Disclosing rape, seeking justice?

Navigating the aftermath of sexual violence in digital society

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Declaration

I certify that except where due acknowledgement has been made, the work is that of the author alone; the work has not been submitted previously, in whole or in part, to qualify for any other academic award; the content of the thesis is the result of work which has been carried out since the official commencement date of the approved research program; any editorial work, paid or unpaid, carried out by a third party is acknowledged; and, ethics procedures and guidelines have been followed.

Tullia O'Neill

31st January 2020.

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge that this research has taken place on the stolen land of the Wurundjeri and Boonwurrung people of the Koolin Nation, on which my university sits. This stolen land has never been ceded; a treaty never signed. As a settler, the opportunities I have been given and my capacity to undertake a doctorate are predicated, in part, on the deeply seeded colonial project that is so-called "Australia," and the structural recompenses offered to me as a white, educated woman. I take this time here at the outset of this thesis, to posit myself as an ally to decolonisation and Aboriginal sovereignty.

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Sometimes I find it hard to have hope. At the time of writing, much of the country, including the area I grew up in, is under threat of fire or is already burning. In the four years that this thesis was written, conservative political parties have succeeded again and again worldwide, governments continue to prioritise the economy over the environment, and it seems that the various social justice issues I am passionate about continue to be pushed to the side for the sake of money. Adults and children the world over continue to be violated, raped, assaulted, and abused.

In a climate of booming university businesses, neoliberalism, and late capitalism, I knew from the outset that a PhD was hardly an undertaking to be romanticised without question or critique. I feel so much gratitude upon completing this research and I was fortunate to receive financial support while doing it, but there were many moments where I wanted to give up. I want to acknowledge the perseverance and strength required to undertake graduate research amongst toxic academic cultures, particularly the rhetoric that we need to 'publish or perish.'

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Publications and Presentations

The following peer-reviewed publications have arisen from this research

O'Neill T (2018) 'Today I speak': exploring how victim-survivors use Reddit. *International Journal for Crime, Justice and Social Democracy* 7(1): 44–59. DOI: 10.5204/ijcjsd.v7i1.402.

The following conference papers have been presented on this research

Victorian Postgraduate Criminology Conference (VPCC), June 21 2016, *Cyber justice and sexual violence: Exploring victim-survivor stories on Reddit,* Melbourne, Australia.

Australia and New Zealand Society of Criminology (ANZSOC) Annual Conference, November 20-December 2 2016, *"Today I Speak": Exploring victim-survivor stories on Reddit,* Hobart, Australia.

Australia and New Zealand Society of Criminology (ANZSOC) Annual Conference, December 6-8 2017, *"I see it as a place to catch people when they're falling": how and why victim-survivors seek support on Reddit,* Canberra, Australia.

British Society of Criminology (BSC) Annual Conference, July 3-6 2018, *Sexual violence and digital ethics: the implications of researching online disclosures in the post-#MeToo era,* Birmingham, United Kingdom.

British Society of Criminology (BSC) Annual Conference, July 3-6 2018, *"I need community": examining the experiences of victim-survivors using Reddit in the aftermath of sexual violence,* Birmingham, United Kingdom.

European Society of Criminology (ESC) Annual Conference, August 28-September 1 2018, *"I just wanted to tell my story…": Examining victim-survivor narratives of sexual violence in digital society,* Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

American Society of Criminology (ASC) Annual Conference, November 13-16 2019, *"I don't know…what is justice?": victim-survivors' perspectives of informal justice online,* San Francisco, the United States.

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Abstract

Millions of victim-survivors have disclosed experiences of sexual violence in digital society. This thesis delves into this phenomenon, examining how and why victim-survivors speak out about their experiences in digital contexts. This research argues for the potential to understand these digital practices as a movement towards 'justice.' Within criminology, scholars have suggested that victim-survivors' online disclosures are tantamount to informal justice that occurs beyond the criminal justice system. Curiously, limited research has engaged directly with victim-survivors to ask them *why* they disclose online. This thesis contributes to a significant gap in research by engaging with victim-survivors to shape knowledge about their disclosure practices in digital society, drawing from data collected from a content analysis of a community on Reddit, as well as semi-structured interviews with victim-survivors who had used a variety of digital platforms as a means to disclose sexual violence.

