I wanted to write a little bit more than you can write in a post on a social media and [that] I needed the space to do that and to work out my thoughts.

Hypatia asserted that her blog, and blogging in general, was a form of consciousness-raising, and that the internet’s ability to transcend time, space and place means that women do not have to meet ‘face-to-face’ but can come together online

¹<https://www.mumsnet.com/>

from across the world to discuss their experiences and debate ideas. Moreover, as the quote below demonstrates, Hypatia believes that the multiple geographic locations from which women speak about their experiences of rape is further indicative of the systematic failure to respond to sexual violence. Speaking more broadly about online feminist activism, as well as anti-rape activism, Hypatia stated:

I think actually a lot of [women-specific] online space is consciousness-raising. The *Mumsnet* feminist section has definitely acted as a consciousness-raising vehicle for masses of women ... When you read people's blogs that is like a form of consciousness-raising isn't it? But the difference is that you're doing it online ... The opportunity for radicalisation is enormous. Because when you speak to women in Australia and in New Zealand and India and in America and it's [rape] happening bloody everywhere, it becomes very clear that this is one great big bloody problem system. This isn't just a little problem that you have in Britain, it's cultural. It's like everywhere, it's happening everywhere. And it does give women a chance to kind of consciousness-raise across the planet, across continents.

In addition, Hypatia also notes that consciousness-raising occurs across multiple networks, not just in one specific space online. Hypatia actively engages with discussions happening on other anti-rape campaigns and her work is shaped in turn by those spaces she is actively involved with:

I talk to people like 'Everyday Sexism' and 'Everyday Victim-blaming' and some of the radical sites out there ... I know they link to me, to stuff, and I'm up on some of the radical sites ... People share me on their Facebook pages and stuff like that.

Survey data too indicated that they are involved in multiple anti-rape campaigns and networks or follow a variety of different Twitter accounts. [Table 2](#) provides an overview of the different activist groups or Twitter accounts survey participants stated they were involved in.

[Table 2](#) highlights that Rape Crisis Scotland, other rape crisis groups and Scottish-related advocacy campaigns were the most common network survey participants indicated they were involved in. These campaigns are overrepresented largely because Rape Crisis Scotland shared my survey on their Facebook and Twitter pages and they have a large following online. However, overall, [Table 2](#) indicates that survey participants were very active in a variety of different anti-rape and anti-violence-against-women scenes online. Some of these respondents were tapped into longstanding digital campaigns, such as *HollaBack!* and *Slut-Walk*. There is also a spread of geographic location represented in these responses, such as 'Destroy the Joint' (an Australian-based project), 'Don't be That Guy' (a Canadian campaign) and Wellington Rape Crisis (New Zealand) listed among the digital spaces activists were involved in. This diversity demonstrates that local issues are part of broader global patterns of violence experienced by women and

Table 2: Online Anti-Rape Networks.

Survey sites	Other Campaigns Survey Respondents Are Involved With
This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me	Rape Crisis Scotland, Women4Women Clackmannanshire, Join the Conversation, EWRASAC, Save EWRASAC, Edinburgh Feminist Network, Rape Crisis Scotland, Slutwalk Edinburgh, Reclaim the Night Edinburgh, Take Back The Night foundation, Not Ever, Destroy the Joint, Stop Street Harassment, Everyday Feminism, Rape Crisis Scotland, Stop Porn Culture, Clementine Ford, Rape Prevention Education New Zealand, Wellington Rape Crisis, Hollaback! UK (Glasgow), Rape Crisis Glasgow
Not Ever	Wise women, Rape Crisis Scotland, Object, End Violence Against Women, Zero Tolerance, Everyday Victim-Blaming, Rape Crisis Scotland, GlobeFem, 16 Days Against Gender-Based Violence, Rape Crisis Scotland, <i>Project Unbreakable</i> , Draw the Line, Don't be That Guy, Make You Move, SlutWalk, Rape Crisis Scotland, Rape Crisis Scotland, Consent is So Frat, Project Not Asking For It, SCOT-PEP, VAWPP – The Violence Against Women Prevention Program, Glasgow Rape Crisis
Herbs and Hags	OneWoman, After Silence, BroadBlogs, No More, http://www.anditwaswrong.com/ , http://www.vday.org/ , Left at the Lights, Fugitivus, yesmeansyes, tits and sass, yes, Everyday Victim-blaming, global sisterhood network
Stop Rape in Conflict (SRC)	Amnesty International
General Survey	Joyful Heart Foundation, #domesticviolencechat, @yeswespeak blog, RAINN, Army of She, End Revenge Porn, My Body My Rules, The Unslut Project, Faculty Against Rape, This Is Rape Culture, End Rape Culture, Unforgiven, Destroy the Joint, White Ribbon, Smash the Joint, Luke Batty Foundation, Amnesty International, No More, Joyful Heart Foundation, @EndRapeCulture7, @lin6org, notmysecrets.blogspot.co.uk, ninaburrows.com, S.H.E. UK, Rape Crisis England and Wales, www.endviolenceagainstwomen.org.uk, @EVB_Now, @WomenandGirlsN, @womensaid, @AVAproject, #ibelieveher, RAINN website, @takedownMRAs, #YesAllWomen

other survivors of sexual violence; however, there is little evidence to suggest that diversity or intersectionality is accounted for in these digital spaces and campaigns (see Chapter 5). Maya referred to these different spaces activists were involved with online as ‘anti-rape networks’. These networks not only share information.

raise consciousness and challenge norms associated with rape culture, but they are also sites of support for survivors where they can go to obtain recognition, support and advice. And, as Lynn highlighted, 'the discussions [generated in these networks] can go on for a long time, and in our case it is still going on'.

Conceptualising digital spaces as 'networks' reflects Melucci's (1985) notion of 'submerged networks', which are not only engaged in moments of mass mobilisation but also sustained through consciousness-raising online when big moments, like the #MeToo movement, quieten down. While networks are 'a very old form of social organisation' in which participation and information dissemination was marked by physical proximity, what is significant about the 'submerged networks' online is also their ability to decentralise the flow of information and organisation of society (see Castells, 2000, p. 695). Networks are predicated on people's relationship or connection to a given network, rather than being bounded by (political) territories or physical place. As Castells (2000, p. 695) suggests, the most 'dynamic social movements are connected across the city, the county and the world'. Importantly, online networks have been significant in shifting away from 'old' forms of media of 'one to many', in which news and information is disseminated from a central hub, to 'new' forms of media, which connect 'many to many' (Castells, 2007). In this sense, news as well as political ideas circulate through numerous channels, shared in the 'space of flows' (Castells, 2000, p. 696), rather than being top-down or unidirectional.

Almost channelling Castells (2000), in which he describes social movement networks as series of 'interconnected nodes' (p. 695), Angela described the work of the *Pixel Project* through 'sharing' as being a significant factor in developing anti-rape networks and feminist networks more broadly, online. Specifically, Angela said:

You share news, you share headlines, and it's sharing information that going from node to node, point to point, rather than us being fed stuff.

For Angela, 'sharing' within and across networks is important in breaking down the centralisation of information dissemination about sexual violence, and the quote included here indicates a resistance to being 'fed' information; instead activists seek out information relevant to their work to either challenge or share particular 'truths' about rape. Maya indicated that the digital media offers new opportunities to spread news and ideas in ways that are different to 'before Twitter came out'. Specifically, Maya said:

[Twitter] Offers a really easy, quick way to get information out there ... I find out about things now that I feel like my friends in the other sort of more mainstream [media] find out like three weeks later ... *because* I'm so part of this community on Twitter.

The significance of social media in creating new opportunities for connecting was further reflected in Alana's comments about the Stop Rape in Conflict

campaign, in which she said that social media has been the key for connecting and amplifying calls to action activists who never even had access to *traditional* or old news media:

Often times folks in Beni [for example] don't necessarily have access to traditional media ... so social media really comes in and allows us to share those [activist] messages in new ways. We can get an email sent out from someone in Beni [about what's going on] who's connected with someone else who can send an email out and then use social media to be able to amplify their message in ways that we can't when there aren't many traditional media outlets in that area.

Alana's comment again draws on Castells' claim that new media connects 'many-to-many' and, in fact, points to the ways new media enables networks to by-pass, and subsequently no longer require, traditional forms of media in order for activists to be heard, seen and believed. Alana said she believes social media and other online tools are also instrumental in democratising the processes of decision making within social movement organisations, such as Stop Rape in Conflict, because:

Our communication is *so* regular, and when you have so many campaign members who are friends on Facebook in our meetings we [can] talk about what so-and-so's up to in Khartoum. I think that's where the divide [around access to media] gets broken down and where those personal relationships between campaign members come into play (Alana's emphasis).

Online anti-rape networks thus help to circulate information and news at a pace much faster than mainstream media and can help activists keep up with changes in policy or respond quickly to perspectives that are sympathetic to 'rape culture' or victim-blaming. On the flipside though, Maya also pointed out some of the problems with information saturation and the immediacy of news that comes with online networking:

I think it offers some challenges because there's so much information so readily available. I know I struggle with finding, sifting through all of it and really finding out o.k., who are my allies, and who do I agree with, and what reflects my understanding or my beliefs about this?

In addition to potential misinformation circulated in 'submerged networks' online, for some, the term 'consciousness-raising', or even describing their online presence as 'activist' in nature, was contentious. Katie in her interview said:

I wouldn't want to elevate myself to some kind of status of 'Katie, the online activist!' But I do hope that I'm starting to change minds, you know?

As I outlined in Chapter 2, consciousness-raising sessions in the 1970s were not just about women coming together to share their experiences but providing a political interpretation of those experiences and subsequently mobilising to engender change (Echols, 1989). As such, in hoping to ‘change people’s minds’, Katie’s blog is still a form of consciousness-raising. However, Katie’s comment also points to some limitations in reflecting on these spaces as truly engaged in consciousness-raising, given that in some of these online spaces the conversation may seem unidirectional if there is no identifiable audience ‘listening’ and responding to posts on digital media platforms. I return to this point later in the chapter.

Similarly Kelly, who did speak of her presence online as a form of consciousness-raising, however highlighted some of the challenges involved in connecting with the ‘right’ people and reaching the ‘right’ audience in order to shift people’s consciousness:

I definitely would call it that [consciousness-raising] ... [but] there’s no way to know how much, how true that is but you kind of have to be ok with that. Especially in the beginning when you haven’t connected with a ton of people, you may not get a ton of responses, you may not get a ton of retweets or ‘likes’ on Facebook and it’s really hard to be like ‘oh no one’s paying attention’ but you don’t know who you’ve reached and that’s what I keep telling myself.

What this quote from Kelly is pointing to is the difficulties involved in generating and sustaining consciousness-raising online, as well as one’s impact or success. While Angela noted in her interview, ‘the whole thing about people liking or sharing your stuff is that it’s an indication that someone acknowledges what you’ve posted’; without this kind of feedback, an activist may feel as if they are just shouting into the abyss (Fileborn, 2014). Yet ‘likes’, ‘retweets’ and ‘reposts’ may not necessarily constitute ‘impact’ or ‘success’ from a more traditional understanding of social movements – and given the criticisms levelled at anti-rape activism more broadly for ‘failing’ to achieve the goal of ‘abolishing rape’, likes and retweets are not sufficient ways of achieving this goal. This approach may be more reflective of contemporary social movements that seem to be lacking in formal structure and leadership, as well as having unstated – or at least unclear – goals in their efforts to address complex social justice issues. In other words, they are just forms of ‘slacktivism’ – a point I return to shortly in this chapter. Certainly, the #MeToo movement has been criticised for failing to articulate its goals and objectives to the extent that some have suggested it cannot be considered a ‘true’ social movement (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). However, #MeToo and other digital campaigns such as #WhatIWasWearing, #BeenRapedNeverReported and *SlutWalk* mentioned in the introduction of this book, have all generated opportunities to push back against or speak back to the logics of rape culture, and institutional actors and other individuals who have attempted to silence survivors and activists speaking out. In this sense, although the managers of these online spaces might have felt unclear or ambivalent about their capacity for engendering change through consciousness-raising, the

discussion boards and comments sections reveal that much of their power lies in their capacity to disrupt rape myths, victim-blaming and rape culture. What is significant about consciousness-raising in these online spaces is that it goes beyond traditional forms of consciousness-raising that connected women with other women and engages with a broader networked public. This naturally brings with it a series of challenges in relation to the possibilities of transforming and transcending attitudes inherent within rape culture and dismantling rape myths.

Dismantling Rape Culture and Rape Myths?

While the discourse of rape can incite outrage, and impassioned responses to violent stranger rape in particular, it is also regularly trivialised and normalised. Sexual harassment, for example, should be seen as a compliment rather than an unwanted/uninvited intrusion into one's movement through public space or workplace. The proliferation and popularity of violent pornography consumed by men has positioned 'rough' sex as something that women actually desire. And the depiction of women in popular culture capitalises on rape as a narrative device in ways that reinforce problematic assumptions about agency, violence and vulnerability – for example, the rape of Sansa Stark in HBO's *Game of Thrones* (Ferredey, 2015). The upshot has been an ethos of denial regarding the actual prevalence of sexual violence further compounded via the production of rape myths and victim-blaming (see Chapter 2). The persistence of rape culture, supported by the circulation and acceptance of rape myths and victim-blaming, creates an environment in which survivors experience what Linda Alcoff 'epistemic injustice' (2018, p. 52), in which their claims are routinely dismissed or disbelieved. This process has been witnessed throughout history whereby women's claims to truth about rape have led to questions about credibility and subsequently the 'truthfulness' of their story (see Alcoff, 2018, pp. 52–54).

The pervasive nature of 'epistemic injustice' extends to feminist claims about the political causes of rape, illustrating that there is a significant and continued resistance accepting the existence of 'rape culture'. Many sectors of the community continue to believe that rape is still uncommon and perpetrated by a small number of people, despite decades of activism seeking to challenge this position (Henry, Flynn, & Powell, 2015). Opposition to acknowledging the existence of rape culture as an underlying cause of sexual violence also divides some rape crisis support services. The North American anti-sexual violence organisation Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN), for instance, are hesitant to endorse 'rape culture' as the cause of sexual violence. Instead, RAINN claim on their public website: 'rape is not caused by cultural factors but by the conscious decisions of a small percentage of the community to commit a violent crime' (cited in Henry et al., 2015, p. 2). This resistance to the existence of rape culture, even at the level of support services, undermines feminist attempts to challenge the causes of sexual violence as a social and cultural problem, reframing it as one caused by a small number of opportunistic men and women or victim-survivors who fail to protect themselves from sexual harm. This is not to suggest that the support services blame victim-survivors; however, it remains

the routine public response to victim-survivors in general, fuelling the perpetuation of rape myths and victim-blaming (Mendes, 2015).

The case studies in this book, however, are deeply resistant to these individualising narratives surrounding the causes of rape and the responsibility placed on survivors to prevent or resist sexual violence. Through consciousness-raising, they demonstrated a commitment to revealing the political, cultural and structural causes of sexual violence and, as I discuss in Chapter 4, offer support for victim-survivors speaking out about their experiences in diverse ways. The Rape Crisis Scotland campaigns – *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* and *Not Ever* – provide rich insights into how digital spaces seek to raise consciousness about and disrupt rape culture and victim-blaming discourses. In particular, the campaigns tackle the rape myths and victim-blaming attitudes mentioned in Chapter 2, such as the consumption of alcohol and the way a victim-survivor is dressed as ‘asking for it’, the assumption that victim-survivors can’t be raped by their partners/husbands – or that survivors are to blame for giving ‘mixed signals’ to perpetrator. In doing so, the campaigns help erode assumptions about ‘real’ rape, rape myths and the prevalence of victim-blaming with the digital space helping to transcend geographic boundaries fostering discussion and debate about rape culture in ways that are not restricted by time or place. As Lynn said:

The website has facilitated a great deal of discussion, and also it’s not time-limited so there’s nothing on there that really makes the thing obsolete. It [*This is Not an Invitation to Rape Me*] still is as relevant today as it was when we launched it in 2008 ... It continues now to be seen as quite groundbreaking in its approach and that has been a big success.

Lynn noted the capacity of the website, *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me*, to provoke discussion and challenge perceptions of ‘real’ rape was evident from the very first comment they received:

The first one [comment] we saw under the wedding picture was something like some guy saying ‘this is all the encouragement I need to take my wife and family away from this country’ ... That was obviously something that provoked quite a lot of people to respond to him.

The large number of individuals who have commented on aspects of the Rape Crisis Scotland campaigns that challenge assumptions about dress, alcohol consumption or a victim-survivors’ relationship to the perpetrator is further evidence of the campaign’s capacity to facilitate discussion – both negative and positive. For example, the ‘Have your say’² section on *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* showcases the website’s capability to generate discussion and debate,

²<http://www.thisisnotaninvitationtorapeme.co.uk/have-your-say/#.WVHAMk0Um71>

although some elements of the discussion seemed to be misinterpreted or dismissed by those engaged in the discussion broad. Taking the ‘dress’ section as a case example whereby Rape Crisis Scotland is seeking to challenge the logic of the victim-blaming narrative that survivors are ‘asking for it’ because of how they are dressed, there were a few people criticising the campaign, with some throwaway comments such as ‘what a spectacular waste of money’. However, there were also numerous comments that incite the sexual safekeeping rhetoric of neoliberalism inherent in rape apologist-style attitudes, as I discussed in Chapter 2 (Gotell, 2008; Stringer, 2013). A comment from ‘Andrew’³ on the discussion board, for example, sparked a debate about the importance of women having to protect themselves from being raped, rather than perpetrators (or men, more specifically) having to modify their behaviour:

This campaign does not place enough emphasis on a woman’s responsibility to protect herself from her assailant. Please consider not only trying to inform men about when it is/is not appropriate to have sex with a woman, but also help the woman to know how to give clear signals when she does not want to have sex as well as how to protect herself when things go awry (Andrew – my emphasis).

However, as Lynn mentioned in her interview:

If you get somebody pitching in with a really negative reaction, you generally get other people giving it right back to them and explaining exactly what it’s trying to do, putting them straight about what the situation is – that women are not inviting sexual activities by the clothes they wear or because they’re drunk, and this kind of thing.

However victim-blaming comments, like those made by Andrew, were not rejected outright. ‘Clare’, for example, said:

I agree with Andrew that more should be done to educate women on how to communicate what she wants clearly and how to avoid getting into trouble in the first place.

In order to distance herself from being seen as a ‘rape apologist’ (see Chapter 2), Clare claimed that this was not ‘to suggest that rape victims are responsible for what has happened to them’ but as an attempt to prevent the potential for victim-blaming and provide women with additional tools to keep themselves safe. Nonetheless, her comment reinforces the sexual safekeeping discourses of neoliberalism that assert women are responsible not only for preventing rape but are also required to demonstrate their capacity to resist being raped. Clare’s comments about sexual safekeeping also seem to reflect problematic assumptions

³Pseudonym assigned.

about safety and perpetrators of rape by suggesting: 'perpetrators of sexual violence are emotionally and psychologically damaged people'. Clare's comment highlights that despite the fact that the campaign *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* attempts to demonstrate (along with decades of activism and scholarship) that rape is more likely to be perpetrated by someone known to the victim, many people still believe that only certain 'damaged' people, or recalcitrant criminals, are responsible for committing rape. This position taken by Clare is echoed in the forum by 'Alex', who acknowledged: 'Nobody can deny the importance of campaigns such as this'. However, he also suggested that:

You have to accept that there are people out there who can/will do you harm ... When I see young girls wandering around town centres late at night, drunk and on their own, they are putting themselves in danger ... You didn't ask for it but you didn't do anything to prevent it ... You can't live in this society and expect everyone to play by the rules, you need to anticipate the ill-desires of others and act to protect yourself. (My emphasis)

Like Clare, Alex is also suggesting that women, particularly young women, need to engage in sexual safekeeping to avoid being preyed upon opportunistic 'perpetrators-in-waiting'. Many thus reject the messages of the campaign surrounding rape culture or seek a compromise that still places the responsibility to prevent rape on women rather than the potential perpetrator.

While the comments on the 'Dress' section of the 'Have Your Say' page on the campaign *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* gets bogged down in victim-blaming and rape apologist rhetoric rather than productive discussion through consciousness-raising, the 'Drinking'⁴ section reveals more in terms of the campaign's capacity to alter people's attitudes and perceptions. This particular discussion page on the website also reveals the gaps in knowledge or at least assumptions about consent, and the law's application and understanding of consent – particularly when alcohol has been consumed by the victim-survivor. This is important because in addition to raising consciousness about rape myths and rape culture, Lynn said that the campaigns were designed to 'reach potential jurors, because we were very much aware of the impact that the attitudes of jurors could have on rape trials'. However, the following conversation demonstrates how thorny attitudes towards the discourse of consent in particular can be. The conversation also highlights assumptions about the over-extended influence of feminism on the legal system and taps into some of the backlash rhetoric that women 'cry rape' when they regret having sex. 'A Devil's Advocate' posted the following comment at the top of the Drinking section:

If a woman and a man meet in a bar, both very drunk, neither is capable of making a rational decision, and both wake up in bed together, having had sex. What if the man is charged with rape?

⁴http://www.thisisnotaninvitationtorapeme.co.uk/have-your-say/#drinking_tab

If she decides that she didn't want to have sex, then the law holds him accountable regardless of whether she consented at the time. (In addition, no jury would ever convict her of rape if he charges her) [*sic.*].

A Devil's Advocate's comment that the law *will* hold the rapist accountable regardless of whether the victim consented or not connotes an exaggeration or misrepresentation of the impact of feminist law reform projects on increasing conviction and lower attrition rates. Specifically, this comment implies that the law automatically sides with the victim and regularly convicts men accused of rape, when in reality this not the case (Millstead & McDonald, 2017). However, responses from 'BREEZE' and 'Reality' are 'giving it right back' to A Devil's Advocate, putting him 'straight' about the *reality* of the situation. BREEZE responds by arguing 'cases wherein both rapist and victim are drunk are rare' and suggests 'rapists deliberately ply a woman with alcohol in order to reduce her level of resistance'. BREEZE goes on to claim: 'rapists are opportunists [who] deliberately seek out women they perceive as "easy to conquer". *Rape is both about male sexual access and male power over women*' (my emphasis). Reality commented on A Devil's Advocate's intimation that false rape allegations are made regularly and even drew on statistics from Rape Crisis Scotland to support their claim, saying:

They [false reports] sit at around 3% – the same as for any other crime ... and the fact that the conviction rate for rape in this county [Scotland] stands at 2.9%, I think you need not lose any sleep about your fictional man [being accused of rape].

Two other commenters, however, agreed with what A Devil's Advocate had to say about how alcohol can impede one's ability to know if they have raped someone or to ascertain consent. 'Max' said, in their best rape apologist voice, that although 'there is no excuse for rape', he suggested that perhaps "'Devils Advocates" point is being missed'. Max cited his own experience of having had a night out and waking up with a girl the next morning with no real memory of whether consent was given – evidently he is unsure of the boundary between 'sex' and 'rape', which is concerning. He was 'worried about how this (equally drunk girl) was going to react' – that she might accuse him of rape. It appears she did not, yet it is unclear to what extent this experience caused Max to reflect upon his behaviour in an ethical way and rethink the boundaries of future sexual relations.

The assumption that the law sides with victim-survivors was further echoed in a comment posted by 'A survivor', who said:

I also agree with 'Devil's Advocate' ... If he accused her of rape, it would be laughed at long and hard, whilst she is expecting the full force of law to come down on him if she accuses him ... If a person (male or female) is so drunk they can't remember what

happened then there is no way of knowing if consent was given at the time, and an ‘oh sh*t [*sic.*], I shouldn’t have done that – he raped me’ response later, when sober, isn’t good enough.

The above discussion reveals the confusing nature of the law, its failure to effectively communicate its own standards of consent and the gap between community and legal understandings of consent (Larcombe, Fileborn, Powell, Hanley, & Henry, 2016). In most Western criminal codes, ‘reasonable belief in consent’ is suggested as the benchmark for the defence to establish, and many Western jurisdictions have moved towards a communicative model of consent in order to capture the broad spectrum of behaviours or situations in which consent is not, or cannot be, freely given (Larcombe et al., 2016). This includes the consumption of alcohol and other drugs as inhibiting one’s capacity to give informed consent – although this is not necessarily understood or applied in a consistent manner (Burgin, 2019). What this discussion in the forum highlights is the complexities and common misunderstandings surrounding the provision of consent in the context of rape – clearly a matter of public interest – which the campaigns run by Rape Crisis Scotland are attempting to bridge in order to address the justice gap and potentially help increase conviction rates.

In her groundbreaking book *‘Against Our Wills’*, Susan Brownmiller (1975) claimed that attending the consciousness-raising sessions with the group ‘West Village I’ changed her mind about rape. Although the discussion so far has suggested that these online anti-rape campaigns polarise opinions about rape culture and rape myths, some posts in the discussion forum do demonstrate people changing their minds about ‘rape culture’ and assumptions about rape, and that engaging with the campaign *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* helps to solidify those shifts in consciousness – even if only on a personal level. For example, one commenter, ‘Rachael’, admitted to ‘being guilty of victim-blaming in the past’, especially when alcohol was involved, and believing that false rape accusations were common. However, her post demonstrates an attitudinal shift; specifically, in her understanding of the ways broader sociocultural patterns and practices, such as drinking culture, prop up ‘rape myths’:

I’ve noticed that western culture seems to be heavily involved with drunk sex. I often see jokes about women needing a few drinks to be ready for sex. The fact of the matter is, if a woman has been drinking, and her partner has not been drinking, and she’s begging him for sex, and he agrees, he is taking advantage of her impaired judgement ...When there is any question of ability to make a sound judgement, one of the parties is guilty of rape. It’s that simple. I think this myth [about alcohol], although the hardest to debunk, is also the most essential.

Rachael’s post ended with the statement ‘this was hard to write, and I’m not sure if everything I said made sense. But I hope it did’. This statement therefore highlights how participants in these online spaces tease out their ideas and render

their arguments comprehensible, as well as changing their minds about rape culture and victim-blaming. These online spaces reflect what Katie (interview participant) described as a ‘crucible for ideas’, in that they helped individuals to develop confidence in formulating an argument and sharing their ideas online as well as offline. Katie said:

In the past six months just blogging about it [rape] and reading what other people are writing has given me an opportunity to develop my own skills to be able to talk more clearly about it with people. A year ago, if somebody had challenged me over like the definition of rape or something, I probably would have just been a jabbering wreck. Whereas now I would be able to very clearly get my point across, and I think that’s come about through talking about it online.

Katie’s perspective was echoed by Maya (interview participant), who said ‘[Twitter is] a really good way to practice how to put your opinion out there and how to support it’. Consciousness-raising networks in online spaces subsequently have the capacity to support activists rehearse their political claims making, although as I now turn to discuss, sustaining this performance and these networks is challenging and multifaceted – but not impossible.

Sustaining Consciousness-raising

As I outlined in Chapter 2, a continuing critique of consciousness-raising is its inability to move beyond that itself and engender social and political transformation. In some ways, this is due to the inability of consciousness-raising to account for the differing sociopolitical and cultural locations from which women spoke about their experiences. The #MeToo movement has been criticised for being stuck in the phase of consciousness-raising, unable to extend further than the moment of mass confessionals (Rosewarne, 2019). Indeed, there has been very little discussion about some of the political and cultural elements, such as rape culture, that create the conditions for sexual assault and harassment to occur within the #MeToo movement. Much of the discussion in terms of the causes of sexual assault and harassment has been directed at individual, powerful men rather than a thorough examination and critique of the structural conditions that enabled the abuse to take place in the first instance (Loney-Howes, 2019). Nonetheless, the #MeToo movement *moved* activists and survivors emotionally into action to initiate conversations about social change and what this might look like (Mendes & Ringrose, 2019). The capacity for digital media to move people into action beyond moments of mass mobilisation and maintain submerged networks was also felt by Maya, who runs a Twitter community called ‘Healing Courage’. She stated that social media provided the anti-rape movement with a ‘community ... for people to come and meet virtually and, with that, a place for you to find like-minded people and feel part of a movement’.

However, there are significant pressures associated with sustaining momentum and connections in the online sphere beyond moments of mass mobilisation

and maintaining digital networks. In terms of engendering support across different digital networks, there was some concern among survey respondents about the extent to which these online anti-rape spaces were capable of fostering co-membership and mobilising a collective response. Despite survey participants indicating that they were involved with or followed a number of online communities and networks engaged with raising consciousness about rape and other forms of sexual violence, they also expressed that they felt these spaces seemed to be operating in digital silos or echo chambers. Some responses to the question 'what more do you think needs to be done by these online campaigns to bring about social change' indicated that these spaces should aim to foster solidarity *between* networks, not just within them. For instance, one respondent to the general survey said, 'they should all join forces together if they really want to make a huge impact. United we stand!' In this sense, while the individual campaigns in this study might have been good at generating networks of support and sharing information *within* their networks, the survey data suggests that they are not particularly successful at mobilising *across* networks, as well as attracting new members or establishing who their target audience is.

Discrepancies thus exist within these consciousness-raising networks over how best to set an agenda, generate solidarity and mobilise a collective identity (see Dianni, 2000; 2003). Another respondent, who said online anti-rape activist campaigns need to, further queried this position: 'Better engage people who have not experienced sexual violence', indicating a greater need to bring non-survivors into consciousness-raising to help them understand the realities of rape and sexual assault. In other words, consciousness-raising networks – according to participants in this study – need to think careful about who their target audience is and how they 'sell' their ideas beyond networks of survivors (see Chapter 4) in order to generate a more impactful response. Some of the case studies in the project were created with no specific market or audience in mind, while others were deliberately set up for survivors, like Kelly's blog. Kelly created her blog as 'a place where I really wanted to reach out and connect with other survivors, and have them feel like they could tell their story in a safe, environment'. However, being oriented towards survivors, with the prerogative of providing a safe place for them to share their stories, also requires a certain level of privacy in order to maintain control over who has access to this network. This also means that it might be difficult for victim-survivors to know about the project and thus requires a significant amount of work to simultaneously attract, engage and protect those who participate within these networks. Moreover, as indicated above, closing off spaces to survivors only may mean that many people are not exposed to the realities of sexual violence and unable to engage in consciousness-raising.

Further pressures associated with sustaining online networks are associated with time and resources. Katie said that she '[does not] have the time to be constantly updating. I'd rather just post occasional – hopefully good quality – stuff, rather than an endless stream of drivel'. Katie's comment highlights the amount of pressure and labour placed on activists to maintain their spaces and keep producing material in order to maintain consciousness-raising networks. This is especially the case for smaller digital anti-rape networks who blog or post in their spare time outside of working hours; however, larger ones also face similar

financial- and time-related challenges. While some of these online spaces are professional services who receive public funding to produce their campaigns – such as the Rape Crisis Scotland and the Stop Rape in Conflict campaigns – all the others are volunteer-run. Generating good posts, sourcing material to share and even finding ways to pay for having an online presence takes time and effort, which can be stressful for activists and often require a certain entrepreneurial spirit. Angela pointed out that if everyone involved in the *Pixel Project* was paid, the campaign could not run because it does not make enough money to pay even her to oversee the project. The project's motto, according to Angela, is 'raising funds, raising awareness and raising volunteer power for the cause'. This speaks not only to those who help to maintain the social media sites and the website but also to those who contribute to the individual campaigns and help by maintaining the technological elements of the website. Angela stated:

We're surviving right now because everyone is a volunteer ... I set us up so we get people to donate in-kind stuff ... We get free server space from Dream Host, our URL is donated to us for 10 years by one of the URL companies ... Video editors donate their skills, writers donate their skills. Basically we get everyone to donate their skills and donate whatever products their company already makes.

This quote from Angela reveals not only the increasing reliance on volunteers for engaging in anti-rape activism but also a certain kind of entrepreneurialism in activism, whereby creativity in sourcing volunteers and in-kind donations from a variety of sources may help to set one campaign apart from another. This donation-based approach also helps to maintain a movement or network's presence that might otherwise disappear after a short burst of mobilisation.

Not only does maintaining a blog, a Twitter account or a Facebook page take up a lot of time, a further theme that emerged from the interview data centred around the limitations of using one's own experience to drive activism and sustain consciousness-raising networks. Given that consciousness-raising and speaking out (see Chapter 4) have been long-standing practices seeking to end sexual violence and address rape culture, the capacity of consciousness-raising to facilitate social and political change drawing on personal experience remains contentious and limited. Hypatia said:

[When] I started it [the blog] I meant to do it every week religiously and then I didn't ... Every now and then I look at it and think I haven't blogged for ages I really ought to ... I think it's probably run its course the way it is ... I've worked through my things about rape ... [and] unless something comes up, which might kind of suddenly spark off an idea, I'm not sure I've got anything to add ... I might just set up a new blog or something, and then I think 'oh I've got followers on this one now and if you start again, you'll have no one'.

Here, Hypatia speaks to the temporal nature of blogs – even though they may exist in perpetuity online, the rationale behind their creation and maintenance eventually shifts or becomes challenging to sustain. This is especially the case for survivor-activists who might use an opportunity, such as the #MeToo movement, to speak out about their experiences, however, going beyond one’s personal experience to explore some of the political elements of sexual violence requires significant effort – and may not necessarily be driving their activism. Hypatia states above that the blog has helped her to work through her experience of rape, which she began in response to the vilification of a woman whom Ched Evans⁵ was accused of raping – and thus feels she may have nothing more to contribute. However, Hypatia also noted the network and following she has gained from the blog and her posts about ‘rape culture’ and feels compelled to remain committed to serving the community she has already created. As I discuss in Chapter 4, this community has become a vital space for survivors to speak out about their experiences that do not fit within mainstream perceptions of sexual assault.

Similarly, Katie noted that she too is aware that eventually she will run out of things to say about herself, although she does post other people’s stories of rape on her blog. However, Katie noted something precarious about the relationship between the personal and the political with respect to the maintenance of and audience in her network around the types of posts she herself makes. In particular, she notes how people seem to be more interested in the ‘grizzly’ (i.e. traumatic) things that have happened to her, rather than her views on the politics of gender inequality. She said:

I will eventually run out of things to say about myself but so much happens in the news about sexual violence that it feels like there’s something every day [to write about] you know? ... [However] people seem to be keener to read about grizzly things that have happened to me than ... my views on Sarah Vine.⁶

In an op-ed in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in March 2016, Kath Kenny suggested that women who write about their traumatic experiences in order to gain public attention generate an ‘attention’ or a ‘sob’ economy. Yet as Spargo-Ryan (2016) notes, women have historically been denied the opportunity to speak publicly about trauma – unless it has completely destroyed them. These online consciousness-raising networks therefore provide victim-survivors the opportunity to tell their experiences of rape, as well as trauma, in ways that both resist and reify normative scripts of rape-trauma in both the context of the courtroom and the ‘confession’, through practices of witnessing (see Chapter 4). Katie’s comment about people being more interested in the ‘grizzly things’ that have happened to

⁵Ched Evans is a Welsh football player who was convicted of rape in 2012 and spent two and half years in prison. His sentence was overturned in 2016 (BBC, 2016).

