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; Millsteed & McDonald, 2017). In addition, statistics from the 1970s that first sought to capture the prevalence of rape remain close to contemporary ones, with

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 (Gotel1, 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 support 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 overwhelming 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:

> 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 #Been-RapedNeverReported 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 Kavanagh 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 Kavanagh 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: *SlutWalk* (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 *SlutWalk*, 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; Wånggren, 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; Wånggren, 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 *SlutWalk* 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 *SlutWalk*, 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 ceeded 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.