Three dominant findings are revealed in this research and several key themes recurrently emerge regarding victim-survivors' digital practices. Firstly, the research found that victim-survivors engage in varying and multiple digital practices, demonstrating how they navigate digital society by considering the consequences of disclosure. These potential consequences bear implications for victim-survivors' identities, and as a result, many prioritise community, safety, and particular audiences to hear their disclosures. Moreover, disclosures vary across public and private digital space and platforms fulfil different needs and purposes. Secondly, this research critically engages with a feminist politics of speaking out by examining how victim-survivors' disclosures are influenced by discourses that shape dominant understandings of sexual violence. The research found that disclosures are not inherently political, particularly when viewed from the perspectives of victim-survivors. Additionally, the findings provide a critical examination of #MeToo, signifying the empowering and silencing effects of this hashtag event and contributing unique reflections from victim-survivors who chose not to participate. By complicating the politics of 'speaking out' online, I argue that 'speaking in' is a significant digital practice among victim-survivors that has been overlooked in feminist and criminological research. While speaking out presented potential risks to victim-survivors; speaking in afforded safety, connection, and recognition.

Lastly, this research demonstrates the potential for informal justice in digital society in the aftermath of sexual violence. By speaking with victim-survivors, I found that their perceptions of informal justice are partially hindered by the dominance of the justice system. Concurrently, the findings indicate that 'justice needs' such as recognition, validation, and belief were met in various ways through victim-survivors' digital practices, which affirmed that victim-survivors' perceptions of

justice could be "kaleidoscopic" (McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017). Victim-survivors in this research were critical of criminal justice and were more likely to have turned to trauma discourses of healing, support, and recovery as a way to frame and understand their digital practices. Therefore, I argue that digital society provides spaces where justice and therapeutic outcomes can be pursued simultaneously. Through sharing and recognising experiences of sexual violence, this research contends that victim-survivors' participation in digital society presents the potential for a multiplicity of justice.

Olivia, Lionel and Dylan

On digital media

I have friends and family that love me, but talking to them… I've never said it to most people, I've said it to, like, two people, but I think it's an uncomfortable topic for them, that then they don't have the answers anyway, and… but I think Reddit kind of did have the answers, because there were people that had gone through it and, as I say, it felt like a safe space to talk because people were expecting it. – **Olivia**

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I think the power of social media has not yet been widely understood by general society as to how it's, in a genuine way, changed everything for survivors. It's probably been the single most transforming thing in our lives with regards to getting justice and bringing pressure to bear on the relevant people. – **Lionel**

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I just want to make sure that I'd, that the story is heard, that it's a narrative that doesn't fade into obscurity, that there's as much resistance to, like the established system as possible even if that's just in knowledge. – **Dylan**

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Looking for Justice Online

The voices of Olivia, Lionel and Dylan illustrate the transformative potential of victim-survivors' disclosures of sexual violence in digital society. The proliferation of social media in everyday life presents vast and diverse opportunities for people to speak about their experiences of rape, sexual assault, harassment, and abuse. Some have argued that digital society provides a foundation from which collective action, resource sharing, and communities of support can develop (see Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016; Mendes and Ringrose, 2019). A significant example of such collective action is online feminist activism, with the #MeToo hashtag being the most notable and ubiquitous hashtag relating to sexual violence in recent years. Spurred by a tweet written by American celebrity Alyssa Milano on October 15th, 2017, the hashtag signified a call to arms for victim-survivors to share stories of sexual harassment and violence with the hashtag #MeToo (Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019a).[1] This hashtag, while undoubtedly significant in bringing the issue of digital disclosures of sexual violence to mainstream attention, was not the first instance in which online anti-rape activism of this nature has occurred (see, for examples, Ferreras, 2014; Francis, 2015; Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016; Loney-Howes, 2015). Nor are hashtag movements the only platform through which victim-survivors disclose their experiences online (for varying examples, see Fileborn, 2014, 2017; Harrington, 2018; Noack-Lundberg et al., 2019; Powell, 2015a, 2015b; Salter, 2013). Although digital society generates contexts in which collective action, social movements and counterpublics emerge and take shape (Powell, 2015b; Salter, 2013; Sills et al., 2016), this should not lead to assumptions that online disclosures of sexual violence are inherently empowering, political, or indeed, part of a broader movement at all. Sexual violence disclosures are as diverse and complex as the victim-survivors who make them, and the significance of digital society is that it allows for new and emerging contexts in which victim-survivors can share their stories. This thesis is concerned with how and why victim-survivors disclose their experiences in these varying digital environments and considers the extent to which justice is achieved through these practices.

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[1] This refers to the emergence of the #MeToo hashtag. The Me Too movement has since been rightly connected to its founder, Tarana Burke, who began an advocacy organisation working with African American victim-survivors in disadvantaged communities (Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019b; Gómez and Gobin, 2019; Kagal, Cowan and Jawad, 2019; Onwuachi-Willig, 2018; Phipps, 2019; Tambe, 2018).
When referring to #MeToo in the chapter and the thesis more broadly, I refer primarily to the hashtag and how victim-survivors have engaged with it, and less so with the earlier advocacy work of Tarana Burke. This is not in an attempt to erase this work or deny its importance or historical basis of the Me Too movement, rather, it is an acknowledgement that the #MeToo hashtag and others like it are of pertinence to this thesis because of their focus of online disclosures of sexual violence.