⁶Sarah Vine is a journalist for the British tabloid newspaper, the *Daily Mail*. She is renowned for her anti-feminist sentiment and controversial views.

her, rather than her thoughts on the politics of sexual violence, indicates perhaps two things. On the one hand, it highlights a cultural fascination with women's experiences of trauma, specifically sexual trauma, which sometimes fails to see the connection between women's personal/private and political subordination. On the other hand, a collective response to an individual's experience may also be a sign of solidarity and ethical witnessing (see Chapter 4); an indication that Katie has been heard, seen and believed.

This focus on individual experiences in digital anti-rape activism returns to one of the central critiques of consciousness-raising raised in Chapter 2; that experience alone cannot necessarily be deployed for political action given the lack of reflexivity from which individuals speak (Brown, 1995). However, Table 3 below suggests that the investment in reading and witnessing the experiences of others provides the groundwork for engendering solidarity, with participants selecting as many options as relevant to them in response to the question 'Why do you participate in these online campaigns?':

'Other' responses included 'for work', 'because rape culture won't smash itself' and 'to ascertain the latest male-created justifications for subjecting women and girls to male sexual violence'. The data in Table 3 clearly indicate that most people participate in these spaces to show solidarity or support for others at 54%, along with promoting social justice (47%) and getting information (46%). In this sense, it is highly probably that most people who read 'grizzly stories' of rape posted in the case studies in this study probably do so to demonstrate support and solidarity with victim-survivors.

Posting 'grizzly stories', however, not only requires a significant amount of time but also a high volume of *emotional* labour from blog and website moderators, as well as their audiences. Being involved in a social movement like the anti-rape movement demands a significant emotional investment and resilience from participants in showing their support, particularly when they are being constantly bombarded with 'grizzly stories'. Katie said she has had friends tell

Table 3. Why Individuals Visit or Participate in These Online Campaigns.

Survey Responses	Total (%)
To provide support to people I know who have experienced rape or sexual violence	19
To connect with others who might have similar experiences	24
To share my experience(s)	15
To get emotional support	16
<i>To show solidarity and support for others</i>	54
To promote social justice	47
To seek legal advice	7
To get information	46
Other – please describe	12

her they ‘always read your blog, and I always like it, but *I don’t want to “like” the Facebook posts because I don’t like it*’. In terms of engagement, Alana also ‘wonder[ed] what type of person would really enjoy reading updates on sexual violence in conflict on a daily basis’. Therefore, she tries to post more about ‘the activism and the power of some of these women who are doing incredible work’, rather than continuously sharing sad news with the community.

Activists who write about, or collate personal experiences of others, are also required to exercise a significant amount of emotional labour, which can cause additional stress and the reliving of their own trauma. Katie said, ‘I don’t know how I haven’t broken this computer with the amount [of times] I have cried all over it [after reading stories] ... it’s really hard’. In addition, moderators and curators face decisions over where to best direct their energy and labour in attempting to cultivate an online anti-rape network to facilitate consciousness-raising. Katie noted:

I could *either* talk about sexual violence in the news, *or* I should talk about me, *or* I should talk about other people and I’m kind of trying to do everything.

Kelly discussed this too, noting not only the difficulties involved in constantly posting about her own experiences but also described the effort required in cultivating consciousness-raising online in the context of deliberations about difficult and emotional topics, such as rape. Kelly said:

It’s time, and it’s dedication and it’s putting yourself out there consistently, different from just one post on a website ... Thinking about what you want to post next and trying to make it a conversation rather than just me posting out to the ether and hoping that someone reads it. I think the other thing too is that this stuff [rape] is just hard and I think that if people are in a place where they’re ready to be honest about it, and they want to be honest in a public forum, then that’s fantastic.

Kelly’s point about ‘trying to make it a conversation rather than just me posting out to the ether and hoping someone reads it’ reflects the challenges in making the personal political online. While social media helps to *market* these publics, with bloggers Katie and Kelly using Twitter as a way of sharing new posts they have written, this does not necessarily translate into new followers or a wider readership. Both Katie and Kelly noted in their interviews that friends and family comprised most of their readership, and one survey respondent said they found these online spaces useful for demonstrating to friends and their mother the realities of sexual violence. Thus, it is difficult for smaller networks to generate widespread involvement, and some may want to keep them contained because of their emotional content.

What this section reveals is the tension that has always existed in anti-rape activism between the personal and the political. Blogs and other activists projects are seeking to cover the *personal*, specifically, their own experiences of rape

and that of other victim-survivors; as well as accounting for the *political*, such as generating a conversation about the persistence of rape culture and the impact of victim-blaming and rape myths. In addition to this tension, Katie, Kelly and Hypatia, in their most recently documented comments above, are pointing to the difficulties involved in ‘going viral’ online. This challenge exists despite the increased attention and revival feminism has received in recent years driven largely by affordances of digital communications technologies in bringing a new generation of young people to feminist ideas (Keller, 2012).

Feminism Trending

In recent times, ‘feminism’ has become overwhelmingly popular (Banet-Weiser, 2018). Far from the peripheral, radical movement it was once characterised as, feminism now occupies a position of cultural significance and power, and digital media has given young women in particular tools to develop a revamped feminist consciousness (Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019). In this sense, feminism is ‘trending’ as a regular point of discussion on social media (Guillard, 2016). However, many of the case studies involved in this project struggled to be seen even by a small number of people, suggesting that only a certain type of feminist anti-rape activism is visible online – primarily that which is driven by high-profile celebrities with significant digital capital, such as Alyssa Milano. Thus, there exists a continuum of counter publics in digital spaces engaged in anti-rape activism, ranging from high profile public campaigns involving millions of followers, to smaller more intimate publics. What connects them is the desire to be seen and responded to; to be witnessed (see Oliver, 2001). Katie said that when she first began blogging, she ‘threw a bit of tantrum’ on Facebook because she was frustrated by the lack of interest – not only in her blog but also for issues pertaining to sexual violence more generally. In the ‘tantrum’, Katie suggested that perhaps she ‘should get out of the way of your [her friends] very important cat pictures?’ While it is easy enough for anyone to start a blog or a social media page, actually acquiring an audience consisting of anyone for consciousness-raising let alone ‘trend’ online is difficult.

The World Wide Web offers a nuanced approach to consciousness-raising for women, insofar as it can provide them with access to knowledge about their historical struggles; connects those with shared interests; and draws attention to, and enables the representation of, the many and varied forms of gendered harms experienced locally and globally (Everett, 2004). It also provides women with access to the ‘public sphere’, in which they have been historically denied participation (see Fraser, 1990), and enables them to critically debate their future trajectories through the construction of subaltern counter-publics. These opportunities, however, do not necessarily lead to increased visibility, and scholars remain divided about their capacity to engender change. Some, for instance, suggest that online activism is characterised by ad hoc political loyalties that are often seeking short-term change, or lack a depth of understanding of complex social problems (Fenton, 2008), like sexual violence. While the ephemeral, ad hoc nature of online social movements is also an historic feature of social movements (Diani, 2000),

the ‘click to change’ approaches of some online social movements is an issue (Budish, 2012), culminating in what some critics refer to as ‘slacktivism’. McCafferty (2011) defines ‘slacktivism’ as the actions of people ‘who are happy to click a like button about a cause and [who] may make other nominal, supportive gestures’, or ‘feel-good back patting’, requiring minimal effort and time, and no commitment to mobilisation or demonstrable interest in actually solving sociopolitical problems (cited in Glenn, 2015, p. 82).

However, such a position sidesteps acknowledging the influence ‘slacktivism’ can have in developing an online community and potentially forging networks across consciousness-raising circles (see also Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019). Moreover, rather than being ‘low intensity’ forms of activism, the highly affective impact of engaging with topics such as sexual violence suggests that participating in digital consciousness-raising networks is anything but easy – or slack – on the part of participants (Mendes & Ringrose, 2019). The outcomes of social activism are always uneven, and online activity, such as ‘liking’, sharing Facebook posts or accumulating a certain number of followers, ‘cannot be confused with impact’ or measurable change (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 8). However, it can indicate one’s ‘affective attunement’ to particular causes or ideas (Papacharissi, 2015, p. 25), and an individual’s desire to show solidarity and share information with other online networks.

Some of the case studies in this project had thousands of people following them on Twitter or Facebook. At the time of being interviewed, Angela said the *Pixel Project* had 20,000 followers on Twitter and Facebook. The Stop Rape in Conflict campaign had 34,000 followers on Facebook and 8,500 followers on Twitter, and in addition, Alana said that the campaign has 800 organisations associated with it and over 6,000 individuals had ‘taken the pledge’ and signed up as campaign members. *Project Unbreakable* had over 5,000 submissions in less than five years, and over 3,000 followers on Tumblr at the time the Project concluded. This is juxtaposed against the blog *Herbs and Hags*, which had only 37 followers, and *These Are Not My Secrets* who had even less. In this sense, for the case studies involved in this project, quantifying the numbers remained significant in assessing levels of affective attunement. Angela from the *Pixel Project* was particularly vocal about the positive impact of this form of ‘slacktivism’, stating, ‘we think of “liking” or “retweeting” as the gateway; the first thing you can do’. In addition, Angela felt that ‘liking’ and sharing were indicative of the effectiveness of the message they were trying to put forward, in essence it is ‘free feedback’ (Angela). Anna echoed this perspective, viewing the impact, or reach, of *Project Unbreakable* as measurable by how frequently posts are shared online. Specifically, Anna said:

[The] easiest way to see it [change] is in the numbers – ‘likes’ on Facebook, followers on Tumblr, etc. It may seem a little silly but social media is very helpful in that way – it allows people to spread the word and keep revisiting [the campaign].

Angela admitted, however, that she felt many online campaigns lacked a clear direction and did not use tools, like social media, to disseminate their messages in

a strong way. This, Angela expressed, was an example of actual slacktivism. The difference between ‘slacktivism’ and fostering ‘affective attunement’, according to Angela is:

The way you approach it and how much effort you put into it ... if you just keep randomly posting stuff on your Facebook page, it just doesn’t work ... A lot of online campaigns aren’t very well thought-out, they just figure that, we’ll just set up a Facebook page and *dada!* Or we’ll just put it on Twitter and *dada!* (Angela’s emphasis)

What Angela is eluding to is the assumption (by some activists) that just having an online presence alone is enough to engage in meaningful consciousness-raising; realistically this takes a lot of effort. As such, she highlighted that it is very difficult to go what is colloquially referred to as ‘viral’ – or to ‘trend’ online:

When you talk about the power of online campaigns, a lot of people talk about going viral, and that’s a very important part of it, [but] it’s not easy to go viral.

While ‘going viral’ is typically thought of as an online cultural phenomenon, it is not a new thing. For example, the increased availability of television in the 1950s and 1960s enabled the civil rights movement to ‘go viral’ through the way television brought it into people’s homes every night, and helped to mobilise widespread support, spreading the movement to other parts of the world (Nahon & Hemsley, 2013). What is significant and new about ‘going viral’ online is the speed in which images, news and videos can be shared, and the democratisation of *who* can go viral; it takes only a matter of hours or even minutes to go from one view to 40,000 views, and any lay individual can access these tools (Nahon & Hemsley, 2013). ‘Virality’ refers to:

Information flow process[es] where many people simultaneously forward a specific information item, over a short period of time, within their social networks, and where the message spreads beyond their own [social] networks to different, often distant networks, resulting in sharp acceleration in the number of people exposed to the message. (Nahon & Hemsley, 2013, p. 16)

Getting an issue to go viral on social media requires a ‘collaborative agenda setting’ between activists and mainstream media (Guha, 2014, p. 156). Guha (2014) contends that in order for feminist issues, such as sexual violence, to ‘trend’ online beyond counter-public conversations, support is required from mainstream media. This was very clearly in operation for the #MeToo movement, with reputable mainstream newspapers, the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker*, almost simultaneously publishing pieces about the violence and abuse perpetrated by Harvey

Weinstein, which helped to back Alyssa Milano's rallying call. In the context of this project and 'feminism trending' online, *Project Unbreakable* was reasonably successful in 'going viral'. Not only have mainstream media outlets covered the Project, but the Project has also received significant support from celebrities who have actively shared posts from their Tumblr account to their personal websites or social media pages. When I asked Anna to comment on some of the successes of *Project Unbreakable*, her response indicated that the campaign had gone viral via the support of mainstream media and celebrity followers:

I don't think any of us expected this success so fast, but we're obviously very glad that the word is spreading! Over time, we've [...] been featured in media such as TIME, CNN, ABC, etc., and recently *Unbreakable* was spoken about on Ashton Kutcher's⁷ website and Facebook (which led to many new supporters)!

While the success of *Project Unbreakable* achieving such levels of publicity is a testament to the popularity and design of the activist project, it should also be noted that 'going viral' also comes with risks that may result in backlash. For example, once *Project Unbreakable* was propelled into the public arena, the founder faced criticism by followers online for not being a survivor of sexual violence and cited this on the website as one of the reasons she decided to close the project down. Although Grace (the founder of *Project Unbreakable*) was providing a platform that enabled survivors to speak out in their own voices, some claimed that because she was not a survivor herself she could never fully understand their experiences and should therefore not be involved in activism. Being a survivor of sexual violence has never been a precondition for being an activist, and not all the activists involved in this book identified as survivors. The backlash received by *Project Unbreakable* nonetheless reveals some of the enduring tensions associated with speaking on behalf of or speaking for victim-survivors, even though *Project Unbreakable* operated in a way that enabled victim-survivors to speak out directly albeit in ways shaped by the platform's vernacular (see Chapter 5).

The case studies in this book, however, indicated that 'going viral' could happen in a variety of creative and different ways given the multidirectional nature of digital media. While *Project Unbreakable* has received a high volume of media attention, Angela indicated that the mainstream press had not taken an interest in the work of the *Pixel Project*. Angela said:

We don't really court media attention. It would be nice if, you know, the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times* or the *Guardian* did something about us but the media has their own agenda.

However, in addition to the role of mainstream media in helping to bolster campaigning, both the *Pixel Project* and the Stop Rape in Conflict campaign

⁷A popular actor who starred in *That 70s Show*.

viewed celebrity capital as an opportunity to enhance their presence online, and a way to bring the media to their campaigns. Alana said that ‘celebrity *gets* media to come [to you], and you can exploit that and use it’ (Alana’s emphasis). Angela said that celebrities have ‘the megaphone of fame and a built-in fan base ... [but] you have to be very precise about what you need them to do’. Other major campaigns in this study, such as Rape Crisis Scotland, did not use celebrity capital to market their anti-rape message; however, they did use their position as a leading advocate and support service for victim-survivors of rape to help others generate traffic for smaller activist projects. For example, Hypatia’s first blog post ‘How I became a rape victim’ was published by Rape Crisis Scotland in 2013, and it remains her most popular blog entry, with 173 comments and 3,500 ‘likes’ on Facebook.

In reflecting on the campaign *Not Ever*, Lynn saw the discussion board on their website as instrumental for facilitating discussions about rape and rape culture, as I discussed in earlier in this chapter in relation to their other campaign *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me*. However, she also suggested that social media was instrumental in helping to disseminate the message beyond the confines of their website to other digital media networks. YouTube, in particular, was mentioned by Lynn as being influential in helping the *Not Ever* video ‘trend’:

I think there is a sort of tipping point. When it’s reached quite a fair audience that [it] just keep[s] on rolling, if you know what I mean? I sense that happening with *Not Ever* on YouTube.

Lynn suggested that the commentary and discussion the video has provoked from different parts of the world evident in the discussion section on the YouTube channel, along with over 800,000 views, is indicative of social media’s capacity to help broaden the reach of their activism. Moreover, the more negative or critical commentary the campaigns *Not Ever* and *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* have received may also be an indication of their influence or the extent to which the campaigns push back against the hegemonic discourses that maintain ‘rape culture’ and assumptions about rape. The more they challenge power and privilege, the greater the amount of resistance is expressed by those who support such positions. Additionally, Angela said that ‘likes’, ‘shares’, ‘views’ and re-blogs are a useful way of demonstrating how ‘viral your message is’. However, Angela also mentioned that this does not necessarily tell you how much *impact* the message is truly having. Rather, it is through direct informal feedback from individuals about the resonance of the campaigns that Angela felt was a more meaningful way measuring impact. Through sharing information on the *Pixel Project’s* social media pages about where people can go to get support, Angela has received messages such as:

‘This is so useful, I wish you were around when I was going through that’ or ‘I wish you were around when my mother was going through that’ and that indicates that, you know, this is working, *it’s not slacktivism*. (Angela’s emphasis)

Despite Angela’s optimism that the *Pixel Project* was ‘not just slacktivism’, Kelly raised some concerns about the limitations of online activism and the lack

of long-term commitment, or shallow attempts to comprehend issues, like rape. She said:

People kind of jump on the bandwagon and think “oh great, I can send this tweet or I can sign [a] pledge and I’ve done my part’ and it’s like no! We need to talk about this in a way that’s actually going to restructure how we think about this as a society and like within the *law* and everywhere.

While Kelly sees these online spaces, such as blogs and social media, as opportunities to engage in the *political* components of rape through consciousness-raising, the above quote points to the very criticisms that social movement scholars have made of online activism regarding its ephemeral, ad hoc nature (see e.g. Fenton, 2008), but also its narcissistic, individualistic (neoliberal), overly *personalised* elements (Baer, 2016). The lack of commitment to structural or political change is the most difficult element to address or measure in online activism, largely because social movement actors involved in spaces like those in this project are not required to *do* something beyond ‘liking’, ‘following’ or ‘sharing’ a cause – although the #MeToo movement has demonstrated some capacity for digital feminist activism to influence legislative reforms. In Spain, for example, #MeToo was considered instrumental in the drafting of new laws that will define all non-consensual sex as rape (The Guardian, March 4 2020).

It is, of course, impossible to determine the impact of individuals ‘liking’, ‘sharing’ and ‘retweeting’ to disrupt rape culture. While it might be possible to get a particular message or movement to trend online, this is not akin to being able to make conclusions about the impact, or lack thereof, of online anti-rape activism. The effect of which is to reiterate the debate in terms of ‘success’ or ‘failure’ rather than paying attention to the contours, strategic decisions and hard work associated with sustaining submerged digital anti-rape networks. Ultimately, what the online spaces in this project have revealed so far is the challenges involved in making the personal political through consciousness-raising. On the one hand, Angela is right to say that these online campaigns are not simply ‘slacktivism’, given that they are able to support consciousness-raising, sustain anti-rape networks and create space for critical discussions. On the other hand, this comes at a price for some activists, and the labour involved in maintaining an anti-rape public, as well as the tensions involved in setting a collective agenda, means that some of the online campaigns struggle to be seen and sustain their presence online. Celebrities and mainstream media have been instrumental in helping to get some anti-rape messages ‘trending’ or ‘going viral’ – in other words, obtaining some form of public recognition – however, most of these anti-rape networks are engaged in ongoing struggles to get their message out into the aether, in the hopes that someone/anyone will witness their struggles in a meaningful way. As such, the politics surrounding the impact of digital consciousness-raising are complex, but as I have discussed throughout this chapter, these online platforms foster ‘sites of conversation’ (hooks, 1984, p. 8) that bring women and the wider community into contact with feminist ideas that they might not otherwise had access to (Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019; Rentschler & Thrift, 2015).

Conclusion

Digital spaces help to facilitate anti-rape consciousness-raising and the development of anti-rape networks that transcend time, space and place. At the heart of these networks is a desire to facilitate critical discussion and debate, and to develop and formulate ideas. Yet, the subject matter of these online campaigns', specifically attitudes inherent in rape culture and the complexities associated with the responses to these claims, highlights the resistance to the messages expressed within. Indeed, this chapter has illustrated how the case studies in this book function as sites of contestation over the causes of rape, namely rape culture, however, there are also difficulties associated with maintaining these online publics – specifically the time and effort required to keep writing or sharing material in order to generate solidarity and support. This chapter has therefore highlighted the tensions associated with broadening the online anti-rape movement beyond consciousness-raising to 'go viral', and the criticisms of online activism as 'slacktivism'. While it not always possible (or desirable) to measure the capacity of online anti-rape activism to bring about change, the data revealed here suggest that conceptualising online activism as simply 'slacktivism' is not clear-cut; doing so overlooks the shifting nature of contemporary social movements and the uneven nature of progress in social movements. Moreover, the emphasis on *impact* and *success* sidesteps the ways in which affective attunement helps the production and maintenance of consciousness-raising and solidarity, all of which is significant for understanding the nature of online anti-rape activism. In the next chapter, I start to unpack some of the deeper complexities at play associated with the themes raised through consciousness-raising efforts within these digital networks, specifically in relation to the ways in which victim-survivors speak out about their experiences and the politics of witnessing.

Chapter 4

Shifting the Rape Script*

Introduction

The experience of being raped is often said to be *unspeakable* – a trauma so damaging that it cannot be articulated through language. But the very notion that rape is something ‘unspeakable’ serves to normalise rules governing the permissibility of speaking about rape, tacitly enforcing the shame that surrounds sexual violence and maintaining victim-survivors’ silence. The unspeakability of rape is also perpetuated by the criminal justice system through its power to define what is and is not rape, thereby denying recognition and permission to claim their experience as rape for those whose experience falls outside sociocultural assumptions as well as legal definitions and interpretations of ‘real rape’.

This chapter examines the ways experiences of rape are articulated in the case studies of online anti-rape activism. I explore how these online platform vernaculars (see Introduction) constrain and enable the articulation of the scripts that govern the ways victim-survivors speak about rape and its associated trauma. In this chapter, I suggest that the vernaculars of these online spaces facilitate the possibility of ‘coming out’ and claiming an experience of rape in ways that reconfigure the parameters of permissible speech surrounding rape, creating a platform for the telling of experiences that push the boundaries of legally and therapeutically ‘approved’ rape testimonies. Moreover, these online spaces enable the possibility of ‘peer-to-peer’ witnessing, specifically victim-survivor to victim-survivor, and shift power configurations with respect to who has the authority to provide recognition.

However, I also point to some of the limitations of these spaces, specifically with respect to the transformative potential the enunciation of experience has beyond an individual’s claim to their own experience. Furthermore, these

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Online Anti-Rape Activism: Exploring the Politics of the Personal in the Age of Digital Media, 61–85

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online spaces demonstrate the affective labour involved in witnessing, and thus the pressure placed on digital campaign moderators to provide support to victim-survivors when they might not feel equipped to do so. In addition, the challenging of the boundaries of the rape script is not universal; platform vernaculars vary in how and what victim-survivors can express about their experiences. For instance, some are able to speak freely and on their own terms, while others are required to take a more structured approach to recounting trauma, in order to adhere to what counts as a comprehensible and authentic narrative. Therefore, in this chapter, I also reflect on some of the restrictions that seek to regulate victim-survivor speech acts in online anti-rape activism and discuss the paradoxes of these disruptive speech acts, given the pressure placed on activists and victims to articulate their narratives in particular ways. In this sense, the capacity of digital spaces to challenge the boundaries of the hegemonic rape script is dependent on three interlocking conditions: first, the parameters of the platform vernaculars, secondly, the regulatory conditions of the online spaces themselves and thirdly the capacity to facilitate the possibility for witnessing.

Unspeakable Stories

The claim that rape is inherently unspeakable is a fallacy; rather, it is the parameters of permissible speech within the law, the confession and wider society that enforce its (un)speakability (Henry, 2010). To speak is to acquire 'a subject position within a discourse and to become subjected to the power and regulation of the discourse' (Weedon, 1997, p. 116). Accordingly, one who speaks about rape is required to present their testimony of sexual violence within the parameters of permissible speech as well as within the given discursive setting in order to make themselves and the speech act both authentic and comprehensible. In this sense, there are hegemonic 'scripts' governing the ways in which rape and rape-trauma can be articulated, and these can and should be disrupted through strategic interventions. In describing the 'rape script', I am borrowing from Marcus' (1992) argument about fighting rape, specifically her discussion about the gendered grammars of violence that govern the ways in which individuals 'audition' for the roles of rapist and victim, to explore grammars and performative elements controlling the ways in which an experience of rape can and cannot be articulated in online spaces. In shifting the rape script, victim-survivors claiming their experiences in digital spaces have generated a new 'genre' of speaking out via 'new modes of telling, understanding, hearing and reading' accounts of rape (Serisier, 2018, p. 8).

Within literature, women have been writing about experiences of rape since 'taking up the pen' (Catty, 2016, p. 2). There is some creative licence, then, assigned to telling stories of rape, though this has not been at the cost of representing the realities of women's lived experiences (Catty, 2016). The stories told in these online spaces are autobiographical rather than fictional accounts of rape; nonetheless, both literary and non-fictional accounts of sexual violence attempt to capture the ways women negotiate and challenge the 'ideological circumscriptions and associations' of rape (Catty, 2016, p.4). 'Sexual stories', especially those

involving rape and sexual violence, are the feature of many epic poems and songs stretching back to antiquity (Plummer, 1995). However, the increasing media flows, such as the influx of daytime television, coupled with the ascendancy of therapeutic culture, changed the medium through which stories about rape are told, as well as influenced the dissemination and proliferation of such stories. In other words, ‘sex ... has become the Big Story’ (Plummer, 1995, p. 4), and therefore, speaking out about an experience of rape in these online anti-rape campaigns is nothing new. What these spaces bring into stark relief is tension between wanting to give victim-survivors the opportunity to tell their stories in ways that are authentic to their experiences, and the pressure, influence and power of a variety of testimonial discourses that seek to constrain what can and cannot be said, and by extension, their transgressive and transformative potential.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, since the 1970s, feminist activists have sought to ‘break the silence’ surrounding women’s experiences of rape. Public speak outs to break the silence emerged from consciousness-raising sessions, particularly (but not exclusively) in the United States, the first of which was organised by New York Radical Feminists. In this seminal speak out conference, 10 survivors spoke out about their experience to a collective of women and reporters from popular and influential magazines (Serisier, 2018). Through these speak outs, survivors sought to challenge the normative narrative tropes that have constrained, depoliticised and mainstreamed the ways experiences of rape can be spoken about in various public and private settings. Speaking out about sexual violence was and continues to be perceived as a way to convince society of the widespread prevalence of rape and the existence of ‘rape culture’ and use this as impetus for future prevention (Serisier, 2018), and through the expression of pain and suffering women can ‘move towards healing themselves through the catharsis of recognition’ (Heberle, 1996, p. 64).

Second-wave feminism, along with the ‘therapeutic turn’¹ in Western culture brought about a significant shift in the way the trauma caused by rape was clinically, socially and legally understood. Activists sought to provide a variety of platforms for rape victim-survivors to speak out about their experiences, to bring to light the physical and emotional impact rape has on women’s lives (Gavey, 2009). The traumatic impact of rape is foregrounded not only in activism but has become normalised within a variety of cultural and political fora, such as daytime television talk shows (Alcoff & Gray, 1993), truth and reconciliation commissions (Ross, 2003), and more recently public inquiries (Wright, Swain, & McPhillips, 2017). The law too is a site in which there is now an expectation that the trauma commonly associated with rape ought to be routinely rehearsed in victims’ testimonies in order to be registered as an ‘authentic’ experience. Here, rape victim-survivors are caught in a bind whereby they are expected to contain their testimony in a logical, coherent way – but they must nonetheless demonstrate that the experience was traumatic.

¹A time in which the expression of emotion became excepted in public discourse and used for political affect, and talking about stress, trauma and counselling became part of everyday life (Furedi, 2004).

These ideas persist despite significant efforts on the part of feminist activists to challenge such assumptions; however, in some ways, feminist activists seeking to improve legal responses to rape have also been complicit in perpetuating these assumptions. In the 1970s, for example, feminist activists drew on the increasing availability (and permissibility) of psychological discourses that flourished and multiplied in the wake of this shift towards a more ‘therapeutic’ society in order to obtain more widespread recognition of the trauma of rape (Gavey, 2009). The incorporation of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) into the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (DSM) as a term for classifying common responses to traumatic experiences in the early 1970s was particularly instrumental for feminist activists. Specifically, it offered activists a medical and scientific language (therefore lending feminist claims greater legitimacy) to bolster claims about the traumatic nature of rape in order to get the law and public discourse to take rape seriously (Herman, 2001, pp. 28–32). Burgess and Holmstrom (1974) developed the term ‘rape-trauma syndrome’ as a way of classifying the ongoing impacts of rape as a life-threatening ordeal associated with a constant fear of violence, coupled with symptoms of numbness, nausea and insomnia. Significantly, Burgess and Holmstrom also noted that these are not exclusive symptoms, indicating that many victims are unemotional and do not always present as distressed. In addition, they also established that victim-survivors often freeze during sexual assaults, yet these responses do not feature as part of cultural and social understanding of rape-trauma.

However, medico-scientific discourses carry a substantial amount of ideological and therefore disciplinary power and subsequently shape and reinforce what PTSD in the context of rape ought to look like. Moreover, the medical and clinical model often fails to account for the social, cultural and intersectional conditions that facilitate rape and focusses exclusively on the ‘violence’ of individual, isolated experiences (Wasco, 2003). This focus on the individual trauma of rape in activism has been criticised by some for internalising and pathologising injury rather than analysing the structural conditions which enable rape to occur and at the same time has the effect of maintaining popular assumptions about authentic ‘real’ rape victims and trauma (Mardorossian, 2002).

Adding to the limitations of a scientific approach to understanding rape PTSD, is that it can be as a seemingly Western, white, middle-class concept. Gilfus (1999), for example, suggests that the trauma paradigm of rape reflects a privileged ‘white, middle-class, never-victimised worldview’ of the lives of women for whom safety and bodily autonomy is taken for granted. Rape-trauma in this context is perceived as a single event that disrupts one’s life, rather than an experience along a continuum of various forms of violence routinely punctuating women’s lives in particular sociocultural situations, who may not see their experience as traumatic given the extent to which trauma marks their very existence (Gilfus, 1999; Wasco, 2003). Examples of this include the intergenerational trauma and violence experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Australia as a result of the violence of colonisation (and other First Nations Women in post-colonial contexts), and African American women who are also subjected to multiple intersections of violence and oppression from the enduring legacies of

slavery and segregation. Such standpoints complicate perceptions and attitudes that rape-trauma is an exceptional trauma inflicted upon survivor's bodies and minds because of the compounding nature of multiple experiences of violence in trauma that are not only interpersonal but are also systemic and institutional in nature. However, feminists have been successful in deploying the psychological language of trauma to the extent that many lay individuals acknowledge that rape *is* a traumatic experience that will have a significant impact on victim-survivors' perceptions of themselves, and that the trauma will require professional help in order for them to recover (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011). Combined, these elements exercise a hegemonic power that influences perceptions about appropriate rape testimony and rape-trauma and thus confine the rape script within an extremely narrow form.

Drawing on the work of Jeffrey Alexander (2004), what I want to suggest is that 'events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution' (p. 8). The pathologisation of trauma, through the influence of psychology on modern life, has culturally codified and embedded particular perceptions not only of *what* traumatic experiences ought to look like but *how* one should speak of them. Yet the contradictory unwritten rules governing the *what* and the *how* of giving testimony routinely place victim-survivors of rape, in particular, in an impossible double bind. On the one hand, rape victims have been targeted for lying about being raped because they have remembered the experience differently to how it actually played out (Conley & Barr, 1998). Additionally, in defence of victims who are unable to construct such an account, psychologists urge the courts to accept that the inability to remember is an effect of trauma. On the other hand, the influence of rape-trauma theory and the assumption that rape is an *unspeakable* trauma means that those who give a coherent, unwavering and detailed story of violence are also subject to scrutiny.

From a cultural perspective reading the truthfulness of rape-trauma, what seemingly makes an account of rape truthful is its 'factual unreliability, its confusion, its inconsistency' (Humbert & Wynne, 2010, p. 3). However, rape victims who choose to share their stories publicly regularly find themselves having to construct an account of their experience that fits within a recognisable sociocultural and legal script in order to be rendered credible (Roeder, 2015; Serisier, 2018). In the neoliberal context, this includes not only accounting for the trauma of one's experience but also illustrating one's propensity for 'sexual safekeeping', such as the steps they took to prevent or resist being raped in addition to displaying an inappropriate level of trauma (Gotell, 2008).

The law is thus a site full of conditions and contradictions that simultaneously constrain and enable the articulation of testimony and the construction of 'truth' (Smart, 1989). The experience of giving testimony in the courtroom is often noted as disempowering for many victim-survivors, due to the structured scripts surrounding not only the ways speaking about rape and rape-trauma is and is not made permissible (no matter how contradictory those scripts might be) but also the scripts governing the legal process. Thus, being able to speak about rape and rape-trauma in a less-prescriptive way, such as the ways some victim-survivors do in these online anti-rape spaces, enables the possibility

of regaining some control ‘over events that confound us’ (Jackson, 2006, p. 17). It is worth recalling Cathy Caruth who claims that what *confounds* is not simply the attempt to reconstruct a factual account from the confusion of details that necessarily affects the recollection of traumatic experience. Rather, it is the reliving of an experience, the exposure to a ‘second wounding’ occasioned by the effort to make comprehensible a violence that ‘has not yet been fully known’ (Caruth, 1996, p. 9).

To speak out about rape requires piecing together a story of experience and functions as a mediator between private and public worlds, as well as provides a mechanism for fostering agency under disempowering circumstances (Jackson, 2006, p. 15). What the rape victim-survivor needs is someone to bear witness to her story who does not carry preconceived judgements (Herman, 2001). In other words, victim-survivors of rape want to be ‘believed’ in the sense that they need to place their trust in a listener who is capable of ‘listening to another’s wound’ (Caruth, 1996, p. 6). Giving testimony therefore becomes a ‘ritual of healing’, of reintegrating painful experiences as part of the self while at the same time making a public statement about the harms of their experience (Agger & Jensen, 1990). Testimony is thus both therapeutic and political, giving voice to private suffering, bringing the private into the public sphere to be *witnessed*. Giving testimony through storytelling, such as those enunciated in these online anti-rape campaigns, can create an opportunity to construct a new way of speaking and witnessing that goes beyond the frameworks through which rape and trauma are normatively articulated. The impact that perceptions about rape and trauma have on victim-survivors whose experiences do not reflect these hegemonic norms narrows the scope through which any claims for recognition are acknowledged. By ‘coming out’ online, the participants in this study provide an opportunity to explore testimonies that do not fit within the parameters of what rape ought to look like, and whose trauma is incongruent with the cultural and legal construction (and perpetuation) of rape-trauma. These spaces also open up the capacity for others to witness their testimony, specifically peers (or other victim-survivors), which enables victim-survivors to become both witnesses and theorists of their own experiences (Alcoff & Gray, 1993).

