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)

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-hierarchal 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

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[1]Despite 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; Largen, 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, sociopolitical 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

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[2]At 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

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[3]These 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 antirape 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 sociopaths 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 socioeconomic 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 caceral 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 identifed 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.