The naming of perpetrators of sexual violence is an increasingly widespread practice on social media sites and had amassed the interest of journalists and researchers in recent years. In 2012, feminist columnist Jill Filipovic wrote *The ethics of outing your rapist* in The Guardian as a response to a video blogger's YouTube disclosure of child sexual abuse (Filipovic, 2012). Filipovic (2012: n.p.) noted her concerns about online vigilantism as a motivating factor behind these disclosures but asserted that "people are entitled to their own narratives about their own lives." She further asserted:

> [T]he video blogger is on YouTube, not in a court room. Her father isn't facing the curtailment of his liberties by the state. She isn't posting anonymously while naming her alleged assailant; she's using her full name and attaching her accusations to her own face and reputation. To suggest that she can't or shouldn't tell her own story – to suggest that she has to turn her story over to a court before we can accept her word as her own truth – effectively muzzles her and many other women. It clips our agency. It puts our own narrative in the hands of someone who presumably knows better. Attempts to tell rape survivors that their experience isn't "true" and that supposedly impartial groups of men know better has a long history (Filipovic, 2012: n.p.).

Filipovic's (2012) piece highlights the tensions between formal justice and victim-survivors' participation in digital society, especially when they want to disclose the identity of the person who perpetrated violence against them.

In June 2017, Australian journalist Lauren Ingram (2017a) named her rapist in a thread on her Twitter account. In part of the thread, she said: "despite the risks of defamation I am naming him because I am terrified of him abusing other women" (Ingram, 2017a: n.p.). Ingram illustrated how she was a "good victim" who reported the perpetrator to police and through other avenues, including a political party with which he was associated (Ingram, 2017b, 2017c). Ingram explicitly reflects on the failures of the justice system as being part of her reason for turning to social media as an avenue for disclosure and justice. In an article she later wrote about her disclosure, Ingram said, "the systems failed me and the only thing I can now do is expose my pain to the world in the hope something will change" (Ingram, 2017c: n.p.). Ingram's story was then reported in other news media, which discussed the "rape shaming" of alleged perpetrators (Cohen, 2017: n.p.). When asked to respond, the alleged perpetrator said that he would pursue legal action, further commenting that "in Australia, justice is served through our established justice system, and not a social media lynch mob" (Pryor, 2017: n.p.). Lisa Pryor (2017: n.p.) then wrote, "while it is right to guard against vigilantism, I don't think it is right to say that a woman who has been raped owes anyone a duty to be silent." There have been notable examples where victim-survivors have named their perpetrators as a means

of challenging lenient criminal sentences.[2] However, these types of disclosure practices bear risks and consequences for victim-survivors,[3] as accused perpetrators can pursue legal processes to stop victim-survivors making these types of allegations (see Salter, 2013). The naming of famous men as perpetrators throughout #MeToo also prompted a significant backlash against victim-survivors (see Fileborn and Phillips, 2019; Haire, Newman and Fileborn, 2019).

Victim-survivors are likely to have different experiences in digital society depending on the context of their online disclosure. While some digital practices might result in consequences such as backlash, it is important to note that many victim-survivors disclose in contexts that are private or anonymous. For example, many online communities exist specifically for people who have experienced sexual violence, forming spaces where victim-survivors can post and comment, gaining further support and connection with peers (Powell and O'Neill, 2016). Hidden Facebook groups and online communities are contexts where victim-survivors can talk about their experiences and name perpetrators, forming a kind of 'digital whisper network' that constitutes a collective resistance tactic (Haire, Newman and Fileborn, 2019; Potter, 2018). In some contexts, digital spaces can be impacted by high profile cases of sexual violence in the media, creating transitory spaces in which prompt anonymous discussion and, at times, additional disclosures. For instance, anonymous message board application (henceforth 'app') Yik Yak[4] was used by students at Vassar College in the United States (US) following a victim-survivor's public admonishment of the college administration in an open letter (Amicucci, 2014). Despite Yik Yak being notoriously rife with bullying, offensive content and trolling, in this instance the open letter spurred victim-survivors on campus to disclose their own experiences of sexual violence (Kutner, 2016). Anonymous and private disclosures can provide a means for victim-survivors to be heard, supported and believed; as well as contexts in which misogyny and rape culture continue to cultivate. The proliferation of misogyny and rape culture were exemplified in the aftermath of the highly publicised Stanford swimmer case, where students at

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[2] For example, in 2011 victim-survivor and then 16-year-old Savannah Dietrich was sexually assaulted by two fellow high school students. Following a highly publicised court case, she named her two perpetrators on Twitter after they received a lenient sentence of 'community work' from the presiding judge (Powell, 2015b; Salter, 2013). Another example is the Stanford case, where Emily Doe released her Victim Impact Statement to Buzzfeed News, which went viral online (see Baker 2016). Although Brock Turner had already been named in media reporting of the case, Doe's decision to release the statement online was a direct challenge to the lenient sentence that Turner received.