Speaking Out Online

Given the sociocultural assumptions about rape’s unspeakability, giving it a voice is an affront to the discourses that seek to silence or regulate it and generates the epistemic injustice I mentioned in the previous chapter (Alcoff, 2018). Society seems to resent the self-assurance and assertiveness of victims who speak of their suffering or remind us of their trauma, since ‘we prefer to avert our eyes from those who persist in reminding us of the wrongs they have suffered’ (Jacoby, 1983, cited in Van Dijk, 2009, p. 13). With varying degrees of awareness of the cultural conditioning that positions rape-trauma as something that is ‘unspeakable’ and the epistemic injustice caused by failing to listen to survivors, the case studies in this project resisted these notions in a variety of different ways. Not only did they

‘speak’ – for example, Kelly called her blog ‘Yes, we speak’ and Katie called hers ‘These Are Not My Secrets: drowning out the silence on sexual violence’, in protest to the idea that victim-survivors of rape should remain silent – participants also challenged the notion that their story had to fit within the paradigms of acceptable rape testimonies. In this way, these online campaigns are developing a new rape script that challenges the normative discourses regulating the ways rape, and its associated trauma, is and is not unspeakable.

Survivor-activists involved in this project described claiming one’s experience of rape online as a truth-telling exercise and a process of ‘coming out’. They articulated ways in which speaking out ought to be truthful and authentic; to resist the pressure to editorialise or gloss over the details of their experience regardless of whether or not those narratives fitted in with the dominant discourses of ‘real’ rape and ‘real’ trauma. Yet, as the following quote from Maya shows, this process is imbued with risk, particularly a fear about not being read as having had an ‘authentic’ experience of rape, and therefore how people will react to her story:

I remember the first time that I shared that I was a survivor on Facebook and it was like a *coming out*. It’s scary and I’d say it’s somewhat exhilarating, frightening ... it’s all the fear of really being who you are authentically and how that’s going to be received [and it] is a really, really scary experience. (Maya – my emphasis)

As I outlined previously in this chapter, speaking out about an experience of rape is required to replicate cultural visions of what ‘real rape’ looks like – typically something violent and perpetrated by a stranger (Estrich, 1987; Stanko, 2002). Experiences that do not fit within this mould are cast as ‘just sex’ through the cultural scaffolding of rape, whereby the processes through which society is conditioned to understand what rape, and an authentic rape victim, looks like manifest through a very narrow discursive and performative lens (Gavey, 2005, also see Kelly, 1988, and MacKinnon, 1989). Modes of ‘authentic rape’ include signs of violence, coercion, innocence and trauma, as I outlined above in my discussion above. Those that do not map neatly onto these discourses are often subject to questions of legitimacy at the level of the social, and within the criminal justice system. Such assumptions perpetuate ‘rape myths’ and have the effect of refuting claims about victim-survivor’s experiences. The cultural denial of rape when it looks like sex has implications not only at the level of the law when it comes to reporting crimes but also whether or not women choose to claim or perceive their experience as rape (Gavey, 1999, 2005). No wonder speaking out and claiming one’s experience as rape is such a frightening experience, as described by Maya – especially when these narratives challenge the boundaries of what ‘counts’ as rape.

The bloggers involved in this project spoke of wanting to create spaces not only for themselves to speak out but for others as well, which suggests, importantly, that some of the case studies presented here were, to varying degrees, conscious of their political potential to foster solidarity and transform attitudes about rape. In this way, these spaces enable survivors to come out to other survivors with a

shared commitment to truth-telling and dismantling the cultural scaffolding of rape by complicating popular assumptions about authentic rape victim-survivors and ‘real’ rape through what I discuss later in this chapter as witnessing (Oliver, 2001). Maya suggested that speaking out can help encourage other survivors to ‘come out’, and that sharing one’s experience can make it seem more ‘real’ or ‘true’ to those who have not experienced sexual violence. Specifically, Maya said:

[The more survivors] come out, the more [other] survivors will feel more comfortable. [And it’s when] they share with other people that they’re survivors and they say ‘oh my god I had no idea’, all of sudden this becomes real to them. It feels a little bit more real than something that happens in a back alley with a stranger.

In this sense, victim-survivors do important political work in terms of challenging popular assumptions about rape, and this commitment to ‘truth-telling’ and challenging assumptions about ‘real’ rape was particularly evident in one of the submissions to the blog *These Are Not My Secrets*. Specifically, the post describes an incident of the victim having a ‘sobbing orgasm’ while being raped.² While this is only mentioned in passing, such an admission is sure to raise eyebrows in a public forum and rape apologist responses, as it runs counter to the traumatic violence narrative associated with rape due to an admission of ‘pleasure’ – even though it was not actually pleasurable. In particular, it challenges the claims made by some anti-rape activists and scholars that victims of rape often ‘freeze’ as a valid form of resistance in a traumatic situation, in response to victim-blaming rhetoric, which postulates that women can and simply should resist or get themselves out of danger (Cambell, 2012; Galliano, Noble, Travis, & Puechl, 1993). The admission of ‘pleasure’ in this example may also complicate perceptions about consent. Recent rape law reforms in Victoria, Australia for example, have sought to shift the focus from the victim and the actions they took to communicate their non-consent, towards the (alleged) perpetrator and the steps they took to establish consent. However, most Western legal jurisdictions exonerate accused perpetrators who ‘reasonably believe’ consent was given (Larcombe et al., 2016). As I highlighted in the previous chapter, there is confusion surrounding consent in the context of rape. Having a victim come before the court to testify she was raped, only for the accused to claim she had enjoyed it because she had an orgasm, would (potentially) indicate to the judge and jury that the accused had a reasonable belief that consent was given – and conjure up the assumption that the victim-survivor was lying.

In light of the potential issues surrounding the believability of the story, the correspondence between the author of the post and Katie (the blog’s moderator) reveals that the author told her to ‘feel free to remove the section about having [had] such a physical response’, because she was afraid it might look like sex rather than rape. The author felt that her experience of rape went against the script of assumed responses to rape and consent to the extent that it might not

²<http://notmysecrets.blogspot.com.au/2015/01/submission-from-female-reader-aged-24.html>

be read as ‘real’ rape. However, Katie described in her interview that she felt that it was important to be ‘as truthful as possible because *I want people reading the blog to get an idea of the reality of sexual violence – even if it’s squeamish and difficult*’ [to read or understand] (my emphasis), and subsequently didn’t take the part about the orgasm out. Katie’s blog therefore provides a space to claim one’s experience and privileges the survivor’s voice and experience as the source of truth. In doing so, the blog space is able to highlight the complexities of victim-survivors’ experiences and the impact that assumptions about rape and consent have on women claiming unspeakable truths.

This approach taken by Katie to telling stories that are ‘squeamish and difficult’ is also reflected on Hypatia’s blog, who describes in detail the complexities and contradictions in her own rape story in her first post: ‘How I became a rape victim’.³ In the post, Hypatia articulates how she felt complicit or responsible for being raped, specifically for allowing herself to be separated from her friends by the perpetrator, the self-blame for not ‘spotting that he was a rapist’, as well as not resisting his advances by waiting for him to finish. Hypatia goes on to say that in her state of shock, she took his phone number and gave him hers – he eventually called to ask her out on a date, to which she stated on the blog post:

[I said] ‘Yes’ ... afraid he would tell everyone what a slag I was, but also because if I went out with him and was his girlfriend then that meant it couldn’t be rape ... It would make that Saturday night OK, the beginning of a romance, not what it still felt like – an attack on my autonomy.

The above comment clearly highlights how the violent stranger-as-perpetrator myth undermines survivors labelling their experience rape, as Hypatia noted being her rapist’s girlfriend would make it not rape, and I return to this issue shortly in relation to marital rape. However, in addition to claiming her experience as rape, Hypatia also noted in her interview with me how the trauma discourse narrows perceptions of the ways victim-survivors are expected to experience and respond to rape:

I was supposed to come out of this screaming and sobbing and generally having an hysterical attack. That’s how rape victims are supposed to behave and if you haven’t behaved like that then you can’t be a rape victim. You can’t have been raped because he didn’t upset you very much – and taken my number afterwards and walked me to the cab so that I would be safe!

Like the story on the blog *These Are Not My Secrets*, Hypatia’s story also goes against the grain of popular scripts of ‘real’ rape, given that she did not scream or appear to be emotionally or physically traumatised by her experience.

³<http://herbsandhags.blogspot.com.au/2012/06/how-i-became-rape-victim.html#!/2012/06/how-i-became-rape-victim.html>

However, she also acknowledges and warns us of these paradoxes in the claiming of her experience, stating, ‘you, Dear Reader, will note what care I have taken to try and explain my behaviour, to pre-empt the questions and criticisms and scepticism’. Such a comment indicates Hypatia anticipates resistance to her labelling her experience as ‘real’ rape, which, to the average reader, might look more like bad or regretted sex. Hypatia also noted that she knew she would ‘get people coming on [the blog] and telling me that wasn’t rape’, however she

Wanted to [show] when other people came on [to the blog] and saw that I was saying look ... it was rape when it happened to me and what happened to you was very similar, so it was rape when it happened to you too. Don’t let anyone tell you that it’s not rape because we have the right to define our own experience and we’re not going to let men sit there and tell us it’s not rape.

Similar to Katie, in addition to creating a space to claim her own experience of rape, Hypatia is also encouraging others to take ownership of their stories even if they do not fit within the ‘Madonna box’ (Hypatia’s term for describing the popular identity of the ‘rape victim’). The production of these alternative rape scripts produce what Butler (2005, p. 24) might refer to as a ‘crisis in the norms that govern recognition’, insofar as their experiences are ‘unrecognisable’ within the parameters of permissible discourses about rape, which enable the possibility of obtaining recognition. This crisis of recognition is reflected in a number of the comments from her followers, who claimed to have been raped under similar circumstances; who say that because of the way Hypatia has claimed her experience, they no longer blame themselves for what happened and feel comfortable calling their experience rape. One commenter posted this in response to reading Hypatia’s story:

I did something similar in the late 1980s, only I married my rapist. Somehow being his wife made it not rape ... *I could never call it rape, because somehow I felt like I’d asked for it* ... he told me no one else would ever want me ... [and] I believed him ... *Thank you for being brave enough to write this, you’ve helped me be brave enough to write what I’ve written just here.* (slightlytwysted – my emphasis).

This response from slightlytwysted sticks out in particular, not only because the commenter has used Hypatia’s blog to ‘come out’ but also because it captures the way ‘rape myths’ influence the parameters of what ‘counts’ as rape, and the extent to which victim-survivors themselves internalise these cultural narratives. Ultimately, this determines whether or not one can (or will) label their experience as such. The statement ‘somehow being his wife made it not rape’, for example, highlights how certain rape myths, namely that women cannot be raped by their husbands, are internalised by victim-survivors themselves – despite the criminalisation of spousal rape in many Western countries. More specifically, it also reveals how perpetrators of sexual violence in intimate relationships emotionally manipulate their victims into believing they cannot be raped. Given the ways in which

male perpetrators exercise multiple forms of power to undermine victim-survivors' capacity to claim their experiences – as encapsulated by the comments from slightlywysted – rape in intimate relationships remains cultural codified as 'just sex'.

Ultimately, what the prevalence of rape in intimate relationships reveals is that women give up their right to say 'no' once they enter into a relationship with a man. Yet what these digital spaces generate is an opportunity to challenge, or at the very least question the cultural conditions that deny women the opportunity to claim their experiences as rape. On the web campaign *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me*, comments under the 'have your say' section pertaining to 'relationships' asks:

Is it marital rape if I do not wish to have sex with my husband, but I am forced to do it because of the psychological pressure that, as a wife, I have to satisfy him sexually because of social, cultural and religious beliefs that define my marriage? (Salome)

There are numerous other comments from women in this part of the comments section that ask similar things, such as:

For years I thought it was normal for my ex-husband to force himself into me when I didn't want it ... I thought it wasn't rape because I put up little resistance ... Not all the rapes were physically violent or painful, does that mean it wasn't rape? To this day he still thinks that what he did was not rape because we were married. And people over the years that I have tried to tell made unhelpful comments that made me feel that as his wife I had no right to say no or fight back ... *Those attitudes are what stop women like me from coming forward. We are made to feel ashamed and that what we've experienced doesn't matter.* (Sarah – my emphasis)

What both Salome and Sarah's comments point to is the way the hegemonic rape script of 'real rape' – and indeed rape apologists – impacts the ways women and other survivors interpret their sexual autonomy in intimate relationships; they cannot say 'no' to their husbands, partners or boyfriends. As Kersti Yllo (1999) highlights, rape in marriage and intimate relationships presents a 'cultural contradiction' that is not present in any other form of violence that speaks to persistent attitudes that women – specifically wives – are the property of men. These attitudes remain despite substantial changes to laws that have made rape in marriage a criminal offence in most jurisdictions. Our cultural scripts surrounding marriage continue to invoke romantic scenes of love, sex and intimacy that erode any possibility of violence, and even feminist activism on the issue of rape in marriage has been relatively ignored focussing more on acquaintance rape or date rape (cf the groundbreaking work of Diana Russell (1990)). Rape in marriage is positioned as something too intimate, too private to interfere with or is rendered consensual sex through the marital contract (Yllo, 1999).

Yet, as Sarah's comment above highlights, the privatisation of rape in marriage makes these victim-survivors feel their experiences are not valid, which in turn stops them from speaking out. Thus, Hypatia emphasised the importance of having a space in which women can claim their experiences as rape, which is why she set up the blog in the first place (see Chapter 3):

One of the things I'm doing is speaking to other women and speaking to other rape victims who haven't had the permission to call what happened to them rape, and *giving them permission to do that*. (Hypatia's emphasis)

The use of the word 'permission' is important here. As I discussed earlier, the law is the typical site in which recognition and 'justice' is imparted upon victims and provides significant authority and *permission* for survivors in calling their experiences rape. The law is, of course, grounded in masculinist, patriarchal authority – as I discuss further in Chapter 6 – and therefore legal definitions and interpretations of rape are validated through the perspectives of men (at least historically, reflected in the enduring legacy of Sir William Hale whose claim that 'rape is an accusation easily to be made, hard to be proved, and yet harder to be defended by the party accused, tho' never so innocent' has had a long standing impact on assumptions that survivors routinely lie about being raped to cover up their sexual transgressions. See Gavey, 2005.). This is clearly noted by Hypatia, who states on her blog, 'the discourse of rape has been defined by men – by the potential perpetrator rather than the potential victim'. Subsequently, having the space and *permission* to claim an experience when it has been denied legitimacy and recognition because it does not 'fit' within the normative legal and therapeutic framework of rape disrupts the hegemonic rape script. In this way, those who blog about their own experiences are creating opportunities for others to speak out and enable victims-survivors of rape to become theorists of their own experiences.

Peer-to-Peer Witnessing and the Politics of Recognition

Through creating digital spaces for victim-survivors to speak out about their experiences, these anti-rape activists generate a culture of peer-to-peer witnessing. Survivors who had shared their experiences on online and completed the survey indicated they had done so to help support other victim-survivors and to highlight that rape is not something to be ashamed of. As one respondent to the survey stated:

I read a comment from an individual who was really struggling [and] I wanted to help her. I am not ashamed of my experience. As I get older, I no longer feel I need to keep it secret. If I can offer help in any way to another person who is experiencing difficulties, I will. (Survey – anonymous)

These online spaces thus generate a form of affective solidarity (Keller et al., 2016; Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019), through the ways victim-survivors feel

compelled to share their stories in order to help other victim-survivors. In this sense, speaking out to peers or other victim-survivors facilitates a culture of mutual support and does not require someone with 'expert knowledge' to impart recognition. Through claiming experience, these online anti-rape spaces are able to reconfigure the power structures with respect to who is listening to and *witnessing* these testimonies.

The notion of witnessing:

Calls for action – a 'not-turning away' from seeing and hearing. It demands attentiveness to the interplay between words, silence and absence and awareness of social and cultural conventions that intervene in and shape them. (Ross, 2003, p. 22)

Witnessing demands an audience; it demands recognition of violence, and it demands critical reflection on the conditions under which recognition is offered. In this sense, it is not enough to see; one must respond or speak back (Tait, 2011), and 'speaking' online through autobiographical storytelling and testimony enables the possibility of this kind of witnessing.

Claims for recognition are often bound up in 'hierarchies, privilege and domination', reinforcing the powerlessness of the oppressed group insofar as recognition is often sought from the oppressors (Oliver, 2004, p. 79). This happens on both a political and cultural level when it comes to victim-survivors of rape seeking recognition of their experiences. At the level of political and legal discourses, testimony is expected to conform to the narrow parameters of 'good victimhood' in order to be receive recognition, where the victim is expected to demonstrate the steps she took to protect herself, as well as take responsibility for her recovery (Stringer, 2014). Relying on the state and the law to confer recognition of injury can reify the power of the state to perpetuate particular norms and subjectivities, with respect to *who* can seek recognition and *how* recognition ought to be sought. This reliance subsequently codifies and entrenches existing social relations, rather than transforming them (Brown, 1995).

Similarly, within some psychological/psychiatric disciplines and confessional discourses reside problematic power relations when it comes to recognition. Both, for example, are conventionally regulated by an 'expert mediator' who, through the 'policing of statements' is called on to prescribe, diagnose and treat victim-survivors of rape and sexual violence (Foucault, 1978, cited in Alcoff & Gray, 1993, p. 271). This focus on the therapeutic and therapy discourses/techniques, according to some scholars, fosters a culture of individualism and narcissism or functions as a regulatory mechanism that seeks to pathologise human behaviour (Furedi, 2004). I noted earlier in this chapter, however, that there has been a significant shift in psychological discourse surrounding the nature of sexual trauma and its impact on women and other survivors' lives, having achieved this recognition because of efforts made by some second-wave feminists. Perceptions about seeking psychological support for experiences of violence have significantly shifted over time, with therapy seen as an appropriate, and indeed necessary, method of treatment for victim-survivors of rape (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011). At the level of

the social, therapy culture has helped to provide a platform and a language for experiences normally relegated to the private sphere (McLeod & Wright, 2009; Wright, 2008). In particular, the ‘therapeutic’ has the capacity to foster a culture of ‘talking things through’ and open communication between individuals, helping to make people ‘feel better’ (McLeod & Wright, 2009). Importantly, ‘talking things through’ does not necessarily occur in a clinical encounter or in the mode of confession, it also takes place among peers, which helps individuals to make sense of their lived experiences (McLeod & Wright, 2009).

Nevertheless, the clinician (be they a psychiatrist or therapist), in the context of the legal system, is still called upon to assess, diagnose and treat the rape victim-survivor who ought to conduct herself in accordance with culturally approved assumptions about sexual trauma and recover from her experience (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011). As such, recognition of injury is underscored by discourses of power. It is through *witnessing* that we can move beyond these problematic power dynamics within political and cultural ‘recognition’ (Oliver, 2001). Witnessing is about the structure of subjectivity itself, fostered through ‘agency and responsibility that are constituted in the infinite encounters with otherness’ (Oliver, 2004, p. 82). Subjectivity and recognition is thus founded on the possibility of addressing, and a response from, others, and there is an *ethical obligation* to respond to, or witness, the suffering of others, in order to render their experience intelligible.

Through the #MeToo movement, and a plethora of other digital spaces created for the purposes of speaking out about and sharing experiences of sexual violence, the internet has become an archive of victim-survivor testimonies, creating a collective memorialisation of experiences. These online spaces and campaigns also project a collective enunciation of violence and, as I discuss below, work hard to ensure the safety of those who choose to ‘come out’. However, memory – and thus memorialisation – are sites of political contestation, meaning the act of speaking out and claiming one’s experience in public exposes victim-survivors to the possibility of having their testimony contested or challenged, overlooked, dismissed or ignored. It is not enough to be able to speak or write about one’s experiences – the place from which one speaks must be taken into account, as well as the direction of that speech act (the audience), the content of the testimony, the identity of the speaker and who is witnessing and judging the testimony.

The politics of witnessing in these online spaces and campaigns thus requires paying particular attention to the tensions that arise when creating spaces to ‘come out’. As Alcoff and Gray (1993, p. 264) note, ‘speech is an event involving an arrangement of speakers and hearers; it is an act in which relations get constituted and experiences and subjectivities are mediated’. What is significant about these online spaces is that the power relations between the speaker and the listener (respondent or witness) are broken down. Unlike the confession described by Foucault as witnessed by the priest, the judge in a court of law or a psychiatrist in a clinical encounter or therapy session, in the online space, the witness is more likely than not to be a fellow survivor. As discussed in Chapter 3, the participants claimed their target audience was for ‘anyone’ (Hypatia) or the ‘normal person who would not necessarily know about the cause’ (Angela). However, they also noted the way survivors have ‘flocked to their campaigns’ (Angela), which was

not necessarily intended but is indicative of the need for survivor networks and the affective political work being done through survivors supporting other survivors (Keller et al., 2016; Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019).

Lynn noted, for example, that although the Rape Crisis Scotland campaign websites *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* and *Not Ever* were not intended to be a discussion forum for victim-survivors, she stated:

One of the most gratifying aspects of that campaign for us was the fact that ... we saw a lot of survivors on there [the campaign websites] just saying: ‘thank you so much for doing this – I blamed myself, now I know it was not my fault’.

Other digital spaces were designed specifically for survivors and therefore actively encouraged their participation; as Anna said, ‘We encourage all survivors of sexual assault and domestic/emotional violence to participate – men and women of any age and sexual orientation’.

While creators and moderators of these campaigns might feel they have positioned their digital spaces to target the average person, as I suggested in the previous chapter, the survey data indicated that the majority of people participating in these spaces were victim-survivors, with 85% of respondents indicating that they were survivors of sexual violence. Many of these respondents revealed that they had experienced the continuum of sexual violence, from unwanted sexual advances or sexual harassment (77%), to unwanted physical contact of a sexual nature (70%), and rape (31%).

Given that these spaces are as much about providing victim-survivors with a voice (the personal) as they are about claims making and challenging ‘rape culture’ (the political), it is unsurprising that there are a significant amount of victim-survivors participating in these spaces. The following majority of survey respondents found these online anti-rape campaigns useful in terms of helping them to make sense of their experiences (53%) and provided them with emotional support or connected them to support services (33%). Although I suggested above that these online spaces are survivor networks, only 23% claimed these sites helped them to connect with others who have also experienced sexual violence. The creation of survivor networks thus seems to be an indirect, but nonetheless important, feature of online anti-rape activism.

In addition to providing support to survivors, a comment left in response to the question ‘why do you participate in these online anti-rape campaigns?’ suggests that non-survivors have also found online campaigns helpful for learning how to support survivors. Specifically, the respondent stated that the blog *Herbs and Hags* helped her to ‘learn how to be sensitive to the possibility that people I interact with are rape victims’. These online anti-rape campaigns therefore have the potential to provide ‘everyday’ people with the tools to support victim-survivors by bearing *witness* their ‘coming out’ offline and online, even when their experience might not ‘fit’ within the preconceived notions of what rape looks like, or if someone fails to be a ‘safety-conscious victim-in-waiting’. As Hypatia said to me in her interview, ‘anyone can become a rape victim’, and there is no ‘correct’ way to experience rape or rape-trauma.

I therefore interpret the relationship between victim-survivor participation and victim-survivor support in these online spaces as ‘peer-to-peer witnessing’, which seeks to dissolve the power relations between the ‘professional’ or institutionalised knowledge and the victim and enables survivor-to-survivor witnessing as a form of recognition. This is also reflected in the work of Rentschler (2014), who interprets the use of digital media campaigns such as *Hollaback!* and participation in some Twitter hashtags, as peer-to-peer witnessing, given that they create the possibility of response – what Oliver calls ‘response-ability’, in which the self is able to be recognised by infinite others (Oliver, 2001). It is not just simply ‘seeing’, ‘hearing’ or ‘listening’ but also requires a *response*. Fileborn (2014, 2016) too suggests that buttons like ‘I’ve got your back’ on the *Hollaback!* website function as a system of recognition insofar as they provide an opportunity for others to ‘speak back’ in solidarity with victims of street harassment. Thus, not only do these online spaces enable women to speak out and claim their unspeakable experiences but also they foster an ethical culture of response and support. As I showed in the previous section, Hypatia’s ‘coming out’ not only prompted supportive comments from those witnessing her claiming of experience but also created a space in which others could claim theirs as rape too. Thus, the affective work done in these online spaces constitutes important political work through the ways in which *witnessing* fosters a sense of solidarity as well as recognition.

It is not just through commenting on blog posts that peer-to-peer witnessing happens in these online spaces. As I discussed in the previous chapter, people can distribute stories on social media by re-blogging or sharing them on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or Tumblr. Such forms of witnessing are often accompanied by seemingly low-impact activism techniques such as liking or retweeting posts, as well as sharing petitions. Although such practices have been subject to criticism – specifically that they do not contribute to any meaningful or lasting change (Morozov, 2009); due to the experience of many rape victim-survivors and feminist activists as being targets for online harassment, low-involvement features can be meaningful for victim-survivors (Rentschler, 2014, p. 78). Campaigns, such as *Project Unbreakable*, utilise these low-impact forms of witnessing. The pictures submitted to *Project Unbreakable* cannot be extensively commented on, but they can be shared on personal Tumblr pages where they can be ‘liked’ or briefly commented on. While these are low-engagement forms of witnessing, it can be seen that having just a small number of people ‘like’ or share a story, or make a statement about supporting victims of rape, can provide victim-survivors with a sense of camaraderie, especially if they have struggled to obtain support offline. In an environment in which the legal system and broader society fails to ‘hear’ experiences of rape and disempowers victim-survivors, having the capacity to speak out, claim one’s experience and have it validated by peers is significant. Indeed, a number of the posters on *Project Unbreakable* highlight the extent to which the law failed to respond to their claims but assert that having the capacity to share what happened to them in a non-judgemental space, and the support they receive, makes them ‘unbreakable’; having the space to be seen, heard and believed is important. This was reflected in my interview with Anna, the website administrator, who said that she feels the ‘two primary benefits [of the campaign] are a place

to share your story and a community of people who truly understand and can be there for one another’.

In this sense, the notion of ‘witnessing’ illustrates that the power and potential of connecting victim-survivors with others to claim their experience or ideas is significant. Witnessing in these online spaces cuts across and challenges the institutional hierarchies that historically had, and have, the power to witness and judge experience (such as a priest, a judge or a psychiatrist). What disclosing or speaking out to another victim-survivor does is mitigate the perception that ‘the arbitrator of the confession be neutral and objective, and their assessment derived not from personal experience but from “abstract knowledge”’ (Alcoff & Gray, 1993, p. 280). Significantly then, the speakers and hearers in these online spaces and campaigns – those testifying and those witnessing (and subsequently passing judgement) – construct a different kind of power relation: one based on shared experience, knowledge and response-ability, rather than seeking out an authority to impart recognition upon them. In this way, the speaking arrangements have been transformed so that victim-survivors ‘[are] both witness and experts, both reporters of experience and theorists of experience’ (Alcoff & Gray, 1993, p. 282).

Managing Negative Witnessing

Not all witnessing, however, is productive, and several of the participants in this study mentioned the problems they have with so-called ‘trolls’. ‘Trolling’ is ‘the act of deliberately posting inflammatory or confusing messages on the Internet in order to provoke a vehement response from a group of users’ (Cassandra, 2008, p. 5), and is one example of a number of practices, such as cyberbullying, cyberstalking and cyberhate, which fall within the field of ‘e-bile’ (Jane, 2014). Trolling is thus an additional silencing technique that seeks to deny the logics of rational and critical debate in the ‘public sphere’, and women who seek to challenge the logics of masculine knowledge are popular targets (Jane, 2014, 2016; Shaw, 2013). The moderators of many feminist online spaces, including the ones in this research project, work tirelessly to ensure they remain a safe space for people to speak out, claim their experiences and foster peer-to-peer witnessing. However, as Wazny (2010) notes in her discussion about Jezebel (a once popular feminist online forum and blog), the desire to create ‘safe’ spaces is in direct tension with the principles of the ‘public sphere’ and ‘free’ spaces in which rational, critical debate can take place. Nonetheless, practices of moderation seeking to curtail the potential for trolls to derail conversations create the potential for more productive (feminist) dialogues to flourish (Shaw, 2013; Wazny, 2010).

It is important to note the varying forms of ‘trolling’ that happen in these spaces, because conceptualising e-bile, and subsequently trolling, in broad terms can result in certain modes of interaction online being misclassified (Jane, 2014). In the previous chapter, I suggested that these online spaces created an opportunity for activists to engage in consciousness-raising and develop and test out their ideas. Indeed, in some ways, they help to change people’s minds about rape and rape culture, similar to the ways in which consciousness-raising in the 1960s and 1970s were instrumental in transforming individual’s perspectives on rape.

However, the shift from consciousness-raising to social, cultural and structural transformation of preventing rape through the recognition of contributing factors such as rape culture via speaking out has not occurred. The discussion I had about the campaign *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me*, in particular, demonstrated the enduring resistance to rape culture and reluctance to reconfigure victim-blaming attitudes from men in particular, – although there were also examples of attitudes being shifted through their interactions with these online spaces.

Of course, there was also resistance to the recognition of particular experiences as genuine rape in these digital spaces; however, given the highly regulated nature of some of these spaces – primarily to minimise harm to victim-survivors – it makes more sense to classify these responses in terms of ‘negative witnessing’ carried out by ‘rape apologists’ rather than strictly ‘trolling’. While some of the comments on the website *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me*, for example, denied certain experiences as rape and were supportive of ‘rape myths’ or reinforcing women’s responsibility to prevent rape, they did engage with the substance of the campaigns, with many acknowledging at least the importance of the message. As I suggested in Chapter 3, discussion in this form as a type of witnessing was ‘welcomed’ to the extent that it provoked discussion, fostered debate and encouraged a sense of response-ability among those participating in the space. This was particularly clear through the ways participants in the forums on *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* responded to points of contention or defamatory comments that sought to undermine the campaign’s messages relating to challenging rape culture. Such an approach offers an additional reading of Carrie to Rentschler’s (2014) notion of ‘response-ability’; that the use of ‘testimony, advice giving and culture of support’ enabled by online spaces, like social media, provide people with the ability to respond (p. 68). Rather than having the campaign managers or blog authors tell people what to think, those participating in these spaces are active in responding to negative commentary and supporting victim-survivors whose experiences are challenged in the campaign’s forums.

Fortunately, the negative witnessing on *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* does not explicitly attack victim-survivors – partly because those comments are removed from the website. Instead, the negative witnessing that happens on *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* attempts to silence, ignore or refuse the campaign’s messages about the influence and impact of rape myths and victim-blaming. For example, this statement from Alan fails to demonstrate any level of engagement with the substance of the campaign:

What a horribly sexist campaign. The implication of your advertisement is that all rapists are male and all victims are female. This is demonstrably false and it’s about time such chauvinistic attitudes were changed. (Alan)

The negative witnessing expressed by Alan further exhibits an agenda associated with men’s rights activists and their ‘not all men’ stance typically directed at feminist discourse in the public sphere (Zimmerman, 2014). Zimmerman (2014) suggests that the ‘not all men’ argument invoked by people, such as Alan, is

routinely employed to derail a conversation and shift the focus of the discussion rather than engaging with it. Crucially though, the ‘not all men’ rhetoric does attempt to show some concern or acknowledgement that ‘rape, sexism and misogyny are real issues – just not, you know, not real issues that the speaker would be involved with’ (Zimmerman, 2014, n.p.). Here, Alan’s attempt to dispel the ‘myth’ that *all men* are rapists shows he is not denying rape to be a serious problem, but he is also distancing himself from contributing to the perpetuation of ‘rape myths’ and being labelled a perpetrator of rape. Rape is something perpetrated by ‘other’ men, and this is reflected in many comments on the campaign’s website, which reinforce societal assumptions that rape is abhorrent but is perpetrated by very few individuals or ‘not all men’. A comment from RDM, for example, does this by saying:

Nice idea to raise awareness, too bad it portrays a false image of not only ‘all rapists are men’, but that ‘all males are rapists’. ... It seems a bit unfair to lump all men into one category as dangerous sexual monsters.

RDM goes even further to distance himself from being labelled a rape apologist by suggesting his comment is not as offensive as others on the website. Specifically, RDM said, ‘some of the male comments here are simply looking for some glory or trying to shock and offend’, yet viewed his own comment about how the campaign sought to make ‘monsters’ out of men as a ‘critical’ response to the campaign’s modes of representation. Lynn said the kind of responses from people like Alan and RDM is ‘not even the half of it ... You should see some of the stuff that doesn’t get through, honestly it’s shocking’. The level of negative witnessing is subsequently dependent on the regulatory features of the platform vernacular.

All the online anti-rape campaigns in this project had differing processes for vetting conversations in their digital spaces. Some, which function as sites of speaking out about experiences as discussed above, have few rules governing what contributors and survivors can and cannot say. Other which seek to foster consciousness-raising about rape culture, in particular, curate their campaigns in particular ways meaning there were strict rules governing what could be posted and how they managed negative witnessing. Although some academics have interpreted the monitoring of digital spaces as a form of censorship that regulates free speech (see e.g. Mendes, 2015), those managing many of the online campaigns regularly employed certain strategies in order to avoid the silencing of women’s voices. For example, the Rape Crisis Scotland campaigns, which received some negative witnessing on their campaign websites but was filtered out during the submission moderation process, meaning very little actually found itself on the campaign pages. Others sought to prevent negative witnessing by being more mindful about what was posted and how the message was framed. For instance, Angela said the *Pixel Project* has been attacked but ‘not as much as others ... because we are progressive and we don’t antagonise people’. I return to this issue of ‘progress’ and ‘antagonism’ in relation to feminism in Chapter 5; however, what is worth noting here is the processes and strategies used by the *Pixel Project*

to eliminate negative witnessing. Specifically, Angela described the campaign's policy for dealing with being 'attacked' as blocking and banning people on Facebook and Twitter, and instead of engaging with abusive emails or correspondence, the *Pixel Project* has a policy whereby they forward the emails to their 'male allies'. These 'male allies' are campaign members or affiliates who support the work of the *Pixel Project*, such as White Ribbon.

Hypatia described a more engaged and assertive approach to addressing the negative witnessing she gets on her blog:

I do understand that people who are actually genuinely decent reasonable people are all also full of these rape myths and just because somebody is a rape apologist doesn't mean that they're a bad person and they're not worth talking to ... So I will be quite patient with somebody who is spouting rape myths. Unless I think you're just an out-right sodding troll, piss off. And that is a call you make depending on the post. [I get] lots of people post saying 'well I don't understand why you didn't do this or why you didn't do that' and I will explain why I didn't do this or why I didn't do that. Or I'll direct them to a bit of the post that says 'well I did explain that to you, I said [that] up there. Did you not read that bit? I've explained this'. Or I'll direct them to another post where ... like somebody did spark a post off – I actually did a whole new post because there wasn't enough space on the blog to reply to her. I realised, actually, you're raising a really good point and if I were reading this and I had never been raped and I didn't know anything about it, I'd also question that, and it's a reasonable question to ask given the crap our society fills us with ... I thought [it] was a reasonable question, which came from a place of trying to understand because I don't mind answering any questions which come from places of trying to understand. [But] I'm not interested in engaging with people who I think are out and out trolls.