[3] In some instances, victim-survivors who name their perpetrators online face threats of defamation cases from accused perpetrators who have the financial stability to pursue victim-survivors through civil law, which can result in victim-survivors having to remove their disclosures from digital platforms (see Salter, 2013). For example, the defamation case between Australian actor Geoffrey Rush and Nationwide News in 2019 has been linked to the #MeToo movement and hashtag, which suggests a potential ongoing tension between online disclosures and legal intervention through civil law (O'Connell, 2019; Patrick, 2018).

[4] Yik Yak is a now de-funct app that existed between 2013 and 2017. It was geolocated, allowing users to post anonymous messages ('Yaks') that could be read by other users of within a 5-mile (~8km) radius. These messages could be up voted and down voted and would disappear within twelve hours of posting. It was particularly popular in the contexts of college campuses and high schools and developed a reputation for feeding into cultures of cyber bullying and anonymous harassment. After declining use over 2016, the app developers decided to shut down Yik Yak in 2017 (Carson, 2017).

Stanford University, also in the US, turned to Yik Yak to discuss the case and the extent of sexual violence and rape culture on their university campus. Glenza and Carroll (2015: n.p.) reported that:

> [Stanford] students described the Yik Yak conversations about the alleged rape after the Kappa Alpha party as a mix of collective horror, tasteless victim blaming and outright misogyny – 'Where all the unconscious bishes at?' read one. The posts contained little big-picture dialogue about prevention.

This indicates that despite the potential for victim-survivors to use digital platforms for support, resistance, disclosure, and naming perpetrators, these practices occur within the broader societal context of thriving rape cultures.

The Current Study

This research has emerged in a context where victim-survivors are increasingly turning to online platforms to discuss their experiences, and where criminologists have begun to refer to these practices as a means to seek justice (see Fileborn, 2014b, 2017; Powell 2015a, 2015b; Salter 2013). This thesis questions how and why victim-survivors engage in digital storytelling, and in doing so, examines the significance of various ways of 'speaking out' online, as well as the potential for justice in digital society. This research aims to understand the impacts, benefits, limitations and challenges of disclosing sexual violence in digital spaces. It makes a unique contribution to feminist criminology by analysing victim-survivors' disclosures on Reddit along with qualitative interviews. This thesis also contributes to the growing field of digital criminology by drawing together digital and non-digital data sources to highlight the potential for online platforms as being sites of justice. While scholars have begun to note the significance of speaking out online, this research suggests that victim-survivors experiences of participating (or not) in online dialogues about sexual violence reveals hidden complexities and can oscillate between being (dis)empowering, (a)political, (un)helpful, and so on. Despite the nuances of these digital experiences, I contend that considering the possibilities for informal justice in digital society broadens the possibilities for victim-survivors who, typically, might not be afforded choice, empowerment or agency in how they are heard in criminal justice systems (Clark, 2010, 2015).

Research Aims and Questions

This thesis contributes to criminological and sexual violence scholarship and is specifically situated within critical, feminist and digital criminologies, drawing from poststructural theories while emphasising the voices and experiences of victim-survivors as a means to contribute to knowledge regarding informal justice. This research has three overarching aims:

1) To emphasise the voices of victim-survivors of sexual violence as an expert source of empirical knowledge

2) To understand the ways that victim-survivors perceive their digital practices and informal justice

3) To explore an under-researched area of feminist and digital criminologies, and by doing so to put forward an original theoretical contribution that assesses digital platforms as an avenue to pursue informal justice

These research aims to produce an original contribution to feminist and criminological research by maintaining feminist methodological traditions that focus on the perspectives of victim-survivors of sexual violence. At the outset of this research, criminologists were yet to directly engage with victim-survivors about their disclosure practices in digital society. While scholars had begun to conceptualise the potential for informal justice online, this was founded primarily based on text-based analyses and observation (see Fileborn, 2014b; Powell 2015a, 2015b; Salter 2013). Indeed, throughout the research, little criminological scholarship has emerged specifically regarding digital spaces as a site of justice for victim-survivors of sexual or gender-based violence (see Fileborn 2017; Loney-Howes, 2017; Powell and Henry, 2017; Powell, Stratton and Cameron, 2018; Salter, 2017; Thompson, Wood and Rose, 2016; Wood, Rose and Thompson, 2018). Although Fileborn (2017)[5] is an exception, these emerging studies have mostly neglected to directly engage with victim-survivors who had used digital platforms to disclose. Thus, despite the rapidly developing interest in victim-survivors' digital practices, a significant gap in literature endures within criminological scholarship and beyond. This thesis aims to extend this literature by emphasising the voices and experiences of victim-survivors who had engaged in these types of digital practices by exploring the extent to which they perceive that their engagement in digital society constituted 'justice-seeking.' To achieve these aims, this thesis is guided by two research questions:

1) In what ways, and for what reasons, do victim-survivors use digital platforms to share their experiences of sexual violence?