Here, Hypatia reveals the complexities and decision processes involved in engaging with and managing negative witnessing. Moreover, the kind of witnessing Hypatia is describing by engaging with 'rape apologists', as opposed to 'outright sodding trolls', is revealing of the power of some of these online spaces to help shift people's consciousness about rape and its associated discourses, and to be able to 'talk things through'. However, the latter part of this discussion, where Hypatia is talking about reasonable questions about rape 'given the crap our society fill us with', is indicative of the amount of effort required of victim-survivors who are called upon to provide an account of their experiences. However, her comments also how instructive listening to survivors recount their experiences can be in helping to transform people's understanding of rape. As the above quote highlights, the digital space enabled Hypatia to be incredibly reflexive in thinking through what a non-survivor might know or understand

about sexual violence and taking the use her platform as a way of shifting consciousness. Furthermore, the above quote also reveals the strategic ways in which she decides whether or not to engage with ‘rape apologists’ (see also Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019, p. 93).

Interestingly, some of the participants perceived trolling or negative witnessing as not inherently bad. Rather, it was perceived as something that occurred once you had ‘gone viral’ or had been impactful. For example, Katie, who had little experience in dealing with negative witnessing, joked about how being trolled was a marker of the success of your activism, suggesting that it meant you had at least been ‘seen’ and ‘heard’ – but not necessarily believed. Katie claimed that she ‘had not received any [trolling] yet, but then it’s still really small – the blog ... I’ll know that I’ve really made it when I start getting hate mail’. Angela stated that sometimes she jokes with her fellow activists about trolling: ‘I’m like “wow, you know, I’m not really, you know, minted until I get a death threat”’.

Others spoke more about the negative aspects of witnessing. For instance, Kelly was targeted on another blog because of a post she wrote:

There was an article I wrote a few years ago ... where people were posting all sorts of victim-blaming stuff [in response to it] ... [and] so at the time I was just like ‘oh my god! Why did I do this? This is horrible! *Why does anyone ever speak out!*’. (Kelly – her emphasis)

But Kelly also noted the bind victim-survivors and activists are in if they do not speak out and challenge the discourses that govern the ways rape can be spoken about, stating that ‘if we speak out then we ... are going to have that kind of reaction from other people. But if we don’t then we’re not changing anything’. From Kelly’s perspective, not speaking out because of a fear of being harassed or experiencing negative witnessing simply perpetuates the techniques used to try and keep rape victim-survivors, and women more broadly, quiet about the injustices they have suffered. In other words, trolling and negative witnessing function as a silencing of free speech rather than an element of free speech. The need to push against the dominant attitudes about rape by speaking out was identified by Maya, when she was trolled by someone on Twitter. To cope with being trolled she reached out to other victim-activists, whose advice echoed what Kelly said above:

[...] She [the fellow activist] shared ... that idea that when someone feels threatened, that’s where that [trolling] comes from ... don’t allow that to keep you from doing what it is that you’re doing in this world because what you’re doing is very important. (Maya)

So in addition to monitoring and regulating the type of speech that can be articulated on these digital platforms, reaching out to fellow activists for support and response reinforces the importance of the networking fostered through consciousness-raising and witnessing and the power of these online social movements to offset the harms of, and even prevent, negative witnessing.

However, a further challenge to the transformative potential of these online spaces through victim-survivors speaking out are the ways some seek to contain the rape script through their platform vernaculars. Although these approaches to contain the rape script are designed to prevent negative witnessing, they effectively regulate and structure how victim-survivors are able to articulate their experiences. Although, as I discussed earlier in this chapter, some online anti-rape campaigns adopted a vernacular that encourages an open-ended and pragmatic approach to the ways people could claim their experiences – for example, choosing to post other people’s stories without editing and including information that might make the experience look like ‘sex’ rather than rape. However, other spaces are far more structured and prescriptive. An example of this is the *Pixel Project*, which provides victim-survivors with a ‘structured platform’ to prevent their narratives from ‘gushing out’. If victim-survivors want to submit their story to the website, Angela said they have to fill out a question sheet, which

Flows nicely from answer to answer and it helps give survivors a way to structure their stories because it’s very important to structure a story carefully because you want the message ... and your story to get across to the widest possible audience, yes? And sometimes we have to turn down stories and you know they didn’t make the cut because ... they don’t fill in the form [properly], [or] just everything just gushes out. (Angela)

Angela was concerned about the ‘damage’ caused by radical feminist ‘shock’ tactics, specifically the use of triggering images and language to incite action. As a result, she and her fellow activists have sought not to ‘antagonise people’ by confronting them with radical views or traumatic experiences, which might put people off from engaging with their campaign, hence the desire to curate these experiences in particular ways. Combined, this line of reasoning underscores the complexities involved in seeking to make the personal political. Specifically, Angela’s approach to containing the rape script (while well-intentioned) highlights the risks that are taken in seeking, with an emancipatory intent, to disrupt the dominant discourses, as opposed to inadvertently reinforcing them by being too careful and attempting to immunise themselves against public criticism and negative witnessing and trolling.

Therapeutic and Emotional Labour in Witnessing

Creating and maintaining spaces for survivors to come out, as well as monitoring and regulating the practices of witnessing takes a considerable amount of effort and time. As I highlighted in Chapter 3, there is a significant amount of labour involved in creating and maintaining these online anti-rape campaigns, and this is compounded by the investment required in creating a space for victim-survivors of rape to speak out and claim their experiences or to engage others in witnessing the testimony of survivors. Bloggers like Katie, who had a very small readership, struggled to obtain witnesses beyond the survivors who had spoken out on her

blog. Thus, Katie's position highlights the extent to which some of these online spaces are caught in a quandary between the personal and the political: while they may be personally empowering, they may not be politically transformative because of the lack of engagement by non-survivors. Katie described her frustration with her friends, whom she felt were not taking rape seriously. Specifically, she stated:

I feel so strongly about this topic [rape] I was kind of expecting all my friends to also feel the same – to also feel so strongly – and obviously they don't!

However, Katie also stated how pleased she was 'that women have used putting it [their story] on the blog to almost "come out" as having experienced sexual violence', making her feel that the emotional labour and work involved in maintaining the blog was worth doing.

Therapeutic and emotional labour was a theme that also emerged from the interviews with managers and creators in relation to supporting survivors and the process of witnessing. Some of these online spaces avoid doing any therapeutic or emotional labour themselves. Anna from *Project Unbreakable* said that 'the project was created and runs primarily for survivors to have a place to share their story and heal within a community'. However, on the *Project Unbreakable* website, there is a caveat that states 'we are not qualified to give certified advice', and then lists the contact details for RAINN 'if you are struggling'. The *Pixel Project* also sought to distance themselves from doing any emotional or therapeutic labour. In her interview, Angela emphasised that the project is 'not frontline', and they do not have the expertise to provide victim-survivors with emotional support. To add emphasis to this point, Angela said three times that the *Pixel Project* is not frontline:

A lot of survivors have a phase they go through where they are very aggressive and they lash out because they're in so much pain. But we're not specialists in that ... What we do is we refer ... Like we get people reaching out to us on Twitter sometimes and saying: 'my friend is going through this, I don't know how to help her' ... Where possible we give them a website, a phone number and email so that they can get the help they need. Because we're not frontline, you know, *we're not frontline* ... We're not frontline therapists, but a lot of people don't understand that. (Angela's emphasis)

While the *Pixel Project* acutely seeks to avoid providing (professional) emotional support for victim-survivors, they do perform a significant amount emotional labour in connecting victim-survivors with appropriate support services. Many of their posts on Twitter, for example, provide information for victim-survivors to connect directly with their local rape crisis services.

Overall, however, this resistance to doing therapeutic labour reveals a clear tension between the political work being done through the fostering of community

and the personal work involved in recovery from trauma. Moreover, the above account from Angela highlights the porous boundary between the political and the therapeutic in these online anti-rape campaigns. Angela's account of the work of the *Pixel Project* and way *Project Unbreakable* survivors' unbreakability indicates resistance to the focus on the therapeutic and demonstrates that the anti-rape movement and survivors are not 'irremediably and unidirectionally shaped by the traumatic experience of rape' (Mardorossian, 2002, p. 768). Instead, there is greater emphasis on maintaining collective solidarity with respect to the cause of ending violence against women and girls and healing within a supportive community as a powerful political response-ability.

Although it is not always clear how socially and political transformative the testimonies in online anti-rape activism can be, it would be unfair of me to suggest that they *ought* to be transformative. Moreover, I do not believe it is the responsibility of survivors themselves to transform political, cultural and legal assumptions about rape. Ultimately, what these differing approaches to shifting the rape script demonstrate is the tension between the personal and the political in storytelling through witnessing. Storytelling in social movements is precarious insofar as they are 'always at risk of being defined as personal rather than political ... evocative rather than authoritative' (Polletta, 2006, p. 28). The extent to which one's story may be read as 'personal' rather than 'political' is the social context in which it is told (Polletta, 2006). As such, an arrangement of speakers and hearers comprised of predominantly victim-survivors is likely to result in an echo chamber, and while having a fellow victim-survivor impart recognition or witness someone speaking out may be significant *personally* for healing, this particular context may not be conducive to *political* change. Nonetheless, the centring of survivors voices as the authority over, and theorists of, their own experience is significant and powerful in the face of enduring resistance to the ways they expose not only the fallacies inherent in rape myths and victim-blaming, but the power and privilege of masculine sexual entitlement that seeks to keep them silenced. Being able to speak out and claim one's experience and have this witnessed is therefore a significant political act – even if only on a personal scale.

Conclusion

I began this chapter by highlighting that maintaining the position that rape is 'unspeakable' fails to account for the ways in which speaking about rape *is* made possible within legal, psychiatric/psychological and social discourses and the dynamics that seek to regulate and contain testimony. Feminist activists since the 1970s have sought to 'break the silence' that surrounds women's experiences of rape by highlighting not only the pervasive nature of rape but also the (potentially) devastating physical and psychological impact it can have on survivor-victims' lives. As such, much social activism and cultural and political discourse has sought to capture the emotional cost of rape, with a strong focus on rape-trauma. Combined, these approaches have both reified particular assumptions about trauma – trauma that is now expected to accompany rape testimonies; and to contain the speakability of that trauma in such a way that it does not disrupt

the flow of patriarchal speech. Testimony is therefore expected to be contained, logical, rational, yet not too calculated, in order to be rendered authentic and credible. Therein lies the paradox that both constrains and enables the possibility of speaking about rape, maintaining the power within those discourses that govern the hegemonic rape script and denying recognition to those testimonies that fail to reflect or abide by those rules. I used these theoretical frameworks as a way to explore how some online spaces have become sites that seek to challenge the dominant discourses that govern the ways rape and trauma can be spoken.

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated how some victim-survivors use online spaces to speak out claim their experiences and illustrated the ways in which differing platform vernaculars regulate and enable survivor speech. Some of these online anti-rape campaigns complicate popular assumptions about truth-telling and rape-trauma; specifically, they challenge the dominant legal and therapeutic scripts through which rape victim-survivors are expected to articulate their experiences. I have argued that challenging such perspectives is further enabled via systems of witnessing. However, I have also pointed to some of the limitations of these online campaigns, which at times can reinforce the normative logics that govern the ways rape-trauma is expected to be articulated. Additionally, I have highlighted the amount of labour involved in witnessing, not only the level of negative witnessing that needs to be diffused in these online spaces but also in providing support to victim-survivors who speak out. This labour – or lack thereof – seeks to place boundaries between politics and therapy and, by extension, points to the tension (and limitations) between individual healing and collective memory as a form of political activism thereby complicating the opportunities for social, political and legal change. In the next chapter, I draw further on the regulatory functions of these online platforms to examine some of the complexities associated with feminism in relation to the modes of representation within these online anti-rape campaigns.

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Chapter 5

The Politics of Recognition and Representation

Introduction

Since the 1970s, feminist activists have been persistent in their efforts to expose the pervasiveness of rape. As noted in Chapter 2, consciousness-raising sessions brought to light the widespread experiences of sexual violence experienced by women in intimate relationships, challenging the perception that rape was something physically violent and perpetrated by a stranger. The prevalence of rape in intimate relationships established the discourse of marital rape, eventually leading to the criminalisation of rape in marriage throughout most Western legal jurisdictions. By the 1980s, researchers in the US shifted their focus onto the experiences of college-aged women, revealing that as many as one in four women on US campuses have experienced unwanted physical sexual experiences that met the legal definition of rape (Koss, 1985; Koss, Dinero, Seibel, & Cox, 1988; Koss et al., 1987). The findings from these studies were widely circulated in the feminist magazine *Ms.* as well as published in the book *I Never Called It Rape* by Robin Warshaw in 1988. The effect of these publications was the generation of a new cultural discourse surrounding rape – ‘date rape’ and ‘acquaintance rape’. However, these publications were met with resistance. Some questioned the figures and suggested that the fault lay with women and their behaviour, that women were crying rape to cover up their promiscuity or that rape was a natural part of the dating scene (Paglia, 1992; Roiphe, 1993; Sommers, 1994). Journalist Katie Roiphe (1993) was particularly concerned that such claims depicted women as perpetual victims, physically and emotionally wounded and incapable of acting or speaking, and thus rendered powerless by their experiences. In essence, anti-rape activists and researchers were accused of valorising victimhood and victim identity politics.

Historically, the representation of rape within anti-rape activism, particularly of victim-survivors speaking out, has tended to depict and focus on (or at least been criticised for focussing on) rape’s exceptionalism. It has been framed as something that is inherently violent and traumatic (Gavey & Schmidt, 2011),

Online Anti-Rape Activism: Exploring the Politics of the Personal in the Age of Digital Media, 87–119

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as something to be legally repaired not fought (Marcus, 1992) and as the worst of crimes (Halley, 2008). This focus on rape's 'exceptionalism' has relied on particular modes of representation and identity politics that narrow, rather than broaden, understandings about the nature of rape and its prevalence reinforcing assumptions associated with 'real rape' – and they are almost always white women. Yet, as Hypatia said, she wanted her blog to show that 'anybody can become a rape victim ... to show how ordinary it is, how normal it is'. Although the previous chapter explored the ways in which experiences of rape regularly fail to fit within the confines of the hegemonic rape script, representations of victim-survivors in the public domain regularly draw on these forms of representation.

In many respects, as I discussed in relation to consciousness-raising in these digital spaces in Chapter 3, the widespread availability and relatively cheap accessibility of ICTs has enabled women who have previously been unable to participate in social activism the ability to have their voices heard. Some of these online spaces provide an opportunity to challenge the dominant discourses that govern hegemonic rape scripts and provide an alternative framework for imparting recognition through peer-to-peer witnessing, as discussed in Chapter 4. As such, they challenge the way rape victim-survivors' testimonies are expected to conform in different social, legal and political contexts, in order to obtain recognition. In this sense, online anti-rape activism can provide the opportunity to remake and unmake victim-survivor identities, as well as recast the depiction of masculinity and femininity in ways that resist, subvert and at times reinforce assumptions about victimhood and victimisation.

Although in the previous chapter I argued that these digital spaces create an opportunity to challenge the dominant narratives inherent in the hegemonic rape script, this chapter interrogates on a deeper level who exactly is permitted, and how, to challenge those scripts. In particular, I explore the ways the case studies in this book navigate these tensions that have historically manifested in the representation of victimisation within anti-rape activism. I pay close attention to the way perceptions of feminism are understood and mobilised within these online anti-rape campaigns, the impact this has on the modes of representation within these spaces, and what this reveals about the way activists negotiate between the personal and the political. As Tanya Serisier (2005, 2007, 2018) notes, the relationship between feminism and anti-rape activism is not inherently given; many survivors who speak publicly about their experiences do not necessarily identify as feminists, nor are they necessarily affiliated with feminist anti-rape campaigns. Activism, in turn, is not always aligned with feminist goals of liberation and emancipation but rather, as I explore in more detail in Chapter 6, is often directed at criminal justice reforms. The case studies in this project illustrate not only a complex relationship with feminism but also their interpretations of feminism, which influences the way victim-survivor identities and claims making are framed in these digital spaces.

'Victim' and 'Survivor' Identity Politics

As I outlined in the introduction of this book, social movements that arose in the 1970s shifted away from claims for economic redistribution to calls for cultural and social recognition (Fraser, 1995; Melucci, 1985). Unlike movements that call

for the redistribution of wealth, claims for recognition are shaped by the collective mobilisation of particular identities, such as gender, sexual orientation, race or, more specifically for the topic of this book, the recognition of sexual victimisation. However, social movements utilising ‘identity’ as a driving force for recognition often operate in exclusionary ways because they fail to deconstruct institutionalised patterns and cultural values held by particular actors, and their power to reify certain identity categories (Fraser, 2000). Efforts by anti-rape activists and feminism more broadly to construct a collective identity in pursuit of social justice have been heavily critiqued for failing to capture and acknowledging intersectional experiences and the ways in which institutional recognition and responses to rape disproportionately impact on men and women of colour (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1983). Moreover, attempts to draw attention to women’s experiences of rape and other forms of violence under patriarchy resulted in backlash in the late 1980s and early 1990s for casting all women as victims (Wolf, 1993). Being classified or identified as a ‘victim’ in general has subsequently come to have negative connotations in contemporary society; however, it is particularly heightened in the context of feminism (Lamb, 1999). While certain sectors of second-wave feminism sought to proclaim that *all* women are victims of patriarchy, highlighting a plethora of social, cultural and institutional examples of women’s systemic marginalisation, the backlash against their victimisation approach, both internal and external to the anti-rape movement, focussed on two key things:

- (1) That claiming *all* women are victims (and *all* men are rapists), or that all women experience victimhood in the same way, collapses differences and fails to acknowledge that different women experience different kinds of oppression, and they do not all respond to violence in a uniform way; and
- (2) That in referring to women as ‘victims’ denies them agency and an inability to recover from violence. (Stringer, 2014)

Despite the backlash against the victimhood discourses of feminism, it has not been entirely abandoned, with the neoliberal discourses of personal responsibility and risk management further complicating victim identity politics in the anti-rape movement (Stringer, 2014). There still remains space for the ‘good’ rape victim identity in the context of criminal justice settings and in broader social narratives. This individual is characterised by their ability to demonstrate ‘sexual safekeeping’, specifically their personal capacity to mitigate the risk of being raped (Gotell, 2008). As such, the logics of neoliberalism have had the effect of splintering the identity category of ‘victim’ into two: the good, ‘agentic’ victim who is able to demonstrate her propensity to manage and take responsibility for her own sexual safekeeping, and the bad ‘vengeful’ victim who blames others for her victimisation – the patriarchy or men, for example (Stringer, 2014). It is this ‘bad victim’ who is disavowed by public discourse. The victim who fails to practise sexual safekeeping – by wearing revealing clothing, getting drunk, not making her ‘no’ audible or clear or failing to demonstrate resistance in any other way than freezing – is rendered responsible for her own victimisation. Such an approach further entrenches ‘rape myths’ and victim-blaming, effectively marking the boundaries of deviant and acceptable

forms of femininity, and subsequently, *the rules for recognition* as a victim of sexual violence (see Gotell, 2008). In this sense, ‘the ideal reasonable victim ... actively resists becoming a victim all together’ and seeks to demonstrate why and how they are not a victim (Laster & Erez, 2000, p. 249).

The performative and representational elements of victimhood are so narrow that individuals cannot possibly align with the discourses that seek to police it. Victimhood is characterised by contradictions, and assumptions about victims are very much rooted in the demands and limited expectations of the sociopolitical environment (Van Dijk, 2009). The label of ‘victim’ is constantly shifting, but it remains a ‘product of social relations, culture, and language’ (Lamb, 1999, p. 3). In this sense, victimhood, under neoliberalism, has become ‘about the quality of the sufferer’ rather than the event of violence and trauma itself, constructing a hierarchy of worthy and unworthy victims, authentic and inauthentic victims of rape (Stringer, 2014, p. 41). As such, activists and victim-survivors are required to make strategic decisions with regard to the representation of victimisation.

Survivor-activists involved in this study drew on their own experiences when reflecting on the notion of victimisation and the extent to which this informed the ways in which they presented their own experiences of rape as well as their thoughts on rape culture in these digital spaces. While there was resistance to the term ‘victim’ or ‘victimhood’, the participants in my study described victimhood in terms of emotional death (see McCaffrey, 1998). Kelly described the feeling of victimhood as:

[Being] broken, like I could not function ... I thought about jumping in front of the train tracks, I was on a ridiculous amount of medication ... I couldn’t do anything ... when I was just a victim of sexual assault that’s all I was, that was my identity.

What Kelly is describing is a common response to sexual trauma (see Herman, 2001). However, Kelly is not suggesting that being a victim per se is negative, but rather a state of mind in response to trauma and it was not until she had recovered from this ‘broken’ state of mind that she felt able to write her blog. However, in contrast Angela viewed the term ‘victim’ as disempowering, and went so far as to claim that *all* victim-survivors detest being referred to as such. Specifically, Angela said:

If you talk to any survivor they hate the word ‘victim’, they don’t like it ... yes you’ve been a victim but you know if you’re alive and you’re healing, and you’re working really hard to rebuild your life ... [You really do not want to] have them go through trauma again or whatever. This [calling them a victim] is not helping!

Here, Angela frames victimhood in terms of ‘woundedness, passivity, oppression and innocence ... woman as powerless victim of domination’ (Stringer, 2014, p. 5). In addition, Angela is suggesting here that to label someone a victim is to re-traumatise them; reflecting Dawn McCaffrey’s research which suggests that survivor status is something that is *achieved* once a victim stops blaming herself or allowing herself to be victimised by others (1998). For Angela, referring

to someone who has experienced rape as a 'victim' is a reminder of the pain and suffering they have gone through, rather than accentuating the positive – personal growth, healing and recuperation. In other words, victimhood is a reminder of the failure of the body and the mind to recover (Herman, 2001). Subsequently, Angela said the *Pixel Project* never uses the word 'victim' on their website or social media pages. Such negative assumptions about victim identity politics reflect the extent to which the language of 'victimhood' is stuck in a fixed set of ideas and meanings – it comes to signify only passivity and powerlessness (Stringer, 2014, p. 6).

Feminism has sought to counteract negative 'victim' talk through the language of 'survivorship' popularised by rape-crisis feminism through reframing identities as 'rape survivors' rather than 'rape victims'. This has been part of a shift away from the focus on suffering not only linguistically, but also, as I will discuss later in this chapter, through the imagery used in campaigning. However, while anti-rape activists almost exclusively utilise survivor discourse, sometimes it is presented or used in depoliticised ways as the language of the 'survivor' is also guided by the logics of neoliberal discourses (Stringer, 2014) with the ethos of survivorship further individualising the experience of sexual violence. Its strong emphasis on healing, personal growth and moving beyond the experience of rape, for example, positions survivorship in the realm of the therapeutic – and subsequently, outside of the political. This emphasis on the *personal* within the discourse of survivorship is thus at odds with constructing collective claims making that addresses the underlying structural and *political* causes of violence against women. Far from subverting the logics of risk and responsibility for preventing victimisation, survivorship in this context can reinforce them, with survivors expected to take personal responsibility for healing and recovering from violence and trauma.

Most interview participants, however, constructed their own meanings behind the terms 'victim' and 'survivor' for personal and political reasons in their activism online and in reference to their own identities and the identities of others. Some, for example, refused the term 'victim' and embraced the use of survivor, like Angela, while others preferred victim or rejected both terms. Alana used the term 'victim' only to point out the problems of representing: 'African women solely as *victims*' (my emphasis); elsewhere she used the term 'survivor' and the *Stop Rape in Conflict's* flagship campaign is titled: 'Survivors United for Action'. Lynn, from Rape Crisis Scotland, also never used the term 'victim' in her interview, opting for 'survivor' at all times. Rape-crisis feminism has been successful at subverting the notion of 'victim identity' through the ethos of survivorship, which is designed to challenge the normalisation of self-blame within 'rape culture' but also capture the broad spectrum of victim-survivor experiences (Stringer, 2014). Just the labelling of the Rape Crisis Scotland campaign's *Not Ever* and *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* is challenging the responsibility paradigms of victim-blaming and subsequently repositioning self-blame as a product of social and political attitudes about victim-blaming, *rather* than a reflection of women's lack of responsibility to prevent rape. The campaigns also invite a reading that suggests 'this is not an invitation to *blame* me'. It is through the subversion of these victim-blaming tendencies that the campaigns propagate a *refusal* on the part of victim-survivors to accept responsibility for rape.

A pattern did emerge with respect to when the term ‘victim’ or ‘survivor’ was employed, however. Maya, for example, used the term ‘victim’ to refer to people engaged with the criminal justice system, whereas ‘survivor’ was used to describe the personal healing process. Specifically, she used the term ‘victim’ to demonstrate that it is the *victim* who is on trial, victim-blaming discourses in which the *victim* is blamed for wearing certain clothes or drinking, or because the *victim* failed to resist or show signs of resistance. Hypatia, however, took a different approach to identifying herself and others as victims. Hypatia never used the term ‘survivor’ in her interview, referring to herself and others solely as victims, and this terminology was also consistent on her blog. The early posts on her blog were specifically about how she explicitly became a ‘rape victim’. Prior to her experience, Hypatia had been convinced by ‘rape culture’ that rape was only rape if: ‘it was (perpetrated by) the balaclava man in the dark alley with a knife’. Through the process of describing how she became a victim of rape, she goes beyond issues pertaining to victim-blaming and self-blame, articulates the challenges associated with labelling her experience as rape and calling the perpetrator a rapist. Hypatia’s experience forced her to confront her own assumptions about what a real rape victim identity looks like, and she used her blog as a way of working through the complexities and contradictions associated with victim-survivor identity politics. Unlike Kelly, who felt like a ‘real’ victim – broken and could not function after being raped – Hypatia describes feeling uncertain about whether or not she could call herself a ‘real’ victim. As I discussed in the previous chapter, Hypatia did not feel emotionally traumatised, although she noted on her blog that she blamed herself for letting her rapist for having power over her, which allowed her to become a rape victim:

[I gave him] the power to penetrate my body again when he knew I didn’t want him to, the power to pretend that he wasn’t a rapist ... Now, I blame the society which convinced an intelligent, popular teenager, that the only way to make rape OK, would be to date her rapist.

Hypatia’s statement suggests, in the same way that rape-crisis feminism has sought to use the term ‘survivor’ to capture the broad spectrum of recovery or responses to rape, it is clear that the term ‘victim’ can also capture this. Rather than the victim identity being exclusively a reference to powerlessness, vulnerability, unspeakability and trauma, the victim identity also seeks to capture the structural conditions which not only enable rape to happen but also attempt to *convince* rape victim-survivors that they are not victims at all (Mardorossian, 2002) – they have simply had a bad sexual experience. In referring to herself and others as rape ‘victims’, Hypatia is thus taking control of the discourse and reinterpreting its meaning, ‘rejecting particular images in favour of new self-representation of their own making’ (Fraser, 2000, p. 110). The seeming disparate identities of ‘victim’ and ‘survivor’ are thus not clear-cut, nor wholly distinguishable.

Labelling an identity as either ‘victim’ or ‘survivor’ can be problematic, because it forces people into a binary of being either one or the other when most of the time,

neither category sufficiently captures their experience (Kelly, Burton, & Regan, 1996). Indeed, throughout this book, I had referred to individuals as victim-survivors, to avoid placing my own assumptions or interpretations on their experiences and to highlight that these categories are not separate but fluid and dynamic. Yet as captured above by Angela, there is a lot of negativity and disempowerment associated with the language of victimhood that means mainstream activism has widely adopted the terminology of survivorship in their advocacy work. Katie, however, did not use either the term 'survivor' or 'victim' to describe her identity or the identities of others, but rather spoke about: 'things that happened to me'. Katie felt there was no language available to capture the trauma of her experience or identity as a victim-survivor. While Katie can speak out about her experience, the ongoing trauma inflicted upon her body and mind defies identity categorisation. However, Katie's narrative might also represent a refusal to be categorised or to fix her identity as either a victim or a survivor. This refusal was evident on Katie's blog, in which she had an entire post dedicated to the terminology she uses, including her opinions about the terms 'survivor' and 'victim'.¹ In the post, Katie highlighted how problematic it can be using the term 'survivor', because it does not capture the instability of PTSD and uneven nature of recovery from rape. Specifically, Katie described the term 'survivor' as too generic because:

For the decade after I was raped, survival was a pretty precarious business ... Telling, for instance, an individual suffering from post-traumatic distress order, 'You're a survivor! You have survived!' strikes me as missing the point.

Conversely, Katie had disdain for the term 'victim'. Specifically, Katie stated on her blog:

I hate using this word; I have enormous issues with it. The mindset of 'victimhood' has been written about by many people, with the emphasis on ceasing to see oneself as a victim, and reclaiming control over one's life. The reality of crimes of sexual violence, however, is that the perpetrator *took* control. While it is important to feel in control of life, day to day, I think that recognising that temporary, non-consensual loss of control is an important part of coming to terms with one's experience of sexual violence. So, I would not say, 'I *am* a victim of sexual violence' but, when talking about the crimes that were committed against me, I might say, 'I *was* a victim of sexual violence'. (Katie's emphasis)

Katie's analysis of victimhood echoes that of Hypatia's, who viewed her status as a rape victim being derived from the power exercised by the perpetrator over the victim. Victimhood is thus expressed as an identity that manifests at

¹<http://notmysecrets.blogspot.com.au/2014/08/terminology.html>

one specific moment in time, rather than something perpetually fixed to an individual. Katie suggests that instead of fighting over which labels or identities to conform to, talking about sexual violence and ‘drowning out’ the silences surrounding sexual violence was the more important political work. Nonetheless, the ways in which the interview participants framed their assumptions, and in some cases identities around the survivor-victim paradox influenced who participated in their consciousness-raising networks, how they positioned their claims about violence, ‘rape culture’, feminism and the response they received from non-social movement actors. Some of the case studies in this project resisted representing women’s (or their own) sexual suffering and victimhood, and when they did, trigger warnings were put in place to indicate that images or narratives might be upsetting to some viewers. Other campaigns, however, attempted to re-signify the meaning and impact of victimhood and survivorship. In this sense, the campaigns strike an interesting balance between the personal and political in their modes of representation. In addition, as I turn to later in this chapter, fighting over labels further influences the identities and experiences of victim-survivors represented within these online campaigns.

Resisting the Representation of Victimisation

Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver (1991) argue:

Representations of rape after the event are almost always framed by a masculine perspective premised on men’s fantasies about female sexuality and their fears of false accusation, as well as their codified access to women’s bodies. (p. 2)

Subsequently, a greater emphasis needs to be placed on tracing how women represent themselves and their experiences of rape, discerning how or where they: ‘break through the discourses that have circumscribed perceptions of the causes and nature of sexual violation [that have] contributed to what amounts to a cultural cover-up’ (Higgins & Silver, 1991, p. 4). Rather than reproducing images that reinforce sexual violence and victimisation as the manifestation of masculine social power, activists ought to: ‘expose sexual violence as the signifier of the impotence of masculine social power’ (Heberle, 1996, p. 68). To do so, anti-rape activists ought to move beyond representing victim-survivors as victims ‘through and through’, because it reinforces masculine power rather than disrupts it (Heberle, 1996, p. 75). Rather, anti-rape activists should seek out as many ways as possible to enable victim-survivors to represent themselves on their own terms, rather than have someone speak on their behalf (Mardorossian, 2002).

While I am speaking of representation in very loose terms, I am specifically referring to ‘representation’ in terms of an image or text, as well as political representation – that is, the opportunity of participation in claims making. I want to reflect briefly on the ways in which ‘representation as parity of participation’ (Fraser, 2005, p. 5) is fostered in these online spaces in modes that resist the logics of normative ‘victimhood’, which I discussed above. I will then turn to discuss the

ways in which representation in the form of text, images or videos are used in these online campaigns to subvert 'good' victimhood discourses. Following this, I then examine how the language of feminist anti-rape activism has changed from a 'fighting' or militant response, to a more rational, 'calculated' one, revealing some of the tensions around the relationship between feminism and anti-rape activism.

Representation is a key to parity of participation in social justice movements, however, misrepresentation is a common feature, whereby particular groups are excluded from political decision making or are denied the opportunity to participate in their own claims making (Fraser, 2005). Digital spaces have created unprecedented platforms for women and minority groups around the world to speak out about violence, inequality and oppression, and to lobby for political and legislative reforms in ways that had previously been unavailable. However, we must be mindful of the 'double talk' that emerges in online spaces that simultaneously provides multiple access points to digital mouth pieces while at the same time reinforces experiences of violence along hierarchies of gender, race and class with respect to visibility (Daniels, 2009). Digital spaces can and do reproduce hierarchies of speaking and acting-power among women, and the reproduction of offline hierarchies has enabled predominantly white, middle-class women to make claims on behalf of 'other' women's experiences online, perpetuating the whitewashing of anti-rape activism and the feminist movement more broadly (Friedman, 2005; Gajjala & Dako-Gyeke, 2010; Loney-Howes, 2015; Trott, 2020).

Providing platforms for victim-survivors to represent their own experiences, either through testimony or participating in social change, is indicative of a significant shift in activist tactics, as some have suggested that victim-survivors' voices and their role in campaigning has become marginalised (see Corrigan, 2013). However, it is clear from the survey data that these digital spaces remain very much occupied by white women. A major criticism of mainstream second-wave anti-rape activism through to the #MeToo movement (see Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019) has been the ways it failed to include, address and represent the multiple intersections of violence experienced by women of colour, which make their experiences of rape distinctly different to white, middle-class American women (hooks, 1984). While African-American women were heavily involved in the anti-rape movement, they often organised separately from mainstream activists because they felt excluded or their experiences did not reflect those expressed by white women (Bevacqua, 2000). As a result, their voices have been pushed to the margins or rendered invisible. In the online context, Kolko, Nakamura and Rodman (2013) suggest that race is either invisible or hyper-visible, particularly for women of colour, and few feminist-activist spaces seem engaged with, or at least to interrogate, issues pertaining to the intersection of class, race and gender (Daniels, 2009; Rapp et al., 2010). This lack of focus on the intersection of gender and race (and sexuality for that matter) online creates problems when it comes to inclusive representation and recognition without essentialising women's experiences of violence. For example, when race and ethnicity is the feature of claims making online, it often manifests in ways that position women of colour as in need of rescue (see Loney-Howes, 2015). In other words, women of colour find themselves spoken on behalf of or for.

Although the online anti-rape projects in this study attempted to be inclusive and diverse, survey data indicated that those participating in the spaces in this research mostly identified as Anglo-Europeans (66%). There was variation within this label, however, with some identifying as ‘European Australian’, ‘European-Scottish’, ‘Scottish’, ‘British’, ‘European Canadian’, ‘European New Zealand’, ‘Jewish European’, ‘German European’, ‘Dutch European’, ‘European Italian’ and ‘American’. The different geographic locations listed here adds further weight to what I said in Chapter 3 about cyberspace’s capacity to facilitate consciousness-raising in a way that transcends space and place; however, some of the managers and creators of these digital spaces expressed the view that online anti-rape activism in general was still ‘very white’ and not particularly diverse. Kelly specifically said, in response to my question, ‘who do you think are using online spaces for anti-rape activism?’: ‘from what I’ve experienced most of the women are white ... It feels very white’.

Lynn said that Rape Crisis Scotland had received some criticism about *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* because they had very little racial and ethnic diversity in the campaign, depicting instead mostly young, white, Scottish women. The representation of white women in the Rape Crisis Scotland campaigns may be attributed to the fact that Scotland has a significant population of people who identify as ‘white: Scottish’, which sits at 84% according to the 2011 census (National Records of Scotland, 2015). Additionally, over 96% of the population identify as ‘white’ but from varying nationalities – such as Irish, British and Polish (National Records of Scotland, 2015). However, it could also be reflective of what McNicol (2015) calls the ‘white visual economy’ (p. 246), which, she argues, dominated media representations of *SlutWalk*. For instance, despite the *SlutWalk* movement being quite diverse in terms of who participates, McNicol (2015) and Mendes (2015) argue that the media promotion and analysis of the event tended to focus on the white women who were involved. In this sense, the use of white women to promote the anti-rape message is not necessarily reflective of Rape Crisis Scotland’s desire to minimise the experiences of non-white women but to use the white visual economy to generate greater visibility in the public domain. However, this nonetheless contributes to the erasure of women of colours’ experiences of sexual violence.

Despite the whiteness in some campaigns, other spaces were diverse in whose experiences they represented. *Project Unbreakable*, for example, sought to capture the experiences of women of colour from across the world, publishing posts in languages other than English, such as French, Spanish, Korean, Japanese and Hindi. In addition, *Project Unbreakable* also publishes posts of men’s experiences of rape and rape experienced by members of the LGBTQI+ community, which I discuss later in this chapter. The Stop Rape in Conflict campaign also sought to avoid using digital communications technologies to mobilise on behalf of supposedly ‘oppressed’ woman of colour (see Friedman, 2005; Gajjala & Dako-Gyeke, 2010; Ray, 2014). Both *Project Unbreakable* and *Stop Rape in Conflict* actively facilitate involving the voices of victim-survivors and are thus instrumental in helping survivors to develop an activist identity. Moreover, the Stop Rape in Conflict campaign generates opportunities to connect activists globally and fosters a non-hierarchical approach to building networks and solidarity. Those involved in

advocacy work are located globally, with representatives in Mexico, Colombia, Egypt, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Canada and the United States.

The upshot of excluding the experiences and voices of a spectrum of victim-survivors can have the effect of producing misrepresentation (Loney-Howes, 2015). Misrepresentation in social justice movements can be compounded by ‘misframing’ (Fraser, 2005), where various forms of misrepresentation ensure that only certain claims are framed as legitimate, excluding experiences outside the normative discourse. The Stop Rape in Conflict campaign was particularly conscious of how African women, in particular, have historically been depicted in anti-rape and anti-violence social justice campaigns. According to Alana, ‘one-dimensional images of African women feed into the narrative that they are incapable of providing solutions or being the drivers of important social and political change’ (see also Loney-Howes, 2015). The campaign has sought to create an online platform, or a network as described in Chapter 3, for survivor-activists to come together and unite for action. Alana described the campaign as creating the possibility of ‘standing *with* and *behind* as opposed to standing *for*’ survivors. Alana also indicated that while the campaign is survivor-led, they are not targeting survivors. Crucially, ‘a lot of what the campaign is doing now is not so much targeted at survivors but targeted *by* survivors’ (Alana, her emphasis), in order to instigate change and to include survivor’s voices in decision making at the level of law and policy. In this way, the *Stop Rape in Conflict* campaign is reconfiguring the modes of representation that have reinforced their victimised status, which subsequently denied victim-survivors of rape in conflict the opportunity to participate in policy and law reform. These survivors are using their experiences to instigate ‘calls to action’ (Alana), and transform perceptions about their victimised social and political status and their capacity to contribute to structural change.

Enabling victim-survivors to represent themselves may have initiated unintended political opportunities for other online campaigns. *Project Unbreakable*, for example, was initially set up for victim-survivors to tell their stories not necessarily political action. However, Anna noted that the role of their voices in the campaign has changed due to its popularity:

The project was created, and runs primarily, for survivors to have a place to share their story and heal within a community. However, because of the popularity that it’s gained I would hope that it’s doing its part in spreading awareness and shedding light on these stories that happen every day. Not everyone realizes what an issue sexual assault truly is.

Project Unbreakable’s capacity to ‘spread awareness’ and ‘shed light on these stories that happen every day’ is evident not only because of the significant number of victim-survivors who have shared their stories but also the cultural recognition the project has received. As discussed in Chapter 3, the role of the media, as well the power of celebrity investment, is a key to obtaining greater recognition and ‘going viral’. However, the cultural notoriety achieved by *Project*

Unbreakable is a testament not only to enabling victim-survivors to represent themselves but also the lack of barriers or limitations on who can and cannot participate. Anna said they encourage submissions from *all* victim-survivors of rape irrespective of gender, sex, sexuality, age (unless under 18 – although participants can share stories of historical child sexual abuse), location and language. Additionally, posts to *Project Unbreakable* highlight just how prevalent the perpetration of rape is by someone known to the survivor. The majority of posts name fathers, stepfathers, sports coaches, the boy next door, babysitters, partners, boyfriends or husbands as the person who raped them. More than this, however, *Project Unbreakable* moves beyond focussing on suffering and victimisation insofar as it has sought to represent the strength and resilience of victim-survivors, rather than focus on trauma, powerlessness, brokenness and helplessness. The use of the term ‘*unbreakable*’ is present in almost every submission to the website, with many participants stating that they themselves are now ‘*unbreakable*’. This is also reflected in the feedback the campaign has received – Anna said that she thinks many who participate ‘truly believe they are now *Unbreakable* [*sic.*]’. In other words, being ‘*unbreakable*’ becomes a proxy for ‘survivor’ – although as Katie mentioned in the previous section, recovering from sexual violence is not a linear path, thus being ‘*unbreakable*’ may not necessarily attend to the precarity and complexities of PTSD.

This shift in subjectivity towards being ‘*unbreakable*’ is also reflected in what is depicted in the images. For instance, although the project accepts submissions from anyone, images of the physical impact of sexual violence are not published on the website. According to Anna, the only circumstances in which submissions to *Project Unbreakable* have been rejected is if the image is too ‘problematic’. Specifically, they

Never turn away a submission unless there is a visibly graphic element to it ... [because] *Project Unbreakable* is centred on sexual assault, which is obviously already a very triggering and sensitive topic – why we are sure to tag all of the photos as #triggerwarning. So if a submission comes in that may be even more upsetting – for instance, showing a recent physical injury – we have to be careful.

It is interesting to note though that some of the submissions to *Project Unbreakable* do feature bodily trauma or injury (one where the victim-survivor has a black eye and another shows scars on their wrist from where the survivor had self-harmed). Others, instead of using the poster format for writing about one’s experience as in the majority of the submissions, have written on their bodies. One woman wrote a variety of different feelings associated with being a victim-survivor of rape all over her face, capturing the complexities and coexistence of different feelings and therefore identities. One side of her face contained words associated with ‘victimhood’, such as ‘worthless’, ‘broken’ and ‘deserving of abuse’, and the other side captured the discourses of ‘survivorship’, specifically the terms ‘healed’, ‘determined’ and ‘hopeful’. These ‘survivor selfies’ (see Wood et al., 2018) or ‘pain memes’ (Dobson, 2015; Harrington, 2019; Mendes, Belisário, et al., 2019) therefore depict the survivors as an ‘image for the online

voyeur of pain' (Wood et al., 2018) constructing a hierarchy of victimhood that may incite a particular affective response. Anna did say: 'once in a while someone will send in a photo that leans towards being pretty graphic'. However, she said:

The project isn't about shock value or drawing in attention with potentially very triggering images. Doing more damage [by posting triggering images] than good isn't helpful ... I don't think people are trying to be disrespectful when they send in the [triggering] photos, they're just not thinking about how it may affect others. (Anna)

Anna's comment that *Project Unbreakable* is not about 'shock value' suggests an attempt to avoid constructing a hierarchy of victimisation or positioning rape victim-survivors as a victims 'through and through' (Heberle, 1996, p. 75). However, while there may only be a small number of submissions that depict the physical impact of violence, there are multiple descriptions of physical pain and the impact of rape on the body present in some of these survivor selfies. For example, some of the posts describe how the victim-survivor was bleeding (or the perpetrator noted that they were not bleeding when they thought they should be) or referenced other bodily fluids such as semen or vomit; other survivor selfies displayed or discussed their bruises. These terms therefore pay reference to the abject nature of bodies that experience violence; what we find unsettling about bodies in trauma that we are both simultaneously fascinated and disgusted by (Kristeva, 1982). However, the abject is not just something that repulses in a corporeal sense. The abject also manifests as a subjectivity, as a 'revolting subject' (Tyler, 2013), emerging in these online anti-rape campaigns through the ways perpetrators seek to cast victim-survivors as abject subjects. Posts on *Project Unbreakable*, for example, reveal how perpetrators refer to victim-survivors as 'sluts', 'whores' and 'bitches', positioning them as revolting, less than human, and therefore deserving of rape. However, in positioning themselves as 'unbreakable', victim-survivors resist being cast as abject subjects and victims through-and-through.

Angela said she also avoids using triggering images on the *Pixel Project* 'out of respect for survivors' but also suggested that:

[People] Get turned off by those images or they, or they just feel like they can't do anything ... I think in a way we're being more radical than the more traditional violence against women campaigns, non-profits and charities because they've been using shock and awe for the last many, many decades and ... when I founded the *Pixel Project* I basically told everybody who is working for us 'we're just going to run the other way'.... [As] anti-violence against women organisations we really shouldn't be capitalising off their suffering, it's disrespectful.

However, in their attempts to distance themselves from the use of triggering images or descriptions of victim-survivors' injuries, campaigns like *Project Unbreakable* and the *Pixel Project* have replaced them with triggering descriptions

of the trauma associated with sexual violence. The ‘Survivors Stories’² on the *Pixel Project* website, as well as number of posts on *Project Unbreakable* and posts on other blogs, often include triggering information not just about a rape or assault but also experiences of PTSD. Vivid descriptions of violence (and sometimes trauma) are increasingly accompanied by a hashtag #triggerwarning, to signal that the content on the page might be distressing for people to read. The use of #triggerwarning is part of new media protocol, preparing and therefore giving people permission to avert their gaze for what is to come (Halberstam, 2017; Rentschler, 2014). Trigger warnings are a way of alerting an audience, particularly survivors of violence, that what they are about to read may trigger traumatic memories as part of a politics of care (Rentschler, 2014). However, trigger warnings (unlike content warnings) can also function in a way that presupposes their audience as already inherently vulnerable, ‘unstable and damaged and could at any moment collapse into crisis’ (Halberstam, 2017, p. 537).

In a way, the use of trigger warnings in online anti-rape activism can reinforce particular assumptions about rape’s exceptionalism in terms of the kinds of violence and trauma that are imagined to be associated with such experiences. It assumes, for instance, that victim-survivors are irredeemably broken and controlled by their inner-turmoil and emotions (Mardorossian, 2002). Perhaps, this is why Hypatia did not use any trigger warnings on her blog, and they were never mentioned in our interview because she wanted as many people to see how ‘bloody mundane’ (Hypatia’s words) rape really is. By ‘bloody mundane’, Hypatia referred to rape being: ‘something that happens every Saturday night’, and that ‘anyone can become a rape victim’. Katie too did not use trigger warnings on her blog, and, as I discussed in the previous chapter, this may be because she wanted people to understand the realities of sexual violence, ‘even if it’s squeamish and difficult’. However, it is clear from what some of the managers and creators of these digital spaces said that their own personal experiences of sexual violence do render them vulnerable to triggering stories. While a number of activist-survivors do share stories and network online, supporting each other through witnessing, when I asked Katie if she follows other blogs or campaigns, she said:

I can’t always read very much, it can be quite *triggering* sometimes.
I have only ever really dipped into other sexual violence blogs.
There aren’t any that I actually follow. *I can find it too upsetting.*
(My emphasis)

Katie’s comment indicates some further complexities associated with wanting to speak out or find a way to represent experiences, and the difficulties involved in reliving experiences (and the associated trauma) through encounters of violence experienced by others. As Katie reminds us in Chapter 4, it is important not to shy away from the realities of sexual violence, yet we must remember that obligation to do so should not fall squarely on survivor-activists putting their stories out

²<http://www.thepixelproject.net/category/survivor-stories/>

into the public sphere. Shifting towards ethical modes of listening, witnessing and representation that account for intersectionality and the complexities of trauma and PTSD are vital if we are to develop a transformative agenda within anti-rape activism, but this is not the responsibility of survivors themselves.

Subverting the Logics of ‘Good Victimhood’

Focussing on a victim’s behaviour and women’s responsibility, in particular, to protect themselves from being rape has been a reoccurring theme in Public Service Announcements seeking to prevent rape (Bevacqua, 2000). As a result, practices of ‘sexual safekeeping’ are deeply entrenched within the discourse of ‘good victimhood’, while the perpetrator and their actions are overlooked or ignored (Stringer, 2014). However, *Project Unbreakable* subverts this rhetoric. Rather than focus on the victim-survivor’s behaviour, for example, many posts on *Project Unbreakable* attempt to centre the perpetrator and their actions, specifically the things they may have said to the victim-survivor during a rape or afterwards, and reveal the ways in which perpetrators of rape attempt to blame their victims for being raped. Statements such as ‘you were asking for it’, ‘you’re the first to complain’ and ‘I can’t help myself – you are so beautiful’ are illustrative of how perpetrators seek to justify their behaviour through victim-blaming or undermining victim-survivors’ lived experiences. Other comments reflect the sense of entitlement and access that men have to women’s bodies, with some posts demonstrating that perpetrators acknowledged that they were raping their victims, but felt it was their right to do so. One post describes the perpetrator’s response when the victim-survivor confronted him as to why he had raped her as: ‘when the opportunity presents itself’. Another post reads: ‘What! Am I raping you? I’m just showing you how much I love you’. Other posts from victim-survivors highlight that rapists are aware that their actions were tantamount to rape, with quotes captured from the perpetrators such as ‘this isn’t right’.

In addition to focussing on the perpetrator, many posts on *Project Unbreakable* also highlight pervasive victim-blaming attitudes regarding victim-survivors’ responsibility to prevent themselves from being raped. Some posters demonstrate the ways the criminal justice system perpetuates victim-blaming attitudes, with one poster containing the following comments from a police officer: ‘what were you wearing?’, ‘why didn’t you fight him off?’ and ‘do you usually have guys over?’ Victim-blaming responses also came from family members, with many posters indicating what their parents or friends had said to them when they told them they had been raped. In one post, a mother blames her daughter for being raped or at least suggests that she put herself in harm’s way, stating: ‘you really shouldn’t have slept in the room with him’. Another post claims the victim-survivor lied about being raped, with someone’s sister commenting that: ‘everyone thinks you’re lying about what *really* happened’ (my emphasis). The suggestion that ‘you’re lying about what *really* happened’, for instance, implies that the survivor simply had a regretful sexual encounter. In doing so, the victim-blaming attitudes undermine and deny the victim-survivor permission to call her experience rape, reflecting attitudes that women cry rape when they have had a bad sexual experience or are ashamed of being seen as promiscuous (Roiphe, 1993).

The two campaigns *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* and *Not Ever* also sought to subvert representations of rape that historically focussed on women's behaviour and their personal responsibility to prevent rape. Lynn said Rape Crisis Scotland wanted to present a

Completely different kind of message to what people are used to seeing ... Previous campaigns had been very much focusing on women's behaviour, safety, those kinds of things, and accompanied usually by sort of negative images of like frightened or um, you know, distraught women or whatever. Whereas this is completely different.

The images in the campaign *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* depict women behaving in ways that might normally assert assumptions associated with victim-blaming, as I discussed in Chapter 3. These images include a group of young women drinking alcohol and out partying, a woman wearing revealing clothing, a young couple kissing and a husband and wife on their wedding day – all contexts in which consent is perceived to be negated or at least implied, or victim-survivors were 'asking for it'. However, Lynn noted that these images were still nonetheless 'shocking' because of how the accompanying strapline 'This is Not an Invitation to Rape Me' subverted the meaning and impact of that which such images are typically associated. Lynn stated:

I think visually it's [the campaign *This is Not an Invitation to Rape Me*] very arresting. They're quite distinctive images of people ... people were quite shocked when they [first saw them]. If you look at these images at first you're not quite getting the message that you expect to. These are quite almost glamour images ... When you traditionally see images like that ... in advertising to sell things maybe like perfume or fashion or something like that ... we wanted to use it for a valid, worthwhile purpose [to challenge rape myths and victim-blaming].

As the quote from Lynn above suggests, in addition to subverting the gaze on women's behaviour and their responsibility for sexual safekeeping, the campaign also manipulates the ways sexual violence is used by consumer capitalism to sell certain products. These 'glamorous images' typically associated with advertising that sells 'perfume or fashion', without the strapline 'This is Not an Invitation to Rape Me', could appear in almost any television commercial or on a billboard. Two images – one of the young woman wearing a see-through top, and the two lovers in the back of a taxi, for example – appear to be almost mocking particular advertisements that have been criticised by feminist-activists for inciting 'rape culture' and glamorising sexual violence (see Stampler, 2014).

One of the major ironies with the victim-blaming attitudes that assert that women 'ask for it' if they 'dress like sluts' is that commodity culture sells that particular type of image and encourages women to dress in a way that is based on

promoting their sex appeal. This critique by Rape Crisis Scotland of consumer culture reinforcing myths about rape is further explored in the *Not Ever* video, where a young woman goes shopping for a skirt so she can 'be raped'. The scene cuts to a bar later that night where the woman is talking to a man, who says to his friend: 'look at that skirt! She's asking for it'. The woman then turns to the camera and says 'as if' she was asking to be raped. The entire *Not Ever* video puts the myth that women 'ask for it' because of what they are wearing, at the centre of the conversation. The assumptions associated with the meaning of the skirt purchased by the main character then becomes the object of critique, rather than the woman and her behaviour. The video further problematises the myth that women 'ask for it', when the potential rapist in the video says to his friends, 'look at that skirt, she's asking for it' and the woman responds: 'as if'.

The line in the video delivered by the woman to the sales assistant – 'I'm going out tonight and I want to be raped. I need a skirt that will get a guy to have sex with me against my will' – is darkly comical, as if any woman would ever deliberately purchase a 'rape skirt' and asks the audience to think about the logics of this line of defence routinely espoused by perpetrators and defence lawyers. The *Not Ever* campaign is therefore a further example of the multiple uses of humour in online spaces to challenge 'rape culture' and online sexual harassment (Keller et al., 2016; Kramer, 2011; Rentschler, 2014, 2015; Vitis & Gilmour, 2016). Rentschler (2014) in particular identifies that online spaces use humour to help to mobilise another kind of feminist political response to 'rape culture', by challenging the ways women are deemed responsible for sexual assault. She uses the example of a hijacked Twitter feed #safetytipsforwomen, in which women posted images of themselves wearing 'rape-preventative' clothing, such as chainmail or a sleeping bag, to demonstrate how the responsabilisation rhetoric in 'rape culture' is merely a tool to regulate women's behaviour rather than rape prevention (2014, p. 70). Through these processes, anti-rape activists shift the responsibility back onto those who support and perpetrate 'rape myths' (Rentschler, 2014). In doing so, the problematic discourse itself, and those who believe it, becomes the object of discussion rather than women's behaviour or responsibility - indeed as one comment on the discussion board on the Not Ever website said 'skirts don't cause rape, rapists do'.

A Rational Rather Than a 'Fighting' Response

In the 1970s, radical feminist activists called for a 'fighting' response to rape, in which women were encouraged to 'disarm rapists', 'smash sexism' and learn self-defence (Gavey, 2009). Much of this rhetoric was aimed at preventing stranger rape rather than acquaintance or marital rape; however, through this process, anti-rape activism sought to challenge the supposed powerlessness of women by rewriting the rape script and repositioning themselves as agents capable of resisting rape, thereby making women, rather than men, the subjects of fear (Marcus, 1992). Through self-defence training, it has been suggested that women can recodify their bodies, turning them into defensive weapons to the extent that this will prevent sexual assault from occurring (Cahill, 2001). However, these 'fighting' responses have been criticised for reinforcing women's responsibility to prevent rape (Mardorossian,

2002; Stringer, 2014). The militant attitudes of some second-wave feminist activists, mentioned in Chapter 2, also faced criticism for being too radical and disruptive, responsible (in part) for creating feminism's bad name (Echols, 1989).

The participants in this study were all too aware of this history and subsequently wary of taking a 'fighting' or militaristic approach to their activism, with their primary concern about alienating potential activists and allies. Some participants sought to distance their campaigns from what Alana called 'militaristic' representations within anti-rape activism. There was a fear that using 'militaristic language', in particular, would put people off engaging with the campaigns. Alana said:

We're very clear about the idea that violence doesn't beget violence; we don't use militaristic language ... We don't say 'we're fighting for this' or 'we're crushing the whatever' ... We encourage non-militaristic ways of communicating about these issues.

Significantly, Alana went on to say she believed that because they took a more 'cautious' approach to their activism, they did not receive as much abuse as more radical, or 'militaristic' feminist-activists received:

We don't receive the kind of abuse that other feminists receive [because] I think we're very clear and very cautious about the way we express things. We're not afraid to express displeasure with decisions, we're not afraid to call out government inaction, but again without using that militaristic language ... It's [militaristic language] very common in activist spaces [and] I think that that sort of tempers some of the reactions that we receive.

Angela also felt that many activist spaces drew on militaristic language, and was outspoken about the negative impact 'fighting' responses espoused by anti-rape activists had on the movement, citing 'radical feminism' as the cause of this, which has (according to her) led to infighting between feminist groups in their struggles for control over representation. Angela wanted to distance the *Pixel Project* from these approaches, stating radical feminist-activists (seem to) demand that change happens overnight, which also resulted in infighting about how to best address the causes and therefore prevent sexual violence. A more 'rational' approach, according to Angela, was to

Do it one person at a time – eventually [after] one person at a time it becomes a small group, a small group will become a community, and if you go after the right people ... eventually, it's going to change ... Radical activists demand change but they're not telling people how to get there. And so it ends up with bloodshed, it ends up with people at each other's throats. It ends up with men not listening to us and accusing us of being feminazis, and when people don't listen to you that's when you've lost the battle ... You have to be patient and that's what a lot of radical activists don't understand.

These more ‘rational’ as opposed to ‘fighting’ responses reveal something about the role and popular understandings of ‘feminism’ in anti-rape activism, as well as feminist activism more broadly. Angela points to it quite clearly in the above quote that there is a fear among activists of being labelled ‘feminazis’ if their ideas are too controversial or ‘radical’. The use of the term ‘feminism’ was notably absent from many of these online campaigns, even if they identified as ‘feminist’. On the Stop Rape in Conflict campaign and *Pixel Project* websites, as well as *Project Unbreakable*, there was a lack of references to ‘feminism’. While Lynn from Rape Crisis Scotland spoke at length in her interview about the role of feminism in helping to shape the direction of their campaigns, as well as noting the history of, and relationship between, the rape-crisis movement and feminism, there was no explicit mention of ‘feminism’ on their campaign websites.

Given that second-wave anti-rape activists positioned rape as inextricably bound to the question of women’s liberation more broadly, I asked the participants to reflect on the role of feminism in their activist projects. The baseline assumption put forward was that feminism is about ‘equality’ between men and women, and Anna, for example, viewed sexual violence as a barrier to achieving that. In addition, some of my participants only came to ‘feminism’ because of their experience of rape or did not see themselves as feminists until they started their projects. Maya, for example, did not consider herself a ‘feminist’ until someone pointed out to her that her ideas were ‘feminist’ – to which she replied: ‘what does that mean?’ Given the amount of backlash feminists have received, Anna suggested that people are scared ‘at the thought of being labelled as a person in support of women earning equal rights’. As such, explicitly avoiding associating oneself with ‘feminism’ may perhaps be an attempt to depoliticise rape, in order to garner greater public support.

In the same way that liberation, empowerment and feminism are choices that can be exercised through consumption (see e.g. Gill, 2016; Gill & Scharff, 2013; McRobbie, 2008), the lack, or exclusion of ‘feminism’, is also a part of the discourse of ‘choice’. Most liberal political movements are placed within a double bind if they want to get their message on the public agenda (Bean, 2007). In this sense, rather than ceding ground to neoliberalism, as some feminist scholars have argued, feminism has had to negotiate with a neoliberal state hostile to feminism, meaning that many of its best ideas have been co-opted and sold to women through the rhetoric of ‘choice’ (Gill & Scharff, 2011; McRobbie, 2008). However, positioning feminism as a ‘choice’ not only contributes to its erasure but also covers up – or worse, denies – feminism’s history, including the gains made by feminism and the systematic backlash (Silva et al., 2015). The interview participants had differing views and knowledge about the relationship between their activism in these digital spaces and earlier forms of feminist activism that came before them. While Lynn, Angela, Alana and Kelly had clear ideas about this – or at least had thoughts about their project’s connection to feminism, others did not. When I asked Anna about her knowledge of feminism and how she perceived the role of feminism in *Project Unbreakable*, she said:

I think that feminist ideas (essentially, equality) certainly play a role considering that rape culture is a very prominent issue ... I have always considered myself a supporter of equality ... I don't think feminism was a forethought in my mind [in] joining the project.

Conversely, Katie was critical of the absence of feminism within some of the spaces with which she engaged and communicated that this stopped her from wanting to become more involved in activism online and offline. For example, in addition to finding it triggering to read other blogs about people's experience, Katie also said that she finds it 'quite galling' when people use digital spaces to speak out about their experiences but then say things like "and now I have a husband/baby/shiny perfect hair, so I'm totally over what happened!" Katie's comment here reveals a deeper tension associated with the history of speaking out and its relationship with feminism, which I did not explicitly address in chapter 4 – namely that many survivors who speak out about their experiences of rape do not necessarily identify with feminist ideas nor do they identify as feminists (Serisier, 2018). As such, it is important to distinguish between the personal politics that sit behind speaking out as inherently different from anti-rape activism. For Katie, who continues to struggle with PTSD and the other persistent reminders of her experiences of sexual violence, glossing over the struggle to survive derails the political nature of both the experience of rape and the recovery. Although, as I highlighted in the previous chapter that some survivors do not necessarily experience a traumatic response to rape, this does not undermine the seriousness of the violence nor does it detract from the challenges associated with recovering and healing from sexual assault. It is the forgetting or the getting over of the experience that does not incite rage or a desire to change things that Katie is particularly upset about, which speaks to the competing agendas within anti-rape activism and the ongoing tensions between the personal and the political.

Anti-Rape activists have had long-standing competing agendas that have caused tension over how to best respond to the issue of rape (Bevacqua, 2000). On the one hand, activists sought to overhaul of sociocultural norms regarding women's sexual subordination, while other focussed more on legislative recognition and reforms as preventative strategies as well as increasing legal safeguards for victim-survivors. These tensions also appear in the online context, although much of this tension emerges in relation to how best to speak out and address some of the structural causes of sexual violence. Angela claimed that there are factions within online feminist groups, which foster a sense of competition between feminists and causes infighting between activists, effectively inhibiting the possibility for collective action. Angela singled out 'radical feminists' specifically as the problem in online spaces. Her description of and accusations about radical feminism is highly reminiscent of the story of a past feminism (Hemmings, 2011) that has gotten in the way of true political emancipation (Wolf, 1993, p. xvi). This past feminism is considered aggressive, misguided and hostile; something that contemporary feminism – if it is to survive and remain relevant – must distance itself from (Hemmings, 2011). Angela's approach to distancing the *Pixel Project* from such associations with a past feminism was to take a more collaborative approach to anti-rape activism and gender-based violence prevention more broadly:

It's about a 360-degree approach, it's about working and collaborating – everybody collaborating and not competing ... We don't like the catfights and take-down culture that happens online and offline in the feminist community and the you know anti-violence against women movement ... We, our allies, partners and collaborators all believe that everyone's better off if everyone works together [and] stops pointing fingers. Obviously, we're going to point our fingers at patriarchy and the people who uphold it ... I see online bust-ups and take-down culture ... feminists attacking other feminists online making many feminists and women's rights activists afraid to say what they think ... It instigates in-fighting. It makes a lot of moderate feminists, whether they're white or not white or women of colour, afraid to speak up ... So radical feminists, you know, I respect that they want the same things as, they want the change that we want – we're all part of the same community – but sometimes I do think that they cause more damage than progress. (Angela)

Katie also noted the infighting between feminists online, suggesting that such arguments over whose experience 'counts', or whose victim-survivor subjectivity is more authentic, means activists end up arguing among themselves rather than focussing on patriarchy and the structural causes of violence against women:

I'm quite cross with the online feminist movement at the moment ... We've got things to focus on, the things that affect all of us, and yet we are arguing with each other [about whose experience counts] ... How are we going to deal with important issues like domestic abuse, and intimate partner violence, and sexual violence, and the whole world of patriarchal bullshit if we can't agree with each other to just accept the differences and focus on what's important. (Katie)

'Feminism' is thus a powerful discursive tool that can be deployed in positive and negative ways that hinder the capacity to bridge the connection between the individual and the collective. Online anti-rape activist spaces can help individuals explore their feminist ideas and identities (Keller, 2012; Keller et al., 2016; Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019; Sills et al., 2016). However, the deployment of particular forms of feminism online function as regulatory discourses governing the framework for whose identity 'counts', and the ideas mobilised within the anti-rape movement, as Katie and Angela's comments highlight. While feminism might be 'trending' online, as I discussed in Chapter 3, its role in anti-rape activism in digital spaces is highly contentious.

Men, Masculinity and Anti-Rape Activism

It is clear that the changes in the modes of representation in online anti-rape activism are a critical response to the backlash against the movement in the 1990s.

The focus on women's victimisation, powerlessness, violence and militancy in earlier activism has now been replaced by discursive representations of strength and resilience in response to violence. In particular, being 'unbreakable', a shift towards centring the perpetrator and their behaviour rather than focussing on women's behaviour, subversions of rape myths that responsivities women for their experiences of sexual violence and moving from a 'fighting' or militaristic response to rape towards prevention through education. At the same time, some anti-rape activism has sought to downplay the role of feminism in claims making or has compromised on politics in order to garner greater public support by focussing on the personal cost of and response to rape.

While 'feminism' seems to be discursively absent from these online anti-rape campaigns, this did not stop people from inquiring as to 'where are all the men [who experience sexual violence]?' (Alana, Angela and Kelly) or 'why can't we be humanists [instead of feminists]?' (Angela). As I discussed in the previous chapters, particularly around negative responses to attempts to raise consciousness on the websites *Not Ever* and *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me*, there are levels of resentment towards activists who fail to represent men's experiences or those that (apparently) blame all men for causing rape. Certainly, it is important to acknowledge the claim 'men can't be raped' is another myth that fuels victim-blaming, prevents men from accessing the services they might need to help them recover from their experiences and denies them status as legitimate rape victim-survivors (Rumney, 2009; Weiss, 2010).

Part of the problem when it comes to representing both rape and victims is the assumption that rape is only a 'woman's problem' (Mardorossian, 2014) – it is only women who can be victims and it is women's responsibility to prevent rape and indeed reinforces a further rape myth that men cannot be raped. Yet rape is neither a women's issue, nor is it men's issue, rather it is a 'problem of and with hegemonic masculinity and only secondarily ... as a woman's problem' (Mardorossian, 2014, p. 3). More specifically:

Analysing victimisation through the lens of a reframed masculinity means bringing rape to public attention not as [a] 'woman's issue' but as an issue that saturates culture and defines structural masculinity's relation to femininity and *not* women's relation to men. (Mardorossian, 2014, p. 3 – my emphasis)

Mardorossian (2014, p. 4) suggests that 'it is structural femininity, not the female subject [or women], that is rape's victim'. Structural femininity's inferior status, as a symbol of weakness and passivity, juxtaposed against structural masculinity, representative of power and agency, produces the 'gendered grammar of violence'. These hegemonic discourses, in turn, enforce the rape script whereby 'one person auditions for the role of the rapist and strives to manoeuvre another person into the role of the victim' (Marcus, 1992, p. 391). In this sense, rape is not an issue that primarily affects women by virtue of them being 'women', but rather because of their structurally and politically subordinate position, which rape reinforces. The hegemonic rape script thus attempts to reinscribe or imprint a

feminised identity on the rape victim (Marcus, 1992, p. 391). Crucially, this occurs irrespective of a gendered or sexual identity. For example, men who rape other men may be seeking to ‘feminise’ their victims as a form of power and control (Mardorossian, 2014), and there is growing evidence to suggest that sexual violence in queer relationships reveals what Bedera and Nordmeyer (2020) describe as ‘righteous masculinity’, whereby perpetrators engaged in acts of violence do so to reclaim or exert power over their partners. In other words, ‘sexual violence cannot be separated from the desire to dominate and ... the desire to dominate through sexual violence cannot be separated from masculinity’ (Bedera & Nordmeyer, 2020, p. 18).

Although rape is a gendered crime in which women are predominantly the victims and men are predominantly the perpetrators, statistics suggest that around 1 in 20 men have experienced rape or sexual assault (RAIIN, 2016). While this figure is significantly lower than the number of women reported to experience sexual violence (around one in five), deeply engrained assumptions about sexuality and gender roles, as well as popular and institutional responses to men’s experiences of rape, significantly impact on whether men and boys formally or informally coming forward about their experiences (Chapleau, Oswald, & Russell, 2008). Much of this is bound up with the heterosexual matrix (Butler, 1990); in particular, the stigma associated with homosexuality and the subsequent fear of being labelled ‘gay’ if a heterosexual man is raped by another man. Indeed, the shame concomitant with being labelled ‘gay’ presents an ongoing barrier for men reporting sexual victimisation to the police and continues to underscore perceptions about rape experienced by men (Rumney, 2009). Additionally, the idea that a woman could rape a man generates an affront to hegemonic masculinity and gender roles in the context of heterosexual sex (Flood & Pease, 2009; Kassing, Beesley, & Frey, 2005).

Despite these challenges that create significant barriers for men speaking out or indeed developing an effectively consciousness around men’s experiences, *Project Unbreakable* was the only case study that sought to include men’s experiences of sexual assault. These experiences ranged from sexual violence perpetrated by men, as well as men who had been raped by women. There are also some posts on the website that illustrate young boys having been raped by, in some instances, other boys after they came out as gay. As one poster reads:

‘You’re **gay**. You should want **this**’. One of my best friends, right before he beat me with an electrical cord to make me stop resisting. I was 13, he was 14. I had just come out to him the week before. (Emphasis in the original text)

This post also indicates how men can be taken advantage of by perpetrators they thought they could trust. The above quote highlights the extent to which the victim-survivor sought to confide his sexuality in his friend, only to be raped for doing so. The violent nature of the assault also suggests that the perpetrator may have been punishing the victim for being gay. Other posts highlight incidences of men being raped by women, with one quote reading: “‘Real men can’t be raped by women”, Spokane, WA Police Department’. This latter example

points to deeply held assumptions about heterosexual sex in relation to rape myths whereby ‘real’ men are expected to initiate and pursue sex with women, and men who admit to not wanting sex or are ‘forced into sex’, ‘violate [the] codes of male [heterosexuality]’ (Weiss, 2010, p. 277).