2) To what extent, and in what ways, can victim-survivor engagement with digital platforms be conceptualised as 'informal justice'?

These research questions propose a dual purpose to this thesis. The first question presents an opportunity to understand victim-survivors' experiences of using digital platforms, from their

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[5] As will be discussed further in Chapter 3, criminologist Bianca Fileborn (2017) has presented findings from a survey and focus group participants with victim-survivors of street harassment which gauged their perceptions of the potential for online spaces to be sites of justice. However, these findings formed part of a broader study on street harassment and participants were not recruited specifically on the basis of their disclosures in digital society.

perspectives. This question situates the research within a feminist standpoint methodology, as it emphasises the voices of victim-survivors, allowing for more nuanced understandings of informal justice in digital society to emerge. It also places the research within feminist scholarship about 'speaking out' online (see, for example Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019a; Serisier, 2018a, 2018b, 2019; Keller, Mendes and Ringrose 2016; Loney-Howes, 2015, 2017, 2018). The second research question allows for a theoretical examination of the extent to which victim-survivors use digital platforms as a way of seeking justice. Sexual violence research that has focused on the perspectives of victim-survivors has revealed that they have different justice needs that often exist beyond the criminal justice system (Clark, 2010, 2011, 2015; Herman, 2005; Jülich, 2006; Jülich and Landon, 2017; McGlynn, 2011; McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; McGlynn, Westmarland and Godden, 2012; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018). However, as noted above, little is known about the perspectives and needs of victim-survivors who are using digital platforms and whether they perceive these practices as constituting justice (Fileborn, 2017). Consequently, the second research question responds directly to the aims of this research by contributing to the under-theorised notion of 'informal justice' in digital society (Fileborn 2014; Powell 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Salter 2013).

Framing sexual violence within the research

Sexual violence, sexual assault, and rape

Definitions of sexual assault, rape, and sexual violence are similar and can overlap but are not necessarily interchangeable. The definition of rape continues to shift and change across time and place, as has its conceptualisation in the media and law, within feminist scholarship and activism, and among other academic disciplines such as psychology and philosophy (Bourke, 2007). Law reform has resulted in shifting legal definitions of sexual violence, and many Western jurisdictions now predicate that rape involves penetration (sexual assault can include other sexual acts) without consent (Larcombe et al., 2016). Contrastingly, international non-government organisations often use a broader overarching term of 'sexual violence' rather than rape. According to the World Health Organisation, 'sexual violence' denotes a range of experiences within a global context, including trafficking, sexual slavery, coercion and unwanted sexual comments or advances (see, for example World Health Organisation, 2012, 2013a, 2013b). The notion of consent is vital to most definitions of sexual violence,[6] as the feminist psychologist and scholar Nicola Gavey (2014) states:

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[6] Consent based definitions of rape, sexual assault, and sexual violence have long existed within legal paradigms and social understandings of sexual violence (Brownmiller, 1975). This means that when a person does not freely agree to sexual activity, it becomes an assault, abuse, or rape. However, feminists have noted that in some contexts, notably the criminal justice system, a victim's lack of consent is not always taken seriously (Ehrlich, 2001;

While some forms of sexual violence involve physical violence or force, not all forms do. Some uses of the term include a wider range of acts of sexual exploitation or denigration, such as verbal sexual harassment. What ties all these phenomena together is the sexual or sexualized act upon or towards another *without that person's consent*. In this sense, they all violate a person's rights to dignity, respect, and control over their own body (Gavey, 2014: 1742, emphasis added).

Feminist definitions and critiques of sexual violence are useful to fill the gaps missing from legal and public policy definitions. There have been many feminist definitions of sexual violence, sexual assault, and rape, particularly since the beginning of the Women's Liberation Movement.[7] There has been disagreement within academic feminism and activist communities over some of the ways that rape, sexual assault, and sexual violence are framed. However, in contemporary research, policy, and activist settings, most tend to agree that sexual violence is gendered and better thought of as a range of experiences that exist on a continuum (Brown and Walklate, 2012; see also Kelly, 1987).