It is significant to note that the majority of the posts made by men on *Project Unbreakable* reflect experiences of rape or sexual abuse when they were children or adolescents and illustrate the ways in which many perpetrators in positions of power groom and then violate the trust of victims. These examples also demonstrate the ways offenders seek to cast their behaviour as normal sexual interactions – or initiate young boys into expected sexual practices. For instance, one post reads, ‘I’m just trying to teach you how to wank, like my brother taught me’. Teacher and family friend’. In addition, representations of men’s experiences of rape and sexual violence as adults also highlight the same dynamics of power and control that can manifest in accounts of heterosexual women’s experiences, whereby perpetrators seek to either downplay the seriousness of their actions or that such acts were expressions of attention and love. For example, there are common statements reflected in men’s experiences of rape, such as ‘You should be thankful that I even messaged you’ (emphasis in original text), and ‘no one is going to love you, no one is going to care, you are damaged now’, that are echoed in comments expressed by women on *Project Unbreakable*. Many posts from female victim-survivors also indicated that the perpetrator made them feel as though they should be grateful for the ‘attention’, or that they were worthless or damaged. However, the posts also indicate that perpetrators used significantly more derogatory language towards women-identified survivors, referring to them as ‘sluts’ or ‘whores’ as a way of reinforcing that they deserved to be raped.

In addition to a lack of representation of men’s experiences of rape in these online anti-rape campaigns, men are not significantly involved in the activism itself. Demographic data collected from the survey indicate that only 9% of those who participated were men. The comments sections on the Rape Crisis Scotland campaigns included a number of ‘opinions’ from men; however, they were not necessarily positive in their reactions or receptive of the campaigns’ messages. One survey participant responded to the question ‘what more do you think needs to be done’, by reiterating that it is not women’s responsibility to prevent rape but that of perpetrators, indicating that more men needed to be included in anti-rape activism and awareness raising because they are the primary perpetrators:

Fair enough victims pool together, but it is not them who need the altering, it is the abusers who need changing. While the abusers see this as OK to do, this [sexual violence] will continue. (Anonymous – survey respondent)

However, some commenters in the *Not Ever* forum who were men felt that the campaign was an important move towards including men in the discussion about preventing rape and encouraging men to hold each other accountable for their behaviour. As ‘Des’, a participant in the forum, explained:

It's about time someone put something like this out! I live on the other side of the world in New Zealand and this video has made its way here. I'm here to plead to other men to help end sexual violence. Next time your mate makes a sexist remark about a woman, call him out on it! Next time your mate won't leave that girl in the club alone, tell him to back off because she isn't interested! You may think that a little one-off comment does no harm, but that one comment encourages rape culture. Rape culture is something kept alive by men, and if the decent guys amongst us decide to take a stand, we can make a difference. Men, time to show how tough you really are; let's keep the women in our lives safe from sexual assault!

This comment by Des illustrates the power and potential of campaigns like *Not Ever* to bring men to conversations about rape. Yet typically, like sex education, attempts to bring men into the conversation about rape prevention are carried out in the absence of women and in doing so overemphasise (and reinforce) sexual difference (Murphy, 2009). Campaigns that emerged in the 2000s, such as 'Men can stop rape',³ have been praised by scholars for positioning masculine traits, such as strength, which inherently imply the capacity to be violent, in non-violent ways (Flood, 2003). Using statements like 'are you man enough to turn away from violence', according to Flood (2003), draws on 'existing investments in male identity ... in order to invite non-violence' (p. 27). However, such an approach can reinforce problematic beliefs about sex, gender and sexuality by appealing to the trope of 'masculine honour' (Messner, 2016, p. 62). The previous quote from Des illustrates this through his claim: '[It's] time to show how tough you [men] really are; let's keep the women in our lives safe from sexual assault!', which draws on the hegemonic discourse of masculinity equalling strength to indicate how men can use their 'toughness' to prevent rape. His language also draws on the masculine protectionist discourse, by virtue of suggesting that men can and should 'protect' women from rape.

What comments, like those from Des, reveal is a hierarchy of masculinity, and this is a feature of some anti-rape campaigns (not included in this study) that draw on strong gendered-behaviour paradigms of 'good masculinity' and 'bad masculinity' (see Masters, 2010). In campaigns like 'My strength is not for hurting', there is an attempt to disrupt the gendered grammar of violence in so far as they challenge the position that masculine heterosexuality is something agentic, powerful and uncontrollable, with women functioning as the gatekeepers who 'relentlessly thwart masculine desire' (Murphy, 2009, p. 120). Yet the campaign seems to rely on the production of 'good masculinity', positioning the rapist as someone who embodies 'bad' masculinity (Messner, 2016) – something that 'good' men can stop. Sexual behaviour is thus used to delineate the boundary/binary between good non-rapist masculinity and bad rapist masculinity, and as

³<http://mencanstoprape.blogspot.com.au/2011/12/saying-goodbye-to-my-strength-is-not.html>

such, rape is constructed as something that the other ‘bad’ man does (Masters, 2010). Although it is beyond the scope of this book to explore anti-rape campaigns specifically addressing men the role of masculinity as causal feature of sexual violence as they were not part of the initial case studies, I do want to mention another recent example of an online campaign that attempts to engage with men and their behaviour, called ‘Don’t be that guy’. I mention this example because survey participants indicated they were connected with this campaign in their digital activist networks (see Table 2). Again, the language ‘don’t be *that guy*’ (my emphasis) positions the rapist as ‘other’ and reinforces a ‘good’ kind of masculinity; one that does not take advantage of intoxicated women, for example. In these examples, men’s responsibility to guide other men’s social and sexual behaviour is the key in facilitating this ‘othering’ process. It implies that these men can purify and reinforce a particular type of ‘good’ masculinity through monitoring other men’s behaviour (Cover, 2019; Masters, 2010).

The use of normative representations of masculinity within anti-rape campaigns is also reflected in a Scottish Police campaign released in 2012, available on YouTube called ‘We can stop it’.⁴ Featuring a rugby player, a personal trainer, a joiner (builder), a graphic designer and a student, the campaign attempts to draw on a particular type of masculinity to show ‘I’m the kind of guy that doesn’t have sex with a girl when she’s too drunk’, ‘I listen when a girl (or a guy) says “no”’, ‘I know that when she’s asleep it’s a “no”’ and ‘I’m the kind of guy that doesn’t pressure his girlfriend to have sex’. These statements are all followed by a question to the audience: ‘do you?’ or ‘are you?’ Again, such language seeks to rearticulate the meaning of masculinity and sexual entitlement through using the statement: ‘I’m the kind of guy who doesn’t (rape)’ and subsequently asks the male audience to question their own behaviour. While the campaign seeks to shift this facet of masculine sexual entitlement, it also reminds the audience that you can still be a ‘real’ man – no matter what your sexual orientation or occupation, so long as you do not rape someone. In doing so, they construct ‘hybrid masculinities’ (Bridges & Pascoe, 2014) that attempt to symbolically distance themselves from elements of hegemonic masculinity, such as violence, and at the same time incorporate attributes of alternative masculine identities (Cover, 2019; Masters, 2010).

While the campaigns directly involved in this project attempt to centre perpetrators as responsible for rape rather than focussing on women and their behaviour as the cause of rape, only the *Pixel Project* sought to target men directly and actively engage them in activism. On the *Pixel Project*’s website, there is a ‘Men’s Room’⁵ that provides men with an overview of what gender-based violence is, highlighting that it is not ‘a women’s issue’, and the steps men can take to help prevent violence against women such as ‘prevention through example and education’, intervention, activism and self-awareness. The *Pixel Project* also acknowledges that perpetrators, or men who might not be willing to admit they have acted violently towards women, might be accessing the website. For example, underneath the ‘self-awareness’ section

⁴<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ypVzXpKkFiU>

⁵<http://www.thepixelproject.net/the-mens-room/what-you-can-do/>

on the 'Men's Room' page, there is a disclaimer that reads, 'If you are emotionally, psychologically, physically, financially/economically, or sexually abusive or violent towards women, or have been in the past, be responsible – seek professional help NOW' (*Pixel Project* emphasis). It is unlikely that any perpetrators of rape would be visiting anti-rape campaigns except to troll them, although they may be seeking help. For example, I asked Anna if perpetrators ever contact *Project Unbreakable*, and she said that it happens 'very infrequently', but 'they are usually asking for help' and are forwarded to the 'appropriate organisation'.

Although most of the case studies involved in this project did not represent men as victim-survivors of rape, some worked directly with external organisations to help bring men into the conversation. For example, the Scottish Police campaign 'We can stop it' mentioned above was developed in partnership with Rape Crisis Scotland to complement their campaigns. Lynn felt that having a campaign like 'We can stop it' focussing on potential perpetrators rather than the potential victims was 'another useful approach' to tackling rape prevention because

That's not something that's really been done before either. It's always been very much about women having to look after themselves and make sure that they don't do X Y or Z.

In this way, sexual violence prevention is presented as something that is not just a 'women's issue' but rather an issue associated with 'masculinity' (Mardorossian, 2014, p. 3 – my emphasis), as I noted earlier in this section. Using masculinity as a tool to shift consciousness may also be a useful tool to meet men where they are (Flood, 2003), which is the approach taken by the *Pixel Project*, who incorporate what Angela called 'male allies' into their activism. Angela said using male allies is 'about being practical and pragmatic because these men are going to listen to another man ... It's called peer-to-peer intervention'. Such a position reflects the stance taken by bell hooks (1984) who advocates for the inclusion of men within the feminist movement because women alone cannot achieve the goals of the feminist movement. Specifically, hooks (1984) argues:

Men are the primary agents maintaining and supporting sexism and sexist oppression, they can only be eradicated if men are compelled to assume responsibility for transforming their consciousness and the consciousness of society as a whole. (p. 83)

However, the 'good man' approach to rape prevention has contributed to the weakening politics of anti-rape work, and visions of social transformation, because their recodification of masculinity fails to address the structural advantages (heterosexual) men have in many parts of the world, which reinforces their access and entitlement to women's bodies (Messner, 2016). Moreover, most men would like to think they are 'good' men and strive to position themselves as 'not rapists' – even if they are. This distancing, or demarcation, between the 'good' non-rapist and the 'bad' rapist was also evident in the comments section on *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me*, as I highlighted in Chapter 4, where comments

such as ‘not all men’ position rape as perpetrated by ‘other’ men but not those who participate in or support these campaigns.

Hypatia too noticed good non-rapist/bad rapist masculinity binary in her interview when I asked her what she thinks could be done to bring about change. Hypatia said, ‘Most rapists want to think of themselves as *good guys*’ (my emphasis); men think they have not done anything wrong either because of the narrow ways in which rape is understood (as something violent and perpetrated by a stranger), or the culture in which they live privileges masculine sexual desire and denies women sexual agency. Yet, it remains difficult to get men to understand or at the very least acknowledge their own role in perpetuating ‘rape culture’. In suggesting that ‘I am not a rapist’ or ‘not all men’, men who challenge the claims made by anti-rape activists distance themselves not only from the subjectivity of ‘a rapist’ but also from the broader social and cultural structures that sustain ‘rape culture’. As a result, they resist the possibility of collectively acknowledging their own sexual autonomy and privilege and continue to position rape as the product of a few ‘bad’ individual men, rather than something enabled through a cultural and political system that denies women sexual agency. Engaging men and boys in anti-rape activism clearly remains an ongoing issue; however, as I discuss in the conclusion of this book, there have been some promising attempts to address this through hashtag activism, such as #HowIWillChange which emerged in the wake of the #MeToo movement. Although not unproblematic, it demonstrates some positive steps taken by men to understand and transform their own power and privilege in meaningful ways, facilitated by digital media.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex Visibility

In addition to criticism regarding the lack of inclusion for men, the case studies in this project took a very heteronormative approach to their anti-rape activism. This is despite the fact that sexual violence experienced by the LGBTQ community takes place within the confines of compulsory heterosexuality governed by (Rich, 1980, cited in Bedera & Nordmeyer, 2020, p. 5) and is therefore still the product of culture that favours masculine entitlement to bodies and sex irrespective of gender or sexuality. Moreover, queer and lesbian women have historically been heavily involved in developing and sustaining anti-rape activism alongside heterosexual women since the 1970s (Taylor & Rupp, 1993). Lesbian women in *Take Back the Night* marches, and more recently the *Slut-Walk* movements, were significant collaborators and participants in these forms of activism, along with transgender women (Carr, 2013). However, in addition to focussing predominantly on women’s experiences of rape, most of the case studies presented in this book focussed exclusively on heterosexual women’s experiences of rape. Indeed, most respondents to the survey identified as ‘heterosexual’ (64%), with 24% identifying as or bisexual, and only 6% listed their sexual orientation as ‘lesbian’, and the rest described themselves as queer or pansexual.

This lack of diversity from the campaigns involved in this study may well simply be a reflection of the dominant sexual identity of individuals engaged in these spaces. However, the demographic data clearly illustrate that over 30% of survey respondents identified their sexuality as not explicitly heterosexual. It is therefore imperative that anti-rape activists take a stronger approach to understanding and incorporating the experiences of the LGBTQI+ community in their activism. Certainly, Rape Crisis Scotland expressed a desire to ‘introduce more diversity in future campaigns’, because a number of comments on the campaign websites wanted to see broader representations of victim-survivors of sexual violence who fall outside the heterosexual matrix. Survey respondents too felt that *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* lacked diversity. One particular comment stated, ‘More campaigns [are needed] including women who are targeted by women, men who are targeted by men, [and] women who are targeted by men’. Experiences of transgender women and men, however, remained markedly absent from these digital spaces, despite lesbian, queer and transgender women disproportionately experience sexual violence (Bedera & Nordmeyer, 2020; Guadalupe-Diaz, 2019; Meyer, 2016; Mortimer, Powell, & Sandy, 2019). It is essential that the parameters of recognition and representation are broadened within anti-rape activism, as there is a dearth of research and knowledge on the experiences of LGBTQ sexual violence survivors, which is reflected in the way support services and primary respondents are insufficiently equipped to address their needs (Guadalupe-Diaz, 2019; Mortimer et al., 2019).

The victim-survivors who identified as lesbians within these online anti-rape spaces tended to describe experiences of rape that were more often than not perpetrated by heterosexual men asserting misogynistic attitudes of sexual entitlement to, or conquests over these women’s bodies (Bedera & Nordmeyer, 2020). Their experiences might therefore also be classified as hate crimes, or ‘corrective’ rape, seeking to reinforce heterosexuality as the ‘norm’. These perspectives are reflected in the following posts on *Project Unbreakable*, with one poster stating the perpetrator’s words: ‘I’ll prove you’re straight’. Another post reads:

He said you consented, it’s his word against yours. Obviously you made a drunken mistake and maybe you’re a bit embarrassed because you’re a lesbian (response from Sexual Offences Investigator Trainee).

The investigator’s response reflects broader issues inherent in victim-blaming attitudes and rape myths – saying that the victim-survivor’s experience was a ‘drunken mistake’ and that she is ‘embarrassed’ about what happened, seems to imply that if the victim-survivor was a ‘real’ lesbian, she would not have consented to having sex with a man, subsequently invalidating her experience. These attitudes are also present in support services, with many mainstream sexual assault and rape crisis groups struggling to appropriately provide support for members of the LGBTQ community (Guadalupe-Diaz, 2019; Mortimer et al., 2019). This is compounded, as Mortimer et al. (2019) have identified, through the ways in which service providers often rely on heterosexist and cis-gendered assumptions about bodies, sex and violence that reinforce heteronormative scripts about rape.

The upshot of these attitudes impacts on LGBTQ victim-survivors speaking out about their experiences but also casts them as group with specific needs that are considered too difficult for activist campaigns to address. For example, the *Pixel Project* chose not to focus on LGBTQ experiences in their activism because they ‘have a very specific set of needs’ according to Angela, and ‘we don’t have any expertise in the LGBT issue [*sic.*]’. However, as I outlined above, the underlying contributing cause in many instances of sexual assault, irrespective of sexuality and gender identity, is masculinity (Bedera & Nordmeyer, 2020). Angela noted that this decision to exclude the LGBTQ community had resulted in transgender folk, in particular, being aggressive towards the project. Specifically, she said, ‘some of the worst attacks on us are by transgender people’, not men’s rights activists or other feminists. Angela stated, ‘it’s not because we’re transphobic’; yet paradoxically, she said, ‘they [transgender people] feel like they are not being included’. Angela also claimed that ‘the way they [LGBTQ people] experience violence ... has a very different dynamic’ to heterosexual women’s experiences, although she did not elaborate on what these differences were. The *Pixel Project*’s approach in responding to the needs of transgender victim-survivors was to refer them to appropriate services, because, as I noted in Chapter 4, they are not a ‘frontline’ service. While Angela said the *Pixel Project* is not ‘transphobic’, the lack of representation of LGBT experiences does reinforce assumptions about ‘real’ women, and thus ‘real’ rape.

This fixation on women as ‘real’ victims and heterosexual contexts as ‘real’ experiences of rape was brought up by Katie, who noticed on a feminist Facebook group a significant amount of transphobia directed towards non-cis-gendered women’s experiences of rape, which she found upsetting. Katie said that these attitudes were espoused by TERFs – or Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists – who historically have drawn on a biology-based and sex-essentialist way of framing gendered experiences of violence (Williams, 2016). Radical feminism is grounded in the belief that women’s subordination stems from patriarchal gender roles derived from biological sex differences (Echols, 1989). From a TERF perspective, masculinity, and by extension misogyny, is something learned, internalised and embodied by men, and therefore, transwomen can never know the lived experience of women’s oppression. In this sense, TERFs argue that transwomen do not experience rape in the same way that heterosexual or even lesbian women do because their embodied and political subjectivity has historically benefitted from masculine privilege. However, it is problematic to conflate ‘radical feminism’ with TERF politics (Williams, 2016). Radical feminists have also sought to disrupt the ways in which patriarchy and male dominance reduce women to a discrete biological category (see e.g. Catharine MacKinnon). In this sense, radical feminism has actively resisted sex essentialism as the defining categorisation of ‘women’ and paved the way for post-structuralist thinking around gender and sex as social constructions. Nonetheless, radical feminism remains poorly understood and has found itself aligned with the discourses of TERFs, who have become increasingly prevalent online, creating a further tension between the personal and the political with anti-rape activism, entrenching particular conditions around authentic rape scripts not only in relation to who can experience rape but who can judge the experience as credible. This issue was

noted by Katie, who said she did not think ‘cis-people have the right to make judgements about how ...’ ‘real’ ‘a transperson’s experience is’. Katie felt that the fighting that has ensued between some feminists about whether or not a transwoman can call herself a ‘woman’ or claim her experience ‘rape’, deflected feminist attention away from the real problem – that of misogyny, patriarchy, power and compulsory heterosexuality, which create the conditions that both enable and deny the existence of rape regardless of gender identity.

It was beyond the scope of this research project to investigate digital spaces where trans activism relating to sexual violence was taking place; however, given the issues highlighted above around TERFs and resistance to addressing the needs of trans victim-survivors’ experiences of rape, it is likely to be taking place in less visible spaces online. Moreover, as a cis-gendered heterosexual woman, I did not feel it was appropriate to approach activists working in this area without first establishing a strong rapport with those engaged in these digital spaces. Given the prevalence of violence in LGBTQ relationships and the persistent failure to effectively believe and support these individuals (Bedera & Nordmeyer, 2020; Guadalupe-Diaz, 2019), I regret this decision. However, I strongly advocate for further research to explore the ways in which digital spaces enable LGBTQ victim-survivors to connect as well as breakdown heterosexist and cissexist assumptions about rape and sexual assault (Mortimer et al., 2019). It is only through gaining a more thorough understanding of the complexities and dynamics underscoring all experiences of sexual assault that we can hope to address the problem – and this includes being more inclusive and diverse in the modes of recognition and representation of victim-survivor identities within activist spaces.

Conclusion

In many ways, this chapter has been primarily concerned with anti-rape activism’s relationship to feminism, and how this tension is negotiated in the case studies involved in this project through various modes of representation and engagement. Historically, anti-rape activists and scholars pushing the victim-feminism agenda have received a significant amount of criticism for framing rape victim-survivors as ‘victims through and through’ (Heberle, 1996, p. 75). This backlash was compounded by neoliberalism’s influence on therapy culture and carceral politics, splintering victimhood into two identities: the ‘good’ victim and the ‘bad’ victim, within law and popular culture (Stringer, 2014). The good victim, as I described above, squeezes ‘the complex ambiguities of coercive hetero sex into the binary, individuated logic of the consent/coercion dichotomy’ (Gotell, 2007, p. 142, see also Larcombe, 2002). Juxtaposed against the ‘good’ victim is the bad victim who supposedly seeks power through claiming a victimised identity status and blames others for their victimisation – namely patriarchy.

While they are not mutually exclusive identities, in this chapter I suggested that survivorship, or identifying as a survivor, is commonplace within anti-rape activism, even though, as Mardorossian (2002, p. 767) notes, being a ‘victim’ never meant powerlessness, but rather ‘a determined and angry (although not pathologically resentful) agent of change’. This has influenced the ways in which anti-rape

activists in these online campaigns have sought to resist and subvert the logics of 'good victimhood' at the level of the individual and the collective through a variety of discursive tropes.

At the level of the visual, a break has been made with historical representations of rape that focussed on the suffering caused by sexual violence, with the emphasis now on survivorship or being 'unbreakable'. However, juxtaposed against these shifts in representation remain few signs that the discourse has been transformative in the ways early activists might have envisioned. While there are indeed fewer triggering images, I suggested that there is an omnipresent abject residing in what is not visible, materialising in particular descriptions about rape. As such, trigger warnings have become commonplace to alert people to the potential harms imagining the abject may cause, but this seems to assume that victim-survivors are governed by their inner-turmoil and trauma. There has also been a shift away from a 'fighting' or militaristic response to rape, towards a more pragmatic or calculated one, at the expense of exerting an overt feminist agenda.

This chapter has also explored the place of men in these online spaces as both victim-survivors and activists. I indicated that there are some attempts to capture men's experiences of rape on *Project Unbreakable*, for example, and others see them as allies in preventing sexual violence. These anti-rape campaigns, however, seem to be reluctant to engage in conversations about sexual violence beyond the heterosexual matrix. While there is some truth in Angela's claim that LGBTQ victim-survivors have a specific set of needs requiring a certain skillset to understand and respond to their experiences, the decision not to represent the LGBTQ community results in the perpetuation of assumptions and representations about 'real' rape and 'real' women. This further reinforces problematic gate-keeping around containing the 'rape script', as I discussed in Chapter 4, whereby cis-gendered (and heterosexual) women remain the benchmarks for determining the credibility of victim-survivors and their experiences.

Under neoliberalism, rape has been cast as an individual problem – caused by the individual actions (or inactions) of victim-survivors who failed to protect themselves from being assaulted or the individual actions of offenders who are opportunistic, sick or deviant. Challenging these logics to examine the broader structural conditions under which survivors experience sexual violence, as well as the popular cultural narratives about 'real rape' and 'real' victims, is incredibly difficult. However, the campaigns run by Rape Crisis Scotland creatively achieve this through positioning women as autonomous agents who do not invite rape and in doing so expose the social and cultural logics that maintain 'rape myths' and victim-blaming attitudes. The modes of representation on *Project Unbreakable* too highlight the extent to which masculine privilege and entitlement operates in the context of rape, and point to the widespread acceptance of 'rape myths' in the community and within institutional contexts. In doing so, posts by survivors subtly highlight the operationalisation of power, both the institutional power expressed by police as the gatekeepers of recognition of experiences and that possessed by perpetrators to exercise various forms of power over survivors. Yet, while these victim-survivors are exceptionally brave and courageous for participating in *Project Unbreakable*, the project seems to be focussed on the impact rape has on an individual and their ability to 'survive'

and become ‘unbreakable’, rather than collective action aimed at challenging ‘rape culture’. In this sense, *Project Unbreakable* may be stuck in the ‘consciousness raising’ phase of activism (see Rosewarne, 2019); however, the affective political work being done by creating a community for healing should not be dismissed. Moreover, healing – as opposed to therapy – ought to be considered a radical political act in a culture that fails to recognise and honour the strength of women. As Page and Arcy (2019) argue about the #MeToo movement, ‘mass healing’ or collective healing is an affront to both the neoliberal discourses of individual empowerment as well as offers a critique of claims pertaining to carceral feminism’s emphasis on criminalisation. focussing on the sharing of experiences fosters collective support and a politics of care central to a transformative feminist agenda (Rentschler, 2017).

Bound up with these challenges surrounding representation as well as the responsibility for preventing rape is the contentious nature and discourse of feminism itself. In these digital spaces, the complexities of feminism manifest in two ways. First, in public perceptions of feminism and the claims made by feminists regarding the best way to represent victim-survivors and who counts as a legitimate victim-survivor and the targeting of men and masculinity as one of the causes of but also instrumental in the prevention of rape. Second, in the internal conflicts within these digital media campaigns surrounding the meaning, mobilisation and their relationship to feminism. I do not want to suggest that any of the approaches utilised by the case studies in this research project are right or wrong, nor do I wish to assert that a particular version or form of feminism may be used or expressed better in online anti-rape activism. Rather, what I claim is that the uptake and resistance to and the uptake of different ways of engaging with feminism reveal is the shifts inherent in the tension between the personal and the political and that happens within and external to anti-rape activism as activists seek to advance their agendas for change. In this sense, the critiques of anti-rape activism in relation to neoliberalism fail to account for the significant agency exercised by those who create and manage these spaces. They are taken up, resisted and manipulated in ways that reflect their own complex assumptions and knowledge about feminism and the history of anti-rape activism, as well as the agenda they wish to pursue. In the final substantive chapter of this book, I turn to how these challenges play out in relation to the potential of these online spaces to foster alternative pathways for victim-survivors seeking rape justice, as well as explore some of the ethical challenges that arise from the different justices practices engaged with in these digital spaces.

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Chapter 6

Justice Practices in Digital Spaces

Introduction

The normative processes undertaken by victims of rape seeking justice through the criminal justice system promises much – the power of the law and the criminal justice system’s capacity to establish the ‘truth’ promising retribution and punishment for the offender as well as the validation of victim-survivors’ experience may appear enticing. However, justice remains elusive if not impossible for many victim-survivors engaged with formal criminal justice proceedings (Henry et al., 2015). Conviction rates remain low, attrition rates high, and despite decades of law reforms in Western legal jurisdictions seeking to better support victim-survivors, address issues relating to the nature and expression of consent and amendments to the rules of evidence, these changes have been at best uneven and, at worse, have reinforced problematic attitudes about victims and offenders (Corrigan, 2013). Victim-survivors continue to report dissatisfaction with their treatment by the criminal justice system regardless of the outcome of a case; their needs are not adequately accounted for across all levels with the system (Clark, 2015; Daly, 2011; Herman, 2005; McGlynn, 2011).

Some feminist scholars have subsequently advocated for the need to explore alternative avenues for victim-survivors seeking justice, such as restorative justice (Daly & Stubbs, 2006; McGlynn, 2011), which seeks to address the harms of sexual violence in a non-adversarial setting but still operates in a way that requires some level of accountability on the part of the offender. Although victim-survivors report greater satisfaction with restorative justice processes than the adversarial system (Daly, 2017), between 80% and 90% of rapes and sexual assaults are never formally reported to police (Rotenberg, 2017). The reasons for choosing not to formally report are complex, with research indicating that these include shame and humiliation following a sexual assault, fear of revictimisation owing to police failure to take reports seriously or retaliation from the perpetrator (Heenan & Murray, 2006; Jordan, 2001, 2008; Rich & Seffrin, 2012). Victim-survivors’ decisions not to report are also determined by perceptions that the assault was not important enough to report or they do not want the perpetrator to get in trouble (Ceelen, Dorn, van Huis, &

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Reijnders, 2019). It is also clear from the previous chapters that issues pertaining to victim-blaming and rape myths strongly influence whether they will engage with the criminal justice system. In this sense, the law and the criminal justice system could conceivably characterised as ‘dressed-up justice’ (Cornell, 1990).

Given these persistent challenges faced by victim-survivors as well as the structural conditions of the law and the criminal justice system that perpetrate an adversarial approach to justice, this chapter explores some of the more creative ways in which anti-rape activists utilise digital spaces to engage in critiques of the criminal justice system as well as to seek rape justice. I position the notion of ‘justice’ in kaleidoscopic terms (McGlynn, Downes, & Westmarland, 2017), meaning that victim-survivors and activists interpret justice in a myriad of different ways and that the practice of justice takes on multiple forms – both legal and extra-legal. I begin this chapter with a reflection on the contentious relationship between feminist-inspired law reform, anti-rape activism and the criminal justice system, before moving into a discussion about alternative forms of justice beyond the realm of law taking place in these online spaces. I demonstrate that, to an extent, the online anti-rape campaigns can provide alternative forms of justice to the ‘normative’ channels within the criminal justice system. However, there was hesitancy from participants to refer to their actions online as an ‘alternative to proper, normal justice’ (Katie) because they did not want to strip the law of its power. Moreover, alternative forms of justice can potentially slide from the realm of the extra-legal to the illegal. I subsequently consider the ethics of some of the ‘justice practices’ happening in these online spaces. Specifically, I examine ‘naming and shaming’ in these online spaces as a form of justice and note some of the ethical dilemmas this kind of practice might create. Justice in this sense is only ever partial, evolving and contested (Fileborn, 2016; Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2020). As such, to conclude, I reflect on the extent to which these online spaces reveal the impossibility of justice when it comes to sexual violence given the enduring failures to acknowledge that the personal is political.

Carceral Feminism and Rape Law Reform

The criminal justice system occupies a position of significant importance when it comes to expressing the moral framework of society. Seeking justice for rape through the criminal courts therefore has the potential to signify and redefine normative standards of sexual behaviour (Larcombe, 2014). The law has the power to define the parameters of rape as a criminal act, and through this codification, the law conveys particular ideas about normal sexual behaviour against which experiences of rape are measured and judged. It is so deeply woven ‘into the fabric of society that most of us cannot envision what society would look like otherwise’ (Dasgupta, 2003, p. 15, also see Smart, 1989), yet the law is also the site of ongoing discursive struggles; it develops unevenly, is full of contradictions and is underscored by hegemonic norms and power relations (Smart, 1989). Thus, the law functions as a mechanism of social control, founded in patriarchal, racist, colonialist violence; blind to or ignorant of the violence upon which it is built (Cornell, 1990; Smart, 1989). The legal system is organised around an adversarial contest

through which the ‘truth’ is ascertained, yet in the context of sexual violence, the law fails to account for the unequal power between perpetrators and victim-survivors to the extent that it reproduces and reinforces the same dynamics of the initial assault (Herman, 2005, p. 574). Equality before the law is therefore a fiction, and the assumption and indeed expectation that law equates to justice perpetuates the ‘masquerade’ of law as a veiled form of violence (Cornell, 1990).

A key question for anti-rape activists and scholars therefore continues to be to what extent is it possible or even desired to obtain ‘justice’ for victim-survivors of rape, and gender equality more broadly, through the law? Although historical, anti-rape activism has been multifaceted and diverse, the seeming centrality of reforms to law and criminal justice institutions has led some scholars to believe that the movement has abandoned its original goals for social justice and change (see e.g. Bumiller, 2008). Accordingly, anti-rape activism and feminism more broadly has come to be associated with crime control and punitive punishment for perpetrators of rape (Bumiller, 2008). In addition, some scholars, such as Janet Halley (2006), are concerned with the impact of feminist calls for the legal regulation of sexual harms on women’s sexual agency and masculinity, particularly in the context of what is ascribed as ‘risky’ sexual behaviour (see also Matthews, 2019). Such critiques have also emerged in response to the #MeToo movement, whereby feminist activists, scholars and public commentators have argued that seemingly more ‘minor’ offences, such as sexual harassment, are now on par with ‘serious’ forms of sexual offending, specifically sexual assault and rape (Fileborn & Phillips, 2019). Accordingly, the flow on effects of #MeToo movement run the risk of criminalising innocent men for engaging in harmless flirtation and banter, and detract attention from both the ‘real’ victims and ‘real’ perpetrators of rape. These arguments mirror those of Katie Roiphe and other commentators who critiqued the ‘date rape’ discourse that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s.

In addition to these critics of carceral anti-rape activism, some scholars are equally critical of feminist-inspired rape law reform projects. Despite substantive changes to rape laws in many Western jurisdictions, law reform projects heralded by anti-rape activists have been described as ‘successful failures’ (Corrigan, 2013; Larcombe, 2011). Some of these ‘failures’ reside in law reform’s inability to lower attrition rates and increase convictions (Corrigan, 2013; Seidman & Vickers, 2005). Larcombe (2011, p. 27) argues, ‘rape law reform is not a feminist ‘success’ story’, because while law reform is an important pursuit for anti-rape activists, changes within the criminal justice system have not improved the overall treatment of victim-survivors. Others highlight the extent to which law reform projects have failed to challenge ‘rape culture’, which underscores many of the reasons why reporting, attrition and conviction levels remain unchanged, despite decades of activism (Gruber, 2009, 2016; Seidman & Vickers, 2005). In addition, ‘jurors, prosecutors and police are ambivalent about placing criminal sanctions on “non-violent” sexual assault ... (and) are very confused about the boundary line between sex and rape’ (Seidman & Vickers, 2005, p. 468, also see Gavey, 2005). Measuring the ‘success’ of rape law reform in terms of conviction rates is problematic, however; it assumes ‘success’ to be synonymous with ‘justice’ and

reinforces a law-and-order approach that espouses the punishment and imprisonment of the perpetrator. Such a framework fails to account for victim-survivor's justice needs and maintains the focus on stranger rape, which is typically, although not exclusively, violent (Larcombe, 2011).

While the debate among feminists about the usefulness of law to facilitate women's emancipation in particular is somewhat valid, they often cede 'to law the very power the law may then deploy against them' (Smart, 1989, p. 5). What Carol Smart means by this statement is that even in seeking to position the law and criminal justice entities as incapable of providing justice, they do not seem to decentre the law or its discursive and disciplinary power. This bind is particularly clear in anti-rape activism. As Tanya Serisier (2018) highlights, the relationship between the criminal justice system and anti-rape activism is highly paradoxical, despite the influence of anti-rape activism on law reform being considered the most successful project of feminism (Corrigan, 2013). On the one hand, anti-rape activism has exposed the legal fictions sounding the law's ability and capacity to judge the 'truth' of rape (Serisier, 2018, p. 48). At the same time that activists dispute the authority of the law to pronounce judgements about sexual violence, they simultaneously turn to it as the site of reform whereby a 'rewritten criminal justice discourse' is still deemed the most appropriate place to hear, evaluate, respond to and address sexual violence (see Brown, 1995; Serisier, 2005).