Liz Kelly (1987, 1988) developed the "continuum of sexual violence" in her influential work *Surviving Sexual Violence*. She contends that sexual violence is "all forms of abuse, coercion and force that women experience from men" revealing the breadth and extent of sexual violence in women's lives (Kelly, 1987: 48). The continuum is non-linear, suggesting that acts of violence at one end of the continuum, like rape, do not necessarily have "greater negative effects" than acts existing at the other end, such as harassment (Kelly, 1988: 76). Rather, the long-term impacts of sexual violence are complex, regardless of the type of violence experienced (Kelly, 1988). The continuum definition is shaped by victim-survivors' experiences and resultantly can grow to include new knowledge (Cook, 2012: 428). Indeed, some contemporary feminist definitions of sexual violence have expanded to focus less on men's perpetration of violence against women to acknowledge the breadth of people who can experience rape and abuse. As Gavey (2014: 1742) states, "anyone can be subject to sexual violence, but it is most commonly carried out by men against women, girls, and to a lesser extent boys." Feminist scholars have acknowledged male rape since the 1970s and it has been conceptualised in a small subset within sexual violence scholarship that focusses on masculinity and

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Muehlenhard et al., 1992). This highlights a fallibility in consent-based definitions that require victim-survivors to prove their lack of consent.

[7] Susan Brownmiller was one of the first second wave feminists to address the topic of rape in her book *Against Our Will* (1975) which highlighted the ways in which rape was a feminist issue due to men's structural capacity to rape women. Second wave feminist definitions such as Brownmiller's (1975) had several things in common. Firstly, rape was defined as a structural phenomenon, whereby men as a class subjugated women as a class through violence and dominance. Secondly, rape was often defined as the (forced) penetration of a vagina by a penis and that males were perpetrators and females were victims. Some second wave feminists, like Catharine MacKinnon (1989), theorised that heterosexual encounters were deemed so fraught within the context of patriarchy that all sex between men and women could be considered as rape. Lastly, second wave feminists also theorised that rape was a male ideology that was about asserting power over all women, and as such, earlier definitions posited that rape was not something that women could perpetrate (Bourke, 2007; Brownmiller, 1975; Griffin, 1979).

rape (see Javaid, 2015a, 2015b, 2016, 2017, 2018; McMullen, 1990; Scarce, 1997).[8] However, transgender and gender diverse peoples' experiences of sexual violence are poorly understood and under-theorised within sexual violence literature (Fileborn, 2012). Cook (2012) suggests that cisgender men and transgender victim-survivors should have the space to determine continuum-based models stemming from their specific experiences and testimonies, which are likely to be different from cisgender women. Thus, while feminist definitions of sexual violence continue to have gendered dimensions, there is increasing nuance in understanding the diversity of experiences that fit within these definitions.

In *Rape: A history from 1860 to the present,* Joanna Bourke (2007) provides a useful way to define rape and sexual abuse amidst shifting contexts and institutions that shape sexual violence in different ways:

> Where does this definitional ambiguity leave us? What is rape? Refusing, and in defiance of institutional directives, to bestow primacy on any single, static definition, I have proceeded on the simple principle that sexual abuse is any act called such by a participant or a third party. The definition of sexual abuse has two central components. First, a person has to identify a particular act as sexual, however the term 'sexual' is defined. Second, that person must also claim that the act is non-consensual, unwanted or coerced, however they may wish to define those terms…so long as someone says that an act is 'rape' or 'sexual abuse,' that claim is accepted. This definition does not claim normative status. In other words, it does not prescribe what ought to be adopted as the correct definition for institutional or political purposes…Nor does it set itself up as a truth statement: it remains neutral about the veracity of any specific claim. Rather, the definition is a heuristic device. It enables us to problematize and historicize every component of the complex interactions between sexed bodies (Bourke, 2007: 9–10).

There are two key benefits to this definition of rape and sexual abuse. Firstly, it assumes gendered neutrality in who can perpetrate and experience sexual violence. Secondly, the definition offers autonomy to the people involved in sexual violence to define their own experiences and does not defer to the definitions inscribed by institutions, scholars or the law. Given this research aims to centre the voices of victim-survivors, the definition of sexual violence should not be restrictive.

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[8] It is worth noting that second wave feminists, for example, Andrea Dworkin (1979: 146) Susan Estrich (1986: 1089) and Catharine MacKinnon (1989) did acknowledge that men and boys could be victims of rape by other men, but feminist research and activism at the time centred its focus on the disproportionate experiences of women and girls as a class. This focus on women and girls' experiences within sexual violence research has potentially shaped sexual violence definitions and theories.