It is, of course, vital that feminists do not let the criminal justice system 'off the hook', holding it accountable for reinforcing myths and attitudes about rape, to ensure the grounds gained in the last 30 years are not rolled back (Munro, 2007, p. 72). Gotell (2015) advances this point, when she argues that while there are dangers involved for anti-rape activists engaging with neoliberal law-and-order politics, turning their backs on law reform would be detrimental to the movement. Specifically, abandoning the project of law reform would have the effect of re-privatising sexual violence and silencing the systemic nature of sexual violence (Gotell, 2015). Moreover, the rejection of law reform as a viable political and social project for anti-rape activists has not occurred in a vacuum; it is not so much that so-called governance feminism stands as a shining light of feminist achievements, but rather as a manifestation of one of neoliberal feminism's *uncanny doubles* (Fraser, 2009). Feminist 'gains' through rape law reform is not a reflection of a carceral feminist agenda, but rather is a product of the appropriation and manipulation of feminist discourses (Gotell, 2008). Moreover, feminist-inspired law reforms have been increasingly eroded by remapping neoliberalism's economic rationalism onto rape victim-survivors, whereby good sexual citizenship is afforded to those who take responsibility for their actions and the risks they take (Gotell, 2008, 2010). This increased 'rationalism' of rape victim-survivors within the criminal justice system has resulted in the continued denial of the systemic nature of sexual violence. While laws have changed to account for broader understandings of consent, trauma and coercion, victim-survivors' experiences are still scrutinised through their individual actions, not the actions of the perpetrator or broader social conditions that sustain gendered power relations (Gotell, 2015). In order to develop a more nuanced understanding of rape justice, what is needed are critical approaches to understanding the relationship between activists

and criminal justice responses to rape, as well as creative outlets for practices associated with victim-survivors seeking justice (Gotell, 2012; McGlynn, 2011).

Victim-centred Justice

This constant tension between feminist demands for rape justice and neoliberal law-and-order politics maintains the elusive nature of justice. Feminist scholars are thus increasingly exploring alternative approaches to the punitive criminal justice system for seeking rape justice for victim-survivors. To quote Maya from this project,

there are lots of different ways I think survivors can feel fairly treated or feel like justice has been served and it may or may not be in a court room.

As an alternative to normative criminal justice processes, many scholars advocate for engaging with and improving restorative justice, which is typically premised on victim's justice needs, such as control, voice, participation, validation, vindication and offender accountability in ways that are not possible in the adversarial criminal justice context (Clark, 2015; Daly, 2011, 2015; McGlynn, 2011). It is important to conceptualise these justice needs as fluid and mobile, and that their needs shift over time. In this sense, 'justice should be conceptualised as a situated, iterative and ongoing project: a process of becoming, rather than a single moment or achievement' (Fileborn, 2016, p. 4). In addition, focussing on victim-survivors' justice needs may help to strengthen a broader social justice agenda, which includes 'challenging conventional understandings of justice' and 'addressing system and social structures that reinforce victim-survivors' disempowered positions' (Clark, 2015, p. 33).

I conceptualise the spectrum of ways victim-survivors seek out justice in digital spaces as *justice practices*. These justice practices are founded on the principles of victim's justice needs, outlined above and enabled through the way innovative justice mechanisms, such as digital counter-publics, generate alternative avenues for victim-survivors to speak out about their experiences in a myriad of different ways (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2020). However, in addition to personal justice practices, these digital spaces also have a certain level of political potential insofar as they are also sites in which logics of victim-blaming are challenged, the impact of rape culture on perpetuating problematic assumptions about causes of rape is explored and structural conditions of women's sexual subordination are highlighted (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2020). Moreover, as I explore in this chapter, the criminal justice system is also critiqued for its role in denying victim-survivors access to traditional criminal justice channels – leading many survivors to turn to these creative digital spaces to speak out about injustice and the impossibility of justice.

One key feature of victims' justice interests include power and control over their narratives and their lives (Herman, 2005, p. 574), and online counter-publics can go some of the way to fulfilling these victim-survivor's justice needs (O'Neill, 2018; Powell, 2015; Wångren, 2016). This is reflected in how some participants' felt about

their own digital spaces as providing alternative forms of justice for victim-survivors. Maya, in particular, felt that the capacity to have a voice and control, as is enabled by these online spaces, was more powerful than participating in the criminal justice system – even when/if a guilty verdict is reached. In speaking about the potential of online spaces to giving victim-survivors a voice and control, Maya said:

There's some solace in that you're at least able to say that 'you know what, it may not be recognised in a court of law but I'm saying right now that that wasn't fair and that's not ok'. And I think there is value in that, I know there has been for me. Like no, *I don't even think even though I went through a trial what happened was necessarily fair or just and I don't think justice was served*. However, me being able to stand up over the last five years and say this happened to me and it's not o.k., and that I feel like that has given me strength and feeling heard than maybe any court of law too ... *Having that, that voice and that control over something, that makes a difference for a survivor*. (My emphasis)

Anna also felt that being able to participate in *Project Unbreakable* offered survivors a sense of justice in the form of control:

I can't speak for them [the survivors], but I like to think that many of the supporters have found a sort of sense of justice in participating. At least, justice for themselves. Even if posting their image doesn't 'punish the perpetrator', *they're doing it as an act of taking a stand taking back what belongs to them* – whether that be sense of security, pride, etc. (My emphasis)

Taking something back or taking a stand was also reflected in the survey, with one respondent stating that their reason for 'going online' to share their experience was because the police were unable to deliver formal justice. The response reads, 'The police didn't have probable cause to arrest my rapists, so I feel like this [sharing my experience online] is my way of doing something about it'. Using digital spaces to speak out about one's experience, coupled with Anna's suggestion that victim-survivors who participate in *Project Unbreakable* are able to ascertain 'justice for themselves' *practised* through 'taking a stand', facilitates the process of becoming 'unbreakable' which gives victim-survivors voice and (to some extent) control. In this sense, disclosing online is not only a form of activism that may be seeking to disrupt the normative scripts surrounding rape, as I discussed in Chapter 4, but is also mechanism of voice and control associated with victim-survivors' justice needs (Fileborn, 2014; 2016). This approach to seeking justice also rejects the carceral approach of punitive punishment for perpetrators.

In addition to these justice practices on an individual level, Anna spoke broadly about *Project Unbreakable* providing justice in the sense that it 'fights ignorance'; specifically:

Breaking down the mindset that some people still hold – whether it's that sexual assault isn't an issue, that people 'ask for it,' that men can't be sexually assaulted, that sort of thing.

In this sense, rape justice can be worked towards through consciousness-raising, thus going beyond individual claims of injustice or violence, into challenging deep-seated socio-legal assumptions about sexual violence. *Project Unbreakable* is therefore seeking justice in a political sense for the recognition of cultural attitudes that undermine survivors' experiences.

Responses to the survey also indicated that participants agreed to some extent that these online anti-rape campaigns provided a sense of justice: 17% of respondents felt these digital spaces bring justice to victim-survivors of rape, and 39% agreed that these online campaigns are successful in bringing about change because they provide an alternative route for justice that is not necessarily related to the legal system. In addition, a comment left on the survey about the blog *Herbs and Hags* suggested that the blog 'helps educate people about ineffective law enforcement'. In this sense, these spaces are also sites of critique towards the law as the gatekeeper of 'real' justice.

'Information' is another element identified as something victim-survivors seek as a form of justice, specifically information about the criminal justice system (Clark, 2010). 73% of people indicated in the survey that they participate in these online spaces to 'get information', although very few survey participants indicated that they sought 'legal advice' from these spaces, with only 6.7% of respondents suggesting they used these digital campaigns to obtain information pertaining to the criminal justice system. In fact, very few digital spaces offered any information about the legal system. Only the Rape Crisis Scotland campaigns contained sections on their websites about the criminal justice system, but this is not located on the campaign page specifically. However, one respondent to the survey regarding *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* indicated that 'There should be more information [available] for survivors about their legal options', indicating that victim-survivors want more information about criminal justice processes and their legal options in order to make better informed decisions about whether or not to report their experiences formally. The campaign *Not Ever* included a section on the website dedicated to discussing the law,¹ outlining the changes made to the (Scotland) Sexual Offences Act in 2009, which sets out for the first time what consent actually means under Scottish law. The *Not Ever* website also contains a section about 'Approaching the police'² for victim-survivors, highlighting the importance of reporting incidents as quickly as they feel able to, informing victim-survivors about how long it might take to make a report and suggesting victim-survivors have someone accompany them to the police station. However, only one person out of 32 different discussion threads on the entire *Not Ever* website publicly sought information about the criminal justice system

¹<http://www.notever.co.uk/the-law/>

²<http://www.notever.co.uk/the-law/approaching-the-police/>

to help them understand the law in order to make a decision about whether they should report their assault to police. ‘Aly’ started a discussion thread titled ‘I dnt understand the law’³ [*sic.*], in which she wanted to know if she could still make a complaint to the police when she had been raped 12 years prior, and because there were ‘so many blank bits’ in her story. Rape Crisis Scotland replied to ‘Aly’ encouraging her to report the rape to the police, despite the ‘blank bits’, and ‘Aly’ responded to let them know she had contacted her local crisis centre and had begun the process of engaging with the police. Thus, providing more information to victim-survivors about the law may help embolden them to engage with the criminal justice system, but the lack of focus on the criminal justice system disrupts assumptions that anti-rape activists are too focussed on a carceral agenda. This particular exchange also demonstrates the continued role and commitment crisis services play in supporting survivors through criminal justice process as, just as they did when they first began in the 1970s, as well as the impact digital communications technologies can have in connecting survivors to variety of services.

‘Naming and Shaming’ and Informally Reporting Rape

In addition to voice, control and information, scholars also cite offender accountability as a justice need of victim-survivors (Daly, 2011; Clark, 2010, 2015). One of the ways online anti-rape activists and victim-survivors have sought offender accountability is through a process known colloquially as ‘naming and shaming’. ‘Naming and shaming’, or ‘outing’ perpetrators of sexual violence through the disclosure of identifying personal information and traits, has been a tactic of anti-rape activists since at least the 1970s. Vigilante ‘rape squads’, for example, were known to spray paint ‘rapist’ on the property of suspected rapists or to distribute lists of known sex-offenders (Gavey, 2009). In the 1990s, women at Brown University in the United States began listing the names of perpetrators of rape in some women’s bathrooms on campus. The rationale behind ‘naming and shaming’ was largely to combat the failure or ineffective nature of official avenues for seeking justice, both in the criminal justice system and through the university’s poor reporting and response policies and procedures. The culmination of this list of sexual violence offenders

represents an interesting and innovative attempt to make survivor discourse public in such a way as to minimise the dangers of speaking out for survivors yet maximise the disruptive potential of survivor outrage. (Alcoff & Gray, 1993, p. 286)

In the same way that these online counter-publics are archives of victim-survivors’ testimonies or rape stories, they are also host to an ever-growing list of perpetrators of sexual violence. Forums such as *Yik Yak*, *Whisper*, *College Confessions* and other social network forums that are often institution-specific and ‘typically viewed as the backwaters of the internet’ are becoming increasingly popular spaces

³<http://www.notever.co.uk/have-your-say/drink/i-dnt-understand-the-law/>

to expose perpetrators of sexual violence, mostly to warn others about certain individuals – making these platforms a ‘21st-century spin on the “rape list”’ (Kutner, 2016, n.p.). Many of the posts to these digital forums are made anonymously and indicate that survivors are turning to these spaces because they have nowhere else to go, or because they do not feel comfortable reporting to an institution (Kutner, 2016). Not only are individual perpetrators ‘named and shamed’; targeted also are those who continue to undermine access to justice, such as the police or other non-legal institutions. Social media pages, such as Instagram, are also used to ‘shame’ perpetrators of online sexual harassment (Vitis & Gilmour, 2016), although such practices can have the effect of (re)responsibilising women as having to manage harassment (also see Milford, 2015).

Naming and shaming in digital spaces has become heavily scrutinised in the era of #MeToo, with many public commentators and judicial authorities concerned about the impact of women publicly accusing innocent men – or making defamatory statements without evidence or due process to support their claims (Fileborn & Phillips, 2019). Certainly, some individuals who spoke out in the wake of #MeToo in the Australian context suffered from significant public and legal backlash. Specifically, the victim-survivor who allegedly accused celebrated Australian actor, Geoffrey Rush, of sexual harassment while they co-starred in the Sydney Theatre Company’s production of *King Lear*.⁴ Although victim-survivors of rape have at times been called ‘vengeful’ for publicly calling out perpetrators of rape (Roiphe, 1993), there is very little evidence to suggest this is the case (Herman, 2005). In fact, research with victim-survivors indicates most seek ‘fair’ punishment and the opportunity for perpetrators to realise there are consequences for their actions, rather than wishing to publicly expose offenders or pursue punitive sanctions (Clark, 2015). Given that many victim-survivors are routinely let down by official reporting channels – whether they be associated with criminal justice or workplace reporting and support systems – ‘naming and shaming’ may actually be a last resort. When the criminal justice system, or other social institutions, has failed to listen to and provide ‘justice’ for victim-survivors – or at the very least recognise their experiences as legitimate – ‘naming and shaming’ may represent victim-survivors taking control under disempowering circumstances, and at the same time attempting to seek offender accountability and retribution (Salter, 2013).

Although ‘naming and shaming’ was not overtly prevalent within the case studies in this project, one person who filled out the survey suggested it was an appropriate response when victim-survivors had no other options. When asked about what more they think needs to be done to bring about social change and justice for victims of rape, they said, ‘[an] eye for an eye law. Name and shame’. However, Citron (2014, p. 118, cited in Jane, 2016, p. 7) argues, “naming and shaming” can become a one-way ratchet to degradation. It can spiral out of control with cyber mobs on both sides and no ability to control the damage’. Others have suggested

⁴I say ‘allegedly accused’ here because the Daily Telegraph named the victim-survivor without her consent or any concrete evidence that she had actually accused him of sexual harassment.

that ‘naming and shaming’ is only considered appropriate after a suspected person has been convicted of a crime, and only if it would potentially contribute to protecting the community for sex offenders (Dunsby & Howes, 2019). As such, publicly ‘naming and shaming’ was largely discouraged by interview participants in this project (see also Dunsby & Howes, 2019). *Project Unbreakable* in particular saw ‘naming and shaming’ as legally inappropriate and would reject submissions if they contained information that might identify perpetrators, as stated on the ‘Frequently Asked Questions’⁵ section of the website where they ask that, ‘there are no names on your poster’. Anna reiterated this point, stating:

The official submission criteria are that no names or initials can appear in the photo and that any quotes used must have quotation marks around them ... [And that] For liability reasons we cannot publish a story that is not submitted by the survivors themselves.

What is interesting is that while no one is directly named on the site, perpetrators are sometimes *indirectly* identified. For example, posts identify a spectrum of perpetrators that range from sports coaches, to family members such as uncles, fathers, stepfathers, brothers and mothers, to trusted family acquaintances including babysitters and neighbours, as well as intimately known offenders like ex-boyfriends, husbands, current partners or friends. Others simply refer to ‘my attacker’ or ‘my rapist’. The intimate naming of these offenders means that it is likely that people who know victim-survivors who have posted their stories to *Project Unbreakable* will potentially be able to identify those who are indirectly named on the site.

Some of the posts on *Project Unbreakable* reveal the ways in which not being able to name the perpetrator reinforces the silencing and secrecy associated with child sexual abuse. One post, for example, actually places the word ‘censored’ over the victim-survivor’s mouth, and in the text that accompanies her submission, where it would reveal the perpetrator’s name. The text reads, “‘Shhh. Don’t cry. You’ll wake your mother’”. My rapist ‘censored’. I was ten. It went on for two years’ [*sic.*]. It can be easily inferred from the ‘censored’ text that the victim-survivor is suggesting her father, stepfather or mother’s partner raped her. As such, it is not difficult to deduce from the submissions who some perpetrators are and indeed suggests that these justice practices of naming and shaming operate as informal reports of sexual assault.

Although confident there was no ‘naming and shaming’ on the Rape Crisis Scotland campaigns, Lynn said that the scope for them to take action against people exposing rapists and informally reporting was limited if they did, largely because of the veil of anonymity. She said:

In the comments, we wouldn’t necessarily know who they were or even necessarily where they were so we might not even be able to (know who or where they are) ... Generally, when people are putting comments on the website, we don’t have any recourse.

⁵<http://projectunbreakable.tumblr.com/post/18913383586/faq>

Other spaces, though, did directly ‘name and shame’ perpetrators. Katie named one of the people who raped her and referred to another by a pseudonym. Not only did she name the perpetrator, but she also stated his age (at the time of the assault) and where he lived (also at the time of the assault). This kind of information is more than claiming one’s experience as rape through speaking out, but rather seeks to document in detail information about the perpetrator and the offence itself tantamount to an informal report of rape. The public outing of the perpetrator and the description of the incident offer up information similar to that which would be requested in a formal report and interview with the police, as well as informal police reporting options, such as the alternative reporting options available in some UK, US and Australian jurisdictions (Heydon & Powell, 2018). In fact, many of the posts on Katie’s blog from other victim-survivors offered rich descriptions about their sexual assaults that contain sufficient information to constitute a formal statement for a police investigation.

I asked Katie why she provided such a detailed description of the offence and the offender, to which she replied:

If there’s somebody else – if this guy made a habit of this – and somebody else read it and thought ‘well I was raped by a “Damian” from Bagshot’, I want her to know that it happened to somebody else as well.⁶

Thus, Katie’s initial rationale for naming ‘Damian’ on her blog was because if other women had been raped by the same person, then there was documented evidence of the event. In some ways, her actions reflect what Clark (2015, p. 30) calls a ‘community safety’ approach to justice, whereby victim-survivors sometimes formally or informally report to protect others by preventing further sexual offending by the perpetrator, or, as Katie’s actions more specifically reveal, to validate and legitimize the experiences of other victim-survivors. I asked Katie about the legalities of her ‘naming and shaming’ ‘Damian’, and if she thought this was an impactful alternative justice practice considering she never reported her experience to the police. Katie said, ‘he’s not somebody that I know anymore ... I don’t know if I feel like ‘haha that told you!’ because he’s never going to read my blog, you know?’ In this sense, Katie’s comment indicates that naming perpetrators online is not necessarily about shaming them – although it does suggest that vindication or punishment for offenders remains a significant justice need for victim-survivors and subsequently highlights some limitations of these online activist spaces to provide informal justice for victim-survivors (Powell, 2015). For instance, offender accountability is something these online publics cannot provide, as it is unlikely that perpetrators are also going online to express remorse, or acknowledging they have raped someone. Even if they were, perpetrators are almost always reluctant to accept

⁶While Katie uses his real name on her blog, ‘Damian’ is the pseudonym I have assigned to him.

responsibility for their actions or acknowledge that they have raped someone, even if they have been found guilty (Boyd & Bromfield, 2006).

Despite the little room for accountability in these online anti-rape activist spaces, Angela felt that they nonetheless functioned like a ‘court of public opinion’, especially when people like Bill Cosby and Harvey Weinstein are outed in incredibly public ways. While these spaces might not be able to provide individuals with ‘real’ justice, when (alleged) perpetrators are exposed, social media demonstrates how ‘communities [can] shun people’. In doing so, Angela said it ‘bursts it [rape] into the open ... And it *at least* gets people to think about it’. Hypatia, however, was not convinced that these online spaces could provide some semblance of justice for victim-survivors, stating that there could be never be justice for rape victim-survivors because the system is fundamentally antagonistic towards women. Rather than speaking about online spaces offering victim-survivors of rape an alternative or innovative form of justice, Hypatia said they provided validation; specifically, she said, ‘I wouldn’t call it justice but validation’. Hypatia argues that the law continues to focus on the ‘good’ victim of rape, and added:

[I] think that women have to accept that in this society *there is no justice for rape unless you fit that very specific little criteria* and even then there isn’t [justice] quite often. (My emphasis)

Certainly, ‘naming and shaming’ for Katie was about validating her experience and the experiences of others, rather than seeking offender accountability or retribution. Katie emphasised that the possibility of having someone come across her blog to say they had also been raped by ‘a Damian from Norwich’,⁷ would help validate her own experience because ‘even now I *doubt myself so much* [that it didn’t happen]’ (Katie’s emphasis). Although Katie did mention that she felt ‘victims of sexual violence are being so horrifically let down by the official routes’, she cautioned against the use of ‘naming and shaming’ online as a justice practice:

It’s tricky because if we’re not careful we’re talking about vigilante mobs aren’t we? ... It’s not really a *safe* means of getting justice, because at least with the criminal justice system, for all its flaws, it theoretically holds people accountable for their actions afterwards. (My emphasis)

While Katie was certain that ‘naming and shaming’ ‘Damian’ would not result in any serious repercussions, she highlighted the way that, even indirectly, ‘naming and shaming’ could have consequences. She discussed, for example, her experience of sexual abuse as a child, and the possibility of the perpetrator being identifiable in a blog post titled ‘1988; 2006’.⁸ When I interviewed Katie, she had

⁷I have also changed the name of the town Damian came from.

⁸<http://notmysecrets.blogspot.com.au/2015/02/1988-2006.html>

not yet published the story out of fear that the perpetrator might be identifiable. Shortly after speaking with me, she did publish it. On the blog post, Katie gives a pseudonym rather than the actual name of the person who abused her as a child – ‘Jill’ – to protect her identity. However, in the interview, Katie talked about how other elements in the story, such as a description of the house in which the sexual abuse took place, might be identifiable to others reading the blog who know her or the area well, which was holding her back from publishing the post. Similar to her post about being raped by Damian, Katie’s post about being sexually abused by Jill offers a rich description and account of events that would be tantamount to details collected in a formal interview report with police. When Katie did release the story online, she also posted a picture of the gate leading to the perpetrator’s house, with the street number on it. Katie said:

It’s a small town, there will be people who will read that post and go ‘oh my god I can’t believe that she did that!’ ... There will be people who will know who I’m talking about.

However, Katie expressed less fear that people might find out the identity of her abuser and the potential backlash, disbelief or denial of her experience and more concern for her own safety that ‘Jill’ might ‘set fire to my house’, and I return to this issue of safely online shortly. Katie also feared that publishing her own, or the stories of others that directly or indirectly identify the perpetrator, might undermine ‘real’ justice processes. Specifically, Katie was concerned that she might be accused by the police of lying or falsely accusing ‘Jill’ of sexually abusing her, should she choose to report the incident one day. There are some studies that show informal reports of rape in digital spaces being subpoenaed as evidence in defamation legal cases and used against survivors (see Salter, 2013), although it remains unclear whether these informal reports have or may be useful for police and the prosecution in gathering evidence for criminal justice trials as documented evidence to support survivors’ stories. If mobile phones and email accounts can be called for forensic examination as evidence, then blog posts and other forms of social media used to informally report perpetrators can and will be used, and the success of its use may largely be determined by the social standing, credibility and consistency of the narrative told by the victim-survivor (Salter, 2013).⁹ Thus, in ‘naming and shaming’ perpetrators online, victim-survivors of

⁹For example, Salter (2013) notes that while Savannah Dietrich, who was the survivor in the highly publicised Steubenville Ohio rape case, was permitted to speak out and was successful in securing a harsher sentence for the perpetrators, her status as a white, middle-class, well-supported victim-survivor arguably made her actions more conducive to obtaining recognition. In contrast with Savannah, Salter discusses of the case of ‘Georgia Grimes’, who established a blog in 2005 in which she claimed to have been gang-raped by the ‘Brothers’ of the Theta Chi fraternity at Georgia Tech University in the early 1960s. On the blog, Georgia described the assault in detail; however, she also posted the full name and graduation details of the perpetrators of the gang rape so that

sexual violence may inadvertently weaken their own cases from a legal perspective if they then choose to formally report their experiences.

Digital Ethics and Victim-Survivor Safety Online

Although I would caution the use of naming offenders online, we might read the naming and shaming, as well as informal reporting of rape, as a form of ‘digilantism’ – a term used to describe the various ways in which feminist-activists engage in ‘DIY justice online’ (see Jane, 2016; Nakamura, 2014, p. 263). However, as Katie highlighted above, online justice mechanisms may undermine due process within the criminal justice system. Although adverse legal action is less likely to be brought against someone like Katie, because neither she nor her contributors are so forthcoming as to directly identify their perpetrators and she has a very small audience of followers, the legal ramifications for ‘naming and shaming’ online are not inconsequential.¹⁰ In addition, there are ethical ramifications for when victim-survivors may also be identifiable. In the context of the criminal justice system, name suppression is often in place to protect both the victim as well as the perpetrator. Most jurisdictions in the United States subscribe to the idea that they need to ‘protect’ the victim-survivor’s identity from the public (Orenstein, 2007). In some instances where the victim’s name has been released to the public, especially high-profile cases, victims have faced a significant amount of backlash and disbelief (Orenstein, 2007). Maya and I discussed ‘naming and shaming’ with respect to ethical questions regarding the protection of both perpetrators and victims. Maya suggested the name suppression of both the victim and the perpetrator only contributes to the silencing discourses that surround sexual violence, and that it is important to put ‘people’s faces and names to an actual event or crime’. For Maya, putting one’s real name into the public sphere as a victim-survivor of rape breaks with the rules of the procedural justice framework and may help to empower survivors to speak out. Therefore, using your ‘real’ name online is another way of taking back elements of power and control that the adversarial criminal justice system denies. However, most people in the online spaces in these case studies did not use their ‘real’ names when speaking out, opting instead for the protection afforded by anonymity. Indeed, as Lynn suggested, anonymity online offers victim-survivors a level of protection from retribution:

Being online is a way of allowing people to stay a bit remove[d] ... They can do it as and when they want to, and under an assumed name ... So it offers a level of protection.

they would be identifiable. Georgia went on to describe how powerless she was to seek justice when the men who perpetrated the violence were able to hide behind their fraternity, and the Statute of Limitations in the United States further prevented her from seeking support from the criminal justice system. She was threatened with legal actions from those she named on the blog and was forced to shut the blog down in 2013.

¹⁰See above note about Georgia.

In this way, people can speak out without having to be identifiable themselves. Kelly echoed this perspective, stating, 'it feels safer [sharing your experience online] ... even if that's not always true [because] there can be anonymity if you want it'. The anonymity of the online space thus provides a buffer for victim-survivors to speak their truths even when they fear retribution or backlash offline.

Despite the 'protection' afforded by online anonymity, safety remained an issue for activists in these online anti-rape spaces – as Katie said above, she was afraid 'Jill' might come and burn down her house if she found out she'd named her as a perpetrator of sexual abuse on her blog. While 69% of survey participants felt 'safe' using these online spaces, 25% said they only felt safe 'sometimes', and 4% indicated they did not feel safe at all. When answering the question 'what causes you to feel unsafe using these online spaces', one survey respondent indicated they had found men posing as women in order to harass victim-survivors, or that ex-partners who had abused them would find out they were using online spaces to tell people they had been raped (and feared retribution). Specifically, their response to the question reads:

I have found two men posing as women join the rape group I'm part of and attack the victims ... I'm always worried my ex-boyfriend might anonymously join my group to monitor or harass me.

In a similar vein, a different respondent to the same survey question indicated that 'you truly never know who is watching'. Thus, personal safety online for victims sharing their stories, or people engaged in these counter-publics, is an important issue but is not something that can be easily monitored and is an increasing issue with the widespread prevalence of technology facilitated violence and abuse online experienced by women and the LGBTQ community (Powell & Henry, 2017).

Kelly was also concerned about her safety. Writing her blog was a way of working through why she was raped, and while Kelly said she felt safe to discuss her experience online, she was very intent on making herself and the perpetrator anonymous, so she did not set herself up for 'any sort of retaliation'. However, she also saw her own 'retaliation' or vindication as being able to speak. For example, when the Dean of her Law School refused to get involved in the case, she wrote to him saying that she had a 'blog called *Yes We Speak* and it's about speaking up [about rape]' as a way of demonstrating that she will not remain silent on the issue.

The fear of being identifiable was also felt by Hypatia, although it was less about the perpetrator of her assault finding out and more about being 'outed' to her work colleagues and family, because they might think she was 'awful' for calling out 'rape culture' or identifying as a feminist. However, Hypatia added:

The longer you do it, the more likely you are to be outed, the more likely you are to lose your anonymity and that is a big consideration for me [in terms of how long she keeps working on the blog].

This also raises ethical issues about the potential for interview participants in this study to be identifiable by virtue of participating in the research (see also Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019, on this point in relation to their study). When I asked Lynn if it was OK for me to refer to the campaign and organisation without de-identifying them, she said, ‘we’re not ashamed of it’ – in fact, all the campaigns, as I highlighted in the introduction, were happy for me to identify their spaces or campaigns so long as interviewees were assigned pseudonyms. This is not the same, however, as identifying personally as a rape victim-survivor. Given the extent to which trolls seek to undermine victim’s testimonies, a pervasive culture of denial when it comes to the prevalence of rape, and the insidious assumptions that victims are ‘lying’ in their claims making, or resentful and out to seek revenge – anonymity provides more personal protection against backlash.

The Impossibility of Justice

There is a real fear that ‘outing’ perpetrators online may result in further victimisation, if the perpetrator were to find out they have been ‘named and shamed’. Victim-survivors are thus caught in a bind that seeks to maintain their silence – not only about their experiences, but to cover up the extent to which institutionalised patriarchy (and heteronormativity) governs the recognition of rape as a social and cultural problem. What is needed in order to change this, according to one survey participant in response to the open-ended question, ‘what more needs to be done to bring about social change and justice for victim-survivors of rape’, is

[A] Radical overhaul [of the] male supremacist legal system which was created by men for men. Women’s experience of male sexual violence continue to be defined and or interpreted from the male standpoint. Male sexual violence against women is a global issue because males continue to hold socio economic and political power over women. Men believe their male lived experiences are the supposedly generic human standpoint which totally erases women’s lived experiences. End male supremacist political systems [*sic.*].

The above comment reflects the view that the law is ‘dress-up’ justice, insofar as it uses the popular hermeneutic or rhetoric of justice to hide or masque its violent foundation (Cornell, 1990). It is not only that violence masquerades as law, with the law masquerading as justice and justice masquerading as violence, making it a self-referential system, or the law’s capacity ‘for self-conserving repetition’ (Cornell, 1990, p. 1055), but also that patriarchal discourse is masquerading as ‘truth’. Thus, the ‘mystical’ foundation of the law as justice needs to be erased, exposed and transformed. This includes accounting also for the ways these foundations intersect with and are a product of colonialism, racism, heterosexism and capitalism.

The criminal justice system nonetheless remains the yardstick for measuring ‘real’ justice, despite the enthusiasm for alternative justice practices in digital spaces. The following descriptive and quote from Kelly not only highlights how a cultural fixation on crime, justice and punishment reinforces our continual

investment in the law for fulfilling the promise of justice but also points to the impossibility of ‘real’ justice when it is not achieved. Initially, Kelly expressed law reform as the most appropriate avenue for engendering justice for victim-survivors of rape; however, when I asked her if she thought there might be some scope for alternative justice practices online, she admitted this would be the first time she had ever questioned the limitations of the criminal justice system. Kelly stopped and questioned herself during the interview: ‘maybe I should be asking myself if the criminal justice system is where we find the justice? ... I don’t think that for most cases ... that it is’. From here, Kelly went on to underscore the impossibility of justice – if the criminal justice system cannot fully provide justice for victims of rape, then what is the alternative? Kelly stated:

You’re stuck in this place where you have to find the quote-unquote justice from other places but ... we’re in this society where we think a crime happened to me, I reported it, justice should be done – that’s what we’re taught. And when it doesn’t happen it just doesn’t compute, so it doesn’t make sense at the same time to look for quote-unquote ‘justice’ in other places when it’s supposed to come from this one place. But I think we need to start doing that because ... I think that the changes that need to happen are going to take a very long time.

Kelly’s comment not only evokes *the differend* (Serisier, 2018; Stringer, 2013) and *epistemic injustice* (Alcoff, 2018 - see Chapter 3) when the law fails to recognise someone as a victim and thus denies them access to justice and recognition. However, her comment also speaks to Carol Smart’s point discussed at the beginning of this chapter about the need to resist the hegemony of law as justice. Thus, what Kelly is pointing to is the impossibility of justice, specifically the failure of the law to provide justice and therefore the need to find other ways to practise justice.

This impossibility of justice is also reflected in other spaces, in particular, *Project Unbreakable*, where a number of those posting to the site talk about the problems they faced when reporting their rapes to the police or their engagement with other aspects of the criminal justice system. Posters displaying comments from the police such as ‘What were you wearing? Why didn’t you fight him off or scream? Do you usually have guys over?’ are a common theme throughout the submissions on *Project Unbreakable*. Police comments often perpetuate myths that women in consensual romantic relationships cannot be raped, as evidenced in this post: ‘The officer told me that I had no physical proof or photos and we were dating. Called it a domestic dispute and wrote me off’. This sample of examples exposes the extent to which victim-blaming and other ‘rape myths’ are rife, even at the first level of engagement within the criminal justice system. The lack of credibility victim-survivors have when reporting their crimes, which perpetuates the assumption that women lie about rape, is also evident on *Project Unbreakable*, with comments such as this taken from the police: ‘well, we asked him and he didn’t rape you, so there’s nothing we can do’. In this example, the

perpetrator's version of events is privileged over the victim-survivor's invalidating her experience and denying them access to justice. Other posts include responses from more senior gatekeepers within the criminal justice system demonstrating the limitations of that system, which subsequently place justice out of reach, with one victim-survivor posting: 'the district attorney said she couldn't file my case because it happened over a year ago ... I can't even file a restraining order'.

Anna reinforced *Project Unbreakable's* capacity to highlight this impossibility of justice:

A very popular trend [in the posts] is the criminal justice system's negative impact on survivors when they are looking for help. To have a system that is supposed to protect and help you, disregard you instead, can be very isolating ... [So] it's not always about the incident itself – many times it's about what the cops or judges have said afterwards that hit them hard.

Anna's comments here reflect what Kelly said earlier about the feelings experienced when the criminal justice system fails – that it is impossible to comprehend why, because of our investment in the system to deliver justice, as I mentioned at the beginning of this chapter. Reporting to the police is then therefore largely rare because victims are afraid they will not be believed, as many of the posts on *Project Unbreakable* indicate and because the system routinely subjects victim-survivors to secondary victimisation, engendering a distrust of the law as the site in which justice may be done. The impossibility of justice brought about by a suspicion of the system is also evident on the *Herbs and Hags* blog, where Hypatia discusses in many posts the extent to which 'rape culture' influences police perceptions of rape and subsequently their willingness to take on cases. Hypatia also points to the ways in which public institutions and systems, such as the media and the criminal justice system, work together to create an environment that is fundamentally against women, seeking to silence their voices by telling them: 'don't you dare seek justice. Don't you dare call the men who raped you to account for it!'