Use of pronouns and 'victim-survivor'

Sexual violence scholarship often uses the pronouns 'she' and 'her' referring to victim-survivors and 'he' and 'him' for perpetrators to explicitly acknowledge the gendered power dynamics in sexual violence victimization. By contrast, this thesis uses gender-neutral language such as 'they/them/theirs' 'people who experience sexual violence' or 'victim-survivor(s)' rather than gendered pronouns, except in direct quotes or when using an interview participants' pronoun. Although extensive research evidence highlights that sexual violence disproportionately happens to cisgender[9] women and is perpetrated by cisgender men, sexual violence scholars researching within queer communities are increasingly arguing that scholarly understandings of victimisation must move beyond cis and heteronormative framings (Erbaugh, 2007; Fileborn, 2012, 2014a; Ison, 2019; Jauk, 2013; Mortimer, Powell and Sandy, 2019). This research concerns the ways that victim-survivors of all genders engage with digital society, resultantly, this thesis avoids the default use of gendered pronouns. This reflects the participants in this research, who identified with a range of genders and sexualities, including cisgender women, non-binary people, and cisgender men.[10]

The term 'victim-survivor' is used throughout this thesis because it encompasses a broad range of identities that an individual might use in the aftermath of sexual violence. Identity terms that label people who have experienced sexual violence have been debated and critiqued among feminists, with debates surrounding the use of 'victim' and 'survivor,' respectively (see, for example Gavey, 1999; Haaken, 1999; Jordan, 2013; Kelly, Burton and Regan, 1996; Lamb, 1999; Reich, 2002; Wood and Rennie, 1994). For instance, 'victim' is criticised for perpetuating the victimhood of women (Lamb, 1999). Feminist criminologists such as Sandra Walklate (2011) have commented that 'victim' often refers to a victim of crime, a term which many people may not identify with because they have not reported to police, or their experience does not fit within the bounds of criminal law. Scholars began using the term 'survivor' as it had empowering effects for women who have experienced rape. The term was also taken up in clinical and policy settings. Mary Koss (2010) has acknowledged that contemporary sexual violence scholars often use the term 'victim-survivor,' 'victim/survivor,' or 'survivor/victim,' as it allows for a broadening out of experiences. Liz Kelly, Sheila Burton, and Linda Regan (1996) caution that combining these terms can create a victim/survivor dichotomy. This thesis uses the term 'victim-survivor,' with the dash signalling to a spectrum of shifting identities that a person might have when acknowledging their experiences of sexual violence. It is also a gender-neutral term, which aligns with the diverse range of people who took part in this research.

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[9] Cisgender is a term used to denote men and women whose gender identity corresponds to their sex at birth.
[10] Unless otherwise specified as trans or non-binary, the use of 'women' and 'men' throughout this thesis henceforth refers to cisgender women and cisgender men.

Outlining this thesis

This chapter has discussed the context in which this research developed, whereby victim-survivors increasingly speak out about their experiences in a variety of ways online. Victim-survivors are naming their perpetrators, disclosing their experiences through hashtags such as #MeToo, and participating in private and anonymous communities. As victim-survivors face scrutiny and potential consequences for speaking out online, a scholarly analysis must provide a complex understanding of the diversity of victim-survivors' digital practices that centres their voices and experiences. This chapter has underlined how this research aims to achieve this by presenting research questions that guide this thesis to ultimately reveal a vexed politics of disclosing rape and seeking justice in digital society.

The following chapters in this thesis begin with an overview of the literature and concepts that shape the research. Chapter 2, *The politics of "speaking out" online,* presents a conceptual framework for considering victim-survivors' online disclosures. It outlines how feminist scholarship has discussed 'speaking out' about sexual violence, along with a review of the emerging scholarly literature that has examined how victim-survivors disclose in digital society and its potential implications. Chapter 3, *Theorising rape justice in digital society,* provides a theoretical framework that discusses the limitations of procedural justice in the aftermath of sexual violence, as well as scholarship that theorises justice from the victim's perspective. It then outlines a theoretical framework that shapes how justice might be conceptualised in digital contexts. Chapter 4, *Survivor voices,* describes the two-stage feminist standpoint research methodology that includes the qualitative content analysis of an online community on Reddit and interviews with 26 victim-survivors.