In addition to discussions about distrust and the failure of the criminal justice system to respond to rape and sexual violence, these online anti-rape activist spaces are also engaged in discussions about why victims choose not to report their rapes, much of which reflects fears that the criminal justice system will not hear and respond to their complaints. On Hypatia's blog post, 'How I became a rape victim', some of the commenters suggested that she should report the rape to the police. However, Hypatia pointed out that because her experience epitomises the 'grey area' of rape (in which her rape looked more like sex), and happened so long ago, that it would be 'pointless'. Hypatia suggested to me in her interview that the perpetuation of the 'grey area' of rape maintains a culture of silence that seeks to punish victims for seeking justice, rather than helping them. Hypatia said that the online hate campaign against the woman who was (allegedly) raped by Ched Evans sent a clear message to anyone who has ever been raped that they should say silent. Katie also expressed a similar attitude about why she did not report her own experiences to the police, stating a fear that she would not be

believed and pointing to the fact that it was often the victim-survivor who came on trial, as opposed to the perpetrator:

I have never been to the police about anything that's ever happened to me ... [even] if now I were to be raped or something would I go to the police? I probably wouldn't, and I feel really bad saying that because if somebody came to me and said they'd been raped I do, I would say 'you should go to the police'. But the idea of you know potentially not being believed ... It so often seems when things are reported, it seems that it's the women who's you know ... is on trial rather than the perpetrator. And that's so wrong ... Not only do we have to prove that the perpetrator did actually commit rape, we also have to prove that the woman is not a slag.

Thus, the continued cultural investment in, yet simultaneous distrust of, the law presents a paradox about justice: if it is not through the criminal justice system that justice is to be found, where is it? Moreover, if it is through the criminal justice system that justice is to be found, what should that justice look like – given the critiques of feminist-inspired law reforms that seem to fuel the perception that feminists (and rape victim-survivors more specifically) are vindictive and vengeful, seeking punitive punishment for the wrongs they have suffered? On her blog post 'Locking up Drunk Young Men',¹¹ Hypatia states that when feminists argue that rape should not go unpunished, specifically in the context of date rape:

We're accused of wanting to lock up innocent young men who were merely doing what is normal in hook-up culture and even that we want to stop empowered young women going out and getting their jollies on a Saturday night with fun no-strings sex with randoms.
(My emphasis)

Yet Hypatia disputes the claim that feminists are driven by a desire for 'prosecutorial power' – as Gruber (2007, p. 585) suggests – who want to lock up rapists for engaging in supposedly 'risky' sexual behaviour. Contra to claims that anti-rape activists, through law reform projects in particular, seek to regulate sexual behaviour, Hypatia states on her blog: 'women aren't stupid and malicious and they know the difference between drunk sex that they're embarrassed about the next day and non-consensual sex'. In other words, Hypatia is reiterating the importance of privileging victim-survivors as the theorists of their own experiences (Alcoff & Gray, 1993). Hypatia also resists reinforcing neoliberal governance ideas that seek to regulate women's behaviour in order to prevent rape, by emphasising in the same post the importance of prioritising 'women's bodily integrity over men's boners'. Hypatia suggests in her post that:

¹¹<http://herbsandhags.blogspot.com.au/2015/01/locking-up-drunk-young-men.html>

Wider society simply doesn't want to address the question of male entitlement to women. It is more horrified by the idea of locking up men for using hook-up culture to get away with rape, than it is about them raping women ... We'd rather they carried on raping.

Because of the resistance to the use of carceral punishment as tantamount to 'rape justice', Hypatia suggests that preventative strategies for rape that seek to dispel cultural and social attitudes about men's sexual entitlement and access to women's bodies are the most effective long-term approaches to ending rape. Ultimately, it will be shifting attitudes about sexual violence, and changes in cultural and social understandings about gender and sexuality rather than reforms within the criminal justice system that will bring about rape justice (Stubbs, 2003). This speaks more broadly to the project of women's liberation seeking gender justice, not just rape justice. This utopian vision for gender justice was reiterated in my interview with Hypatia where she stated:

We need to reduce the numbers before we can have justice, we need to reduce the numbers of men who rape but don't call it rape, because of course most rapists don't think they're rapists do they?

In this way, a response to the impossibility of justice in these online counter-publics is education – educating people not just about the impact of rape but also about some of the *causes* of rape. Specifically, underscoring the extent to which women (and some men) are all subjected to certain governance structures which seek to undermine their social and political autonomy (or, more plainly, to 'rape culture'). And yet, Hypatia notes the impossibility of justice in a cultural sense too, stating that 'all this' – that is, her suggestions for shifting people's consciousness with respect to men's entitlement to women, and sociocultural attitudes about 'the ownership and purpose of women's bodies', and our relationship to sex – 'is long-term. We can't do it overnight'. Justice is thus always something 'still to come'; something *imagined* to occur in the future, as anti-rape activists envisioned when they first began organising more formally in the 1970s. In this sense, Hypatia's quote that 'when it comes to rape, not much has changed for women in nearly three decades', with which I began this book, is correct – although as I have illustrated throughout this book, activists engage in multiple different strategies to resist, navigate and negotiate the external as well as internal limitations that seek to silence their claims.

Conclusion

The fixation on the criminal justice system in prosecuting sexual violence has overshadowed feminist visions of social (and gender) justice (Ptacek, 2010). Real changes in the prevalence and response to sexual violence are dependent on shifts in social values about gender and sexuality, rather than a reliance on the criminal justice system (Stubbs, 2003). In other words, the criminal justice system is only one avenue and a tenuous one at best, when it comes to seeking justice.

Challenging conventional understandings of justice, as well as integrating the needs of victim-survivors in justice discourse, may help to create new pathways for responding to sexual violence.

In this chapter, I have suggested that using a victim-centred approach to justice for victim-survivors is useful in conceptualising the possibilities that online spaces foster for providing alternative, or informal justice, for victim-survivors, specifically voice, validation, control and information (see Clark, 2010, 2015; Daly, 2011, 2015). However, I have also cautioned against calling these elements ‘justice’ insofar as my participants were hesitant to refer to them as such. This was largely due to the criminal justice system remaining the yardstick against which ‘justice’ was judged and the impossibility of attaining rape justice, given the extent to which the law is inherently violent towards women. Although emphasis was placed on the shortcomings of the criminal justice system and its inability to effectively prosecute sexual violence or treat victim-survivors with respect, Katie in particular was concerned that online ‘digilante’, or DIY justice might undermine ‘real’ justice processes, despite having ‘named and shamed’ two perpetrators of rape on her blog. I have also highlighted issues pertaining to safety as expressed by interviewees and survey respondents in engaging in these online spaces. Furthermore, I have explored how, in many ways, these online anti-rape campaigns highlight the impossibility of justice insofar as they point to the problems inherent in the criminal justice system.

Ultimately, and in retrospect, much of the focus of this book has been on the alternative ways in which activists and survivors seek out justice online in response to the ways in which the criminal justice system and society, more broadly, actively deny victim-survivors of rape recognition or reject claims about rape culture as being a significant contributing factor to the causes of rape. Through consciousness-raising and speaking out in digital networks, activists and survivors have sought to highlight the prevalence of rape and sexual violence, as well as the personal and political causes (and costs) of that violence. However, ‘justice’ was positioned as something unobtainable. Although Hypatia suggested that these online spaces offer victim-survivors, in particular, with ‘validation’, this was not the same as ‘justice’, because justice itself could only manifest when men stopped raping women. In this sense, Hypatia envisioned rape justice as ‘gender justice’ – as something political rather than personal. In essence, justice would be the point at which women no longer experience rape, and attitudes towards sexual entitlement and women’s bodies had changed. As a blog post by Hypatia reveals, this kind of collective justice is impossible; it is always yet to come.

So, if justice is something impossible to achieve, what does this mean for the future of anti-rape activism in digital spaces? And how might this tension between the personal and the political in terms of rape justice unfold moving forward in a post-#MeToo world? I now turn to the conclusion of this book where I outline some of the key issues moving forward for sustaining an agenda for change as well as networks of support for anti-rape activism in the age of digital media.

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Conclusion: The Future of Anti-Rape Activism

Introduction

In the time since this project was completed, rape and sexual violence has occupied a significant position on the public agenda, with digital media playing a vital role in not only bringing the issue into the public sphere but also sustaining the conversation. The #MeToo movement, which emerged in October 2017, was quickly followed by the #TimesUp movement seeking to address the prevalence of sexual assault and harassment in Hollywood. One year after #MeToo began trending on Facebook and Twitter, the hashtag #WeBelieveHer became popular following the appalling treatment of Dr Christine Blasey Ford, who accused then-US Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh of sexually assaulting her when she was 15 years old. Beyond the confines of North America, a plethora of other popular digital campaigns – some inspired by #MeToo, others more reflective of their local contexts – have emerged and garnered significant support around the world.

Shortly before I submitted this manuscript for publication, the Weinstein Trial began. Images circulated around the world of a ‘broken man’ using a walking frame to shuffle in and out of court. Multiple survivors took the stand in court to testify to the abuse and violence they experienced from him, and he was eventually convicted of rape in the third degree and a criminal sex act in the first degree (Pierson, 2020). Despite the multitude of survivors who spoke out at the time the #MeToo hashtag was trending and impact this had on compelling submerged online networks into action, it is the outcome of his trial that the ‘success’ of the #MeToo movement has been publicly judged (Pierson, 2020). Subsequently, the broader agenda and effects of the #MeToo movement – however loosely defined or impactful they have been – have been considered ‘complete’ or at least positioned as partially victorious (Pierson, 2020). However, for most survivors and activists, the fight is far from over. This is why it is so important to continue to explore the sites of resistance that exist outside of moments of mass protest or response and to critically examine the ways in which these digital spaces are engaged in making the personal political, as I have done in this book.

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I have argued that online spaces are useful tools for furthering anti-rape politics, highlighting a spectrum of digital media campaigns engaged in anti-rape activism to unpack and explore the nuances and complexities associated with engaging and sustaining these projects beyond moments of mass mobilisation and high-profile cases. Drawing on the rich and complex history of anti-rape activism dating back to the 1970s, this book has illustrated the ways in which these digital projects engage with the politics of the personal in the face of critiques pertaining to carceral feminism and neoliberalism. I have demonstrated the various ways those involved in these online anti-rape campaigns attempt to be heard, seen and believed from forming anti-rape networks through consciousness-raising, fostering peer-to-peer witnessing, to broadening the modes of representation and offering alternative pathways for practising justice. In doing so, I have highlighted the ways these online anti-rape spaces are continuously oscillating between – and attempting to reconcile – the personal and the political in the age of digital media. What has emerged from this project is a complex reading of the nature, use and scope of online spaces for anti-rape activism. While small in scale, this book points to both the potentials and limitations of these online anti-rape activist spaces and depicts a nuanced reading of anti-rape activism that is not inherently a reflection of a carceral or neoliberal feminist agenda. Rather, it is broad and multifaceted, with activists engaging with and navigating these challenges in complex and creative ways that also reveal the precarity and porous nature of digital feminism.

While #MeToo has changed the landscape of digital feminist activism, it could not have done so without activists like the case studies involved in this book, paving the way for it to emerge. In other words, the case studies presented in this book highlight the significant contribution digital submerged networks play in facilitating moments of mass mobilisation, sustaining consciousness-raising and supporting victim-survivors long after rape and sexual violence are off the public agenda. Therefore, in concluding this book, I wish to reflect on some of the overarching dynamics that have been salient across the chapters before turning to the impact of the #MeToo movement and the future of anti-rape activism. I first draw attention to the notion of ‘authenticity’ in these online anti-rape campaigns through their attempts to articulate and broaden what rape looks like and who can assume the identity of a ‘real’ rape victim, followed by a discussion about the ways these spaces seek to curate particular anti-rape messages. Second, I reflect on the persistent onus on women to take responsibility for being raped, highlighting the pervasive undertones of the ‘personal responsibility’ discourse associated with neoliberalism, as well as the enduring challenges faced by activists and crisis services to move beyond rape as ‘women’s problem.’ Finally, in concluding this book, I reflect on the future of anti-rape activism in a post-#MeToo world. Drawing on the analysis conducted throughout this book, I consider on the challenges, complexities and opportunities for anti-rape activism and the enduring role of digital media in navigating the personal and the political.

Curating Authenticity in Online Anti-Rape Activism

In many ways, the case studies in this book have been heavily concerned with the notion of ‘authenticity.’ One of the key challenges for feminist activists creating content in digital environments is the balancing act required in developing

a particular individualised brand and advancing a collective political agenda (Banet-Weiser, 2018; Pruchniewska, 2018) – and the key element for a successful ‘brand’ (or curating a particular message, as I discuss below) is authenticity. This particular form of authenticity is heavily associated with neoliberalism; however, one of the compelling elements of the way ‘authenticity’ was utilised in the case studies involved in this project was not so much about selling a particular brand of activism or feminism, but rather about challenging culturally approved assumptions about ‘authentic’ activism, rape, victim-survivors, and justice seeking.

In the first instance, participants in this study sought to assert that their approach to claims making were ‘authentic’, ‘real’ or ‘genuine.’ I discussed in Chapter 3 the ways online activism has been criticised for fostering a culture of slacktivism in which participants have little understanding of the complexity of social problems, or offer superficial means of contributing to the movement, and as such is considered by some scholars to not be ‘real’ activism. Yet, Angela was insistent that the *Pixel Project* was a ‘real’ or authentic form of activism and not slacktivism; ‘liking’ or ‘sharing’ on social media sites is a way of determining how popular your message is and functions as a gateway to getting individuals more involved in the cause (see also Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019, who support this position). Conversely, Katie felt that her blog, *These Are Not My Secrets*, was not ‘activist enough’ and did not want to elevate herself to the ‘status’ of being an online activist. Here, Katie is pointing to an assumption that there is an authentic subjectivity of an ‘online activist’ and a ‘real’ or correct way to connect the personal to the political.

A further way in which the notion of authenticity arose was in Chapter 4, where I demonstrated how most victim-survivors’ experiences fall outside hegemonic expectations about ‘authentic’ rape, and the significant role digital space plays in helping to rewrite the rape script in ways that are more authentic or true to victim-survivors’ experiences. While activists, such as Maya, feared their contestations of the hegemonic scripts might not gain recognition, they also felt compelled to remain *authentic* to their experiences, to be as truthful as possible and not to gloss over the ‘difficult bits.’ Hypatia, in particular, had gone to great lengths to articulate why her experience of rape is still ‘real’ even if it does not look like conventional assumptions about rape and rape-trauma.

In developing this point around shifting the rape script and challenging notions of authenticity in relation to ‘real’ rape’, Chapter 5 demonstrated the ways these online spaces resist or challenge the notion of the ‘good victim’, who is held up as the ‘authentic’ victim in neoliberal victim discourse. In particular, I discussed how these online spaces resist representing victim-survivors in ways that focus on their inherent victimisation because, as Angela argued, it is ‘disrespectful to survivors’, opting instead to use language and imagery that signifies their strength, empowerment and resilience. Other spaces, like the Rape Crisis Scotland campaigns, sought to subvert the logics of the good victim by challenging the victim-blaming discourses that position women as ‘asking to be raped.’ However, in their attempts to subvert or recast the depiction of a ‘good’ victim, some of these online spaces reinforce an assumption that ‘real’ victim-survivors of rape are typically heterosexual, white women. These exclusionary practices did not occur across the board, however: *Project Unbreakable*, for example, was a notable

standout when it came to representing a diverse range of victim-survivors of sexual violence. Nonetheless, the failure to accommodate LGBTQ victim-survivors perpetuates not only assumptions about 'real' rape but also 'real' women.

Lastly, authenticity also emerged in relation to the question of 'justice.' In Chapter 6, I explored how these online anti-rape spaces challenge the criminal justice system as the site of 'real' justice. Specifically, I discussed how these online campaigns help to broaden the scope of justice beyond the criminal justice system, as well as operate as sites of critique of the power that the criminal justice system possesses to impart recognition. The question of authenticity also emerged with respect to using (or not using) one's real name online. The provision of anonymity was perceived as one of the most important features of the online space for these anti-rape activists because it provided them with protection so that they could speak their 'truths' and enunciate a challenge to the real causes of rape without people finding out their real identities. While anonymity might protect activists from harassment or negative reactions offline, safety online remained a concern for some participants because of the ease of accessibility of many of these activist spaces. In this sense, the operation of authenticity in these anti-rape activist spaces seems to be about fostering honesty, intimacy, support and privacy in order to advance a collective agenda.

The aforementioned approaches to authenticity were part of these digital campaigns' attempt to curate a particular anti-rape message. However, this curation was not necessarily about developing a particular 'brand', although some sought to sell a particular type of feminism. Rather, curating these digital spaces was about creating safe spaces for victim-survivors or for ensuring that discussions did not get out of control. I highlighted in Chapter 4, for instance, that in addition to peer-to-peer witnessing, in which victim-survivors witness the coming out and claiming of experience of other victim-survivors, negative witnessing also occurs in these online spaces. While some of this negative witnessing, as Hypatia outlined, was not inherently bad because it did offer an opportunity to help educate people misguided about rape due to the influence of rape culture, trolling nonetheless remained a problem for these online anti-rape campaigns. Subsequently, a significant amount of labour is involved in maintaining a certain standard of acceptable discussion in these online spaces to keep out the trolls and rape apologists. The upshot of the constant surveillance carried out by the moderators of these online anti-rape campaigns means that a highly curated message is presented to the public, reinforced through the modes of representation.

There also existed a perception by some of the managers of the case studies involved in this project that many online feminist projects using a 'fighting' response to rape and rape culture cripple their activism. For example, in Chapter 5, I highlighted how Alana and Angela wanted to take a more 'rational' rather than a 'fighting' or 'militarist' approach to their activism in order to present a more unified front, as well as to distance themselves from what were perceived as historically radical feminist approaches to anti-rape activism. Angela specifically was concerned that a 'fighting' response results too often in 'bloodshed' with feminists subsequently accused of being 'feminazis' and 'men not listening' to the claims being made, stymying any potential for change. Moreover, both

Katie and Angela noted that there was a significant amount of ‘in-fighting’ between feminists online, which means, according to Angela, that some moderate feminists feel they cannot voice their opinion for fear they will be attacked by other more ‘radical’ feminists. This point ties in with what I suggested above about authenticity. For instance, Katie expressed that in arguing with each other about whose experience or subjectivity is more ‘authentic’ (for instance, a trans-woman’s experience of rape is considered less ‘authentic’ than a cis-gender woman’s), feminists fail ‘to focus on the things that affect all of us’ – such as patriarchy, for example. As a result, fighting with other activists as well as presenting a ‘fighting’ response was perceived to hinder significantly anti-rape activism’s capacity to bridge the divide between the personal and the political. Thus, there is a balancing act playing out in these online spaces between freedom and control, which seems to echo the contradictions inherent in the desire to both present discourses of rape in an authentic or real way and resist the idea that there is such a thing.

Rape as ‘Women’s’ Responsibility

While rape has been substantively on the public agenda for nearly four decades, the problems that emerged in response to second-wave anti-rape activism continue to undermine activist efforts. To varying degrees, activist efforts to provide greater support for victim-survivors, as well as reform the criminal justice system, have been responded to in Western democracies. However, access to funding remains tenuous, and law reform projects are criticised or have been appropriated by a carceral neoliberal agenda. Moreover, efforts to engage in a productive dialogue about the sociocultural causes of rape, such as the objectification of women’s bodies – regardless of sexuality – and the disregard for their autonomy, remain contentious, with the focus barely shifting from rape as something random and perpetrated by a stranger. Where perpetrators are known to the victim, they are presented as monstrous, pathological, sick or deviant subjects who took advantage of vulnerable women – the imagery and journalist reporting on Harvey Weinstein in the wake of the #MeToo movement made particularly good use of these tropes (Royal, 2019). Rape is thus positioned in individualistic, a-political terms – as a ‘woman’s problem’ to solve. The material presented in this book very much highlights this tension, indicating that while certain elements of anti-rape activism have changed, the influence of neoliberal discourses, such as risk management and personal responsibility, continues to hold sway over public perceptions of rape. Although this speaks to what Rose Corrigan (2013) argues, that the anti-rape movement has been a successful failure – and indeed what Hypatia outlined at the beginning of this book that little has changed for women – activists clearly continue to fight tirelessly to resist and challenge these discourses. In this sense, I would argue that rather than having ceded ground to neoliberalism, activists within the anti-rape movement are, to varying degrees, conscious of these challenges relating to the ways in which survivors continue to remain responsible for preventing rape in particular – as well as speaking out about rape – and sought to address these in creative ways.

Nonetheless, most of the online anti-rape campaigns examined in this book carried out their projects in the absence of men. While these spaces did not outright exclude men, the overwhelming majority of people who participated in them identified as ‘women.’ In some ways, this inadvertently re-responsibilises women, and the onus thus remains on primarily women and other survivors to speak out about and prevent rape, despite evidence that many of the causes of rape lie at the heart of structural masculinity (Bedera & Nordmeyer, 2020; Brownmiller, 1975; Campbell & Wasco, 2005; Mardorossian, 2014). It was clear on the discussion boards associated with the Rape Crisis Scotland campaigns that attempts by activists to shift this responsibility were heavily resisted, yet at the same time, there was also opposition to the idea of (heterosexual) women as sole victim-survivors. For example, many of the comments in the forums queried the lack of representation of men as victim-survivors in their campaigning, as well as reinforcing women’s personal responsibility for managing their own risk in order to prevent rape. Bloggers in this project also resisted the responsibility rhetoric by engaging in a discussion about the broader sociocultural causes of rape. Hypatia, for example, was outspoken on her blog about the role of masculine sexual entitlement as the cause of most rapes – including her own, not her mode of dress, alcohol consumption or relationship to the perpetrator. In addition, Hypatia also noted how women are conditioned not to call their experiences rape. However, rather than showing a willingness to engage in a discussion about rape myths and rape culture, these issues were regularly dismissed by some commenters as not ‘real’ problems, and rape would be prevented if women simply took greater responsibility for their own personal safety. Again, this question of authenticity emerges, with rape culture not being perceived as the ‘true’ cause of sexual violence. Given the persistent resistance to recognising the role structural and cultural tropes of masculine dominance continue to play as factors underlying the causes of sexual violence, it is admirable that the activists continue to push back against the failure of many to ethically listen, witness and respond to activists’ claims.

This failure to witness activists and victim-survivors extends to the realm of the political, not just everyday people interacting online. Under neoliberalism, the feminist movement has been recast by the state as a ‘special interest group’, and subsequently, sexual violence has largely disappeared from public policy (Gotell, 2007). While rape crisis centres have relied on volunteers throughout their histories, the increasing withdrawal of financial and political support from the state under neoliberalism has meant that centres have had to channel the minimal amount of funding they do have into providing support services for victim-survivors rather than construct public campaigns aimed at challenging sociocultural attitudes. Rape crisis services in England and Wales continue to have their funding slashed, and in Australia crisis services, such as 1800 Respect, regularly request donations in order to continue to provide support and advice to victim-survivors. In addition, funding in many Western contexts is often contractual and requires evidence-based evaluations to support funding renewals – it is far easier to present how many victim-survivors a service has supported rather than how many sexual assaults have been prevented or attitudes changed. As a

result, much of the anti-rape activism happening in these online spaces is grassroots and volunteer-led. Thus, anti-rape activism in the online context is heavily dependent on volunteers. There were the exceptions of the Rape Crisis Scotland and Stop Rape in Conflict campaigns, which receive state and international financial support to develop their projects. In this sense, anti-rape activism is rendered a ‘special interest group’ rather than a sole object of policy and reform, and campaigns have to compete with other ‘special interest groups’ when applying for funding to create and sustain their activism. It is therefore remarkable how resilient sexual assault and rape crisis support services have been in the face of precarious futures and is a reflection of their political commitments to assisting victim-survivors (see also Vera-Gray, 2019), but nonetheless maintains the position that it is women’s – and survivors’ – responsibility to address the harms of rape in particular.

In order to address the ways in which rape continues to be positioned as a ‘women’s problem’ to solve, what is needed is a greater focus on fostering ethical listening and witnessing to ideas and the experiences of others that might present themselves as ‘strange and unfamiliar rather than always and already known and knowable’ (Serisier, 2018, p. 193). In particular, the power of witnessing that results from the response-ability nature of digital platforms is something this book has attempted to highlight, with Chapter 4 demonstrating the capacity of online spaces to help shift ideas about the hegemonic rape script through speaking out in different ways. Chapter 5 also sought to illustrate the ways digital spaces challenge assumptions about victimisation and survivorship – albeit in ways that are not unproblematic. As such, in order for online anti-rape activism to generate transformative approaches that shift rape away from being a ‘women’s problem’, acts of listening and witnessing need to be intersectional in its approach. This means accounting for the hidden activists and victim-survivors of rape whose experiences and claims making are routinely dismissed or overlooked, including experiences of LGBTQ survivors, women of colour, older women, women from marginal and lower socio-economic backgrounds, women with disabilities and women located in isolated geographic locations. It is through witnessing these voices and experiences that the structural conditions and causes of sexual violence, such as patriarchy, masculinity, capitalism, racism and colonisation, will be exposed.

Online Anti-Rape Activism in a Post-#MeToo World

This book has illustrated that despite claims that anti-rape activists are too invested in a carceral feminist agenda or has ceded ground to other elements of neoliberalism, the anti-rape movement in the online context is engaged in a broad spectrum of practices that seek to challenge the hegemonic discourses that govern the ways in which rape can be spoken about in the public sphere. In particular, this book has captured how these online spaces highlight the power of hegemonic discourses to regulate how rape and rape culture is conceptually and popularly understood. I suggested that these online spaces both subvert and reproduce these discourses, and I have argued that this simultaneous subversion and reification speaks to the tension between the personal and the political – the individual

and the collective – in seeking recognition of rape on an interpersonal level and a sociocultural one. This tension between the personal and the political is what makes the anti-rape movement compelling and complex, and in concluding this book, I want to turn to consider the future of online anti-rape activism in a post-#MeToo world. In particular, I want to reflect on what digital spaces, like the ones discussed in this book, can offer activists in the wake of #MeToo, to provide some ‘materials through which future movements and activist practices can be imagined’ (Rentschler & Thrift, 2015, p. 242).

Although I do not wish to claim that the discussion and findings presented in this book are a reflection of online anti-rape sites in general, they still nonetheless speak to some of the broader, ongoing issues associated with anti-rape activism, specifically in relation to whose voices and experiences are captured in digital spaces. The majority of case studies involved in this project were predominantly (although not exclusively) white, middle-class women of North American and Anglo-European origin. The same critiques were levelled at the #MeToo movement in response to the revelation that ‘me too’ was something initially orchestrated by Tarana Burke in 2006 as part of her work with young African-American women and girls experiencing sexual violence. The co-option of Burke’s tagline, despite being problematic in itself, was less significant than the fact that it revealed the continued failure to witness women of colour’s experiences of sexual violence and the tireless efforts of activists working in these communities (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). Many of these victim-survivors’ experiences are underscored by continued histories of racism, colonisation, poverty and other intersecting forms of marginalisation that ‘fit’ even less within culturally approved or ‘social filters’ (Serisier, 2018, p. 192) described in Chapter 4. In order to advance a truly transformative politics of recognition, experiences and positions of intersectionality need to be at the forefront of anti-rape activism – online and offline – moving forward.

The issues arising from the whiteness of anti-rape activism are further compounded by the cis-gendered and heterosexual nature of representation within these digital spaces. The lack of LGBTQ inclusion in the #MeToo movement and the online anti-rape spaces involved in this project is concerning. Not only does it reinforce heterosexuality as the normative context in which rape occurs, but it also suggests the only ‘real’ cis-gendered women can experience rape. Although one of the case studies, Rape Crisis Scotland, expressed a desire to include LGBTQ experiences in future campaigning, they have not done much targeted campaigning around this issue. The assumption expressed by Angela that lesbian and transgender women have special needs when it comes to supporting them through their experiences of rape is surely incentive enough to find volunteers with those skills or at least acknowledge in activism the levels of sexual violence experienced by the LGBTQ community. Moving forward, anti-rape activists should continue to broaden the modes of representation and inclusion not just at the level of what counts as ‘rape’ but also whose subjectivity counts as a legitimate rape victim-survivor.

As I indicated in the introduction of this book, the data from the case studies were collected between two periods of mass mobilisation in relation to sexual

violence: *SlutWalk* and the #MeToo movement. These case studies therefore illustrate the potential of digital media to help sustain submerged anti-rape networks and consciousness-raising when the spotlight is no longer on sexual violence. While moments like #MeToo can inspire crowds and generate significant public discussion (Papacharissi, 2015), they are merely ruptures or moments that create the possibility for intervention and response (Fileborn & Loney-Howes, 2019). Most online anti-rape activism will never reach the kind of profile achieved by the #MeToo movement; however, the ‘connecting, dialoguing, and finding solidarity with others’ (Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019) illustrates these digital networks’ capacity to engender social change – even if only on a small scale. It is the submerged digital networks, like the case studies explored in this book, that carry out the tireless, grinding work of sustaining consciousness-raising, maintaining spaces for victim-survivors to speak out about their experiences, engage in more ethical modes of representation and foster alternative avenues for seeking justice.

The challenges for sustaining momentum and interest in social justice issues in the digital sphere are not dissimilar to traditional ‘offline’ social movements, yet as also I noted in the introduction of this book, online activism continues to face criticism for being too ad hoc and ephemeral. It is significant to note that half of the case studies included in this study remain active online or their projects have evolved. Some are no longer active – or have at least gone into abeyance, despite the popularity of the #MeToo movement, such as the blog *These Are Not My Secrets*. *Project Unbreakable* too no longer receives submissions, although following the election of Donald Trump in November 2016, they briefly reopened the Tumblr blog for new submissions, and all the previous submissions are still publicly accessible. The blog *YesWeSpeak* was also deactivated in 2016, although the author continues to remain active on Twitter. The *Pixel Project* maintains a strong presence on social media, and Hypatia, author of the blog *Herbs and Hags*, periodically writes new posts about rape culture. Others have evolved their projects. Rape Crisis Scotland continues to develop new campaigns in addition to *This Is Not an Invitation to Rape Me* and *Not Ever*, including one called ‘I just froze’, and the International Campaign to Stop Rape and Gender Violence in Conflict has morphed into a new campaign called *Beauty in the Middle*. *Healing Courage*, who started out as a micro-blogger on Twitter, has now founded her own non-profit in San Francisco supporting survivors and continues to develop her online presence. In this sense, it is clear that online spaces engaged in anti-rape activism are vital networks for generating and sustaining activism and have the capacity to do so for extended periods. The evolution of *Healing Courage* also reflects the significance of digital spaces in helping survivors to construct their activist identities (Baker & Bevacqua, 2018; Mendes, Ringrose, et al., 2019).

One of the key issues raised in this book, along with the #MeToo movement, is the persistent challenges experienced by victim-survivors when reporting sexual assault either formally or informally. In Chapter 6, I showed a small number of examples of the barriers faced by victim-survivors when disclosing their experiences to the police or even friends and family members. As such, many of these online spaces, and mass movements like #MeToo, function in ways akin to informal reporting, and disclosure in online spaces may provide victim-survivors with

a sense of justice (see Fileborn, 2016). However, participants in this project also noted that using online spaces were not necessarily safe pathways for achieving justice, despite Chapter 4 illustrating just how *politically* subversive and *personally* transformative having a space in which to ‘come out’ and disclose one’s experience can be. In addition, peer-to-peer witnessing – and specifically victim-survivor-to-victim-survivor recognition – provides victim-survivors the opportunity to label their experience ‘rape’ when it does not ‘fit’ within the parameters of normative socio-legal discourses (see also O’Neill, 2018). Research suggests that victim-survivors often take years, if not decades, to disclose their experiences of sexual assault for a variety of different reasons – some of these include the fear they will not be believed, shame and humiliation and fear of retaliation from the perpetrator (Ceelen et al., 2019; Gebicki et al., 2017; Jordan, 2008). The popularity of online spaces for disclosing and informally reporting sexual assault demonstrates their capacity to sidestep some of the challenges that emerge when formally reporting sexual assault. Although the use of digital platforms for informally reporting are not without their problems, and may potentially cause further legal issues for victim-survivors if they were to out perpetrators online, the opportunity to be heard through the telling of one’s story in a way that is meaningful and validates experiences is one of the most powerful justice needs of survivors of sexual violence (Clark, 2010; Fileborn, 2014, 2016; O’Neill, 2018; Wänggren, 2016). For many, receiving this kind of support and validation may be more powerful than the recognition that may come from a positive criminal justice response, and moving forward digital spaces will remain significant sites of informal justice victim-survivors.

In rounding off these reflections moving forward for online anti-rape activism, a question mark remains over the involvement of men as a means of challenging assumptions that rape is a ‘women’s problem’ to solve as mentioned above. As I discussed in Chapter 5, rape is not a ‘men’s’ or ‘women’s’ issue to address; rather, it is a broader structural problem with respect to hegemonic masculinity that positions women as passive sexual objects and men as agents and sexually aggressive subjects. Greater attempts to involve men and women in dialogue with each other in responding to rape culture are needed in order to address the prevention of sexual violence (Flood, 2003; Moynihan et al., 2015). Michael Flood suggests that #MeToo movement asks three things of men: First, to listen to women and recognise that men’s violence against women is common, serious and wrong; second, #MeToo asks that men reflect on and change their behaviour as well as their interactions with women; and third, #MeToo asks men to contribute to social change by calling out the behaviour of other men and challenging the structural inequalities that ‘form the foundation of sexual harassment and abuse’ (Flood, 2019, pp. 285–286). However, despite the popularity of the #MeToo movement, there remains significant resistance from men to acknowledging the pervasiveness of sexual violence and the existence of rape culture. For example, the hashtag #HowIWillChange, which emerged in response to #MeToo as a way of attempting to engage boys and men in the prevention of violence and their role in sustaining rape culture, was met with trepidation and outright backlash (PettyJohn, Muzzey, Maas, & McCauley, 2019). Data collected by Flood (2019) also suggest

that while #MeToo led to some men reflecting on their own behaviours in sexual interactions and role they played in perpetuating rape culture, many still believe that women lie about rape and that sexual violence is not that serious a problem. Nonetheless, the hashtag offers some inroads into how we might better engage men in violence prevention post-#MeToo (PettyJohn et al., 2019). The use of ‘male allies’ by the *Pixel Project* may be one effective way to involve men within anti-rape activism that does not digress from focussing on the fact that rape is by far a gendered experience. However, Angela’s comment that men are more likely to listen to other men reveals the extent to which feminist discourse and ideas need to be more or less palatable. In other words, anti-rape activists continue to have to meet men on their own terms. Activist efforts should continue to challenge the impact of socially constructed behaviours associated with masculinity, the structural conditions that regulate women’s bodies, the widespread behaviours that proliferate rape culture and the extent to which these ideologies filter through institutional understandings and responses to sexual violence.

This book has provided a nuanced contribution to understandings about the nature, use and scope of online spaces for anti-rape activism, in particular, the complexities regarding being heard, seen and believed, as well as the challenges involved in managing the competing demands between the personal and the political. While these online spaces might not be able to end rape, their existence is nonetheless a testament to the tireless efforts of anti-rape activists to ensure rape’s presence is secure on the public agenda. It is my hope that this book and these concluding remarks will be useful in developing an agenda for change that is meaningful and impactful in reflecting on the significance and challenges associated with meeting the initial goals set out by second-wave feminists – to abolish rape in our lifetimes.

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