The second half of this thesis unfolds as four analysis chapters that discuss how victim-survivors navigate digital society and the extent to which justice can occur through online disclosures of sexual violence. Chapter 5, *Navigating digital divides,* reveals that victim-survivors disclose their experiences in varigated ways, demonstrating that 'public' and 'private' digital environments are distinguishable and produce different disclosure experiences. Chapter 6, *Speaking out, speaking in?* discusses the significance of online communities as sites of connection and storytelling, illustrating how victim-survivors contribute to supportive community environments and the factors that lead them to speak more publicly about sexual violence. Together, these chapters present some of the ways that victim-survivors navigate the joys and challenges of digital society, revealing complex reasoning and motivations behind their digital practices. Following this, the analysis turns to a discussion of 'justice.' Chapter 7, *"I don't know…what is justice?"* shows what justice meant to participants in this research, discerning whether digital practices aligned with and fulfilled the justice needs of victim-survivors, from their perspectives. Chapter 8, *The multiplicity of informal justice,* focusses

on the potential for informal justice in digital society, arguing that it occurs in multiple and simultaneous ways. The analysis in these chapters demonstrates that victim-survivors who disclose online can experience justice as individuals or within the context of broader movements and conversations about sexual violence, such as #MeToo. Chapter 9, *Disclosing rape, seeking justice?* concludes this thesis by returning to the role of digital platforms in the aftermath of sexual violence. I ultimately argue that victim-survivors' participation in digital society is complex and shaped by their perceptions of safety and the particular ways that they can speak about their experiences.

Several aspects of victim-survivors' navigation of digital society come to light in the following chapters. There are five 'interludes' throughout this thesis that emphasise interview participants' voices and shape the trajectory of the discussion. These interludes allow for a moment to pause and reflect, and signal to the importance of victim-survivors' experiences in this research. The first interlude presented at the outset of this chapter describes aspects of the discussion to come. Olivia spoke about the difficulties of speaking about sexual violence, and how communities in digital society provided a space for her to seek answers. Lionel spoke of the significantly transformative nature of digital society in bringing about justice. Dylan discusses the importance of victim-survivors' stories being heard. Beyond these interludes, several recurring themes emerge throughout this thesis. Much like in their everyday lives, victim-survivors must navigate their identities, their trauma, and their safety within various contexts of digital space. Moreover, digital environments allow for communities and peer connections to grow and develop, which, in turn, can affect how and why victim-survivors disclose online. As will be illuminated in later chapters, there are complexities and difficulties in the process of making online disclosures which present implications for how sexual violence is understood in society and whose stories are heard. In presenting these dialogues, this research demonstrates the possibilities and pitfalls that emerge when considering digital society as a site for informal justice in the aftermath of sexual violence.

2
The Politics of 'Speaking Out' Online

On June 3, 2016, the victim-survivor in the highly publicised 'Stanford swimmer case,' then known to the public as Emily Doe, published her Victim Impact Statement online with Buzzfeed News (see Baker, 2016). The statement was viewed more than 15 million times within the first week of being published online (Miller, 2019: 248). The lenient sentence of Brock Turner sparked a "popular outrage" that framed media narratives surrounding the case (Phillips and Chagnon, 2018). Upon releasing her story online, Doe said, "even if the sentence is light, hopefully this will wake people up…I want the judge to know that he ignited a tiny fire. If anything, this is a reason for all of us to speak even louder" (Baker, 2016: n.p.). Doe's comments and the public's response to her story exemplify some of the salient concepts that will be discussed throughout this chapter, which examines the dominant ways that victim-survivors can speak out about their experiences, both in digital society and in other contexts, such as the legal system, therapeutic spaces and within popular culture.

In October 2019, Chanel Miller published *Know My Name,* a memoir where she tells the story of her experiences as the 'Emily Doe' of the Stanford case (Miller, 2019). Miller's (2019) reflections on what was a heavily reported and publicly consumed narrative of sexual assault depict a woman finally able to speak, to reclaim her identity, no longer reduced to Emily Doe, or defined solely by sexual violence. Despite the importance of this text and Miller's (2019) commentary on victim-survivor identity and healing, it is worth considering the ways that rape narratives themselves are shaped and produced. Tanya Serisier (2018b, 2019) contends that in recent years, notably in the context of vast numbers of victim-survivors utilising #MeToo, the act of 'speaking out' about rape has gained cogency in public discourse. In Sara Ahmed's (2004) terms, it might be suggested that digital rape narratives have gained a 'stickiness,' that is, traction that resonates within broader discourses and brings about particular emotional responses (see also Mendes, Belisario and Ringrose, 2019; Mendes, Ringrose and Keller 2019). The act of speaking out and its resultant 'genre' in public discourse has undoubtedly grown from the Women's Liberation Movement, where naming the harms of sexual violence became a political act in anti-rape activism (see, for example Brownmiller 1975; Serisier, 2018b). However, as this chapter demonstrates, sexual violence disclosures are narratives that remain socio-culturally, politically, and discursively shaped, and those who can speak are bounded by "permissible speech" (Loney-Howes, 2017, 2018). There are politics in 'speaking out.' Although some victim-survivors may have opportunities to reclaim their identities and share their stories online or in other formats, as Chanel Miller has, this chapter also presents the limitations

that continue to permeate and shape dominant understandings of what sexual violence is, who can speak about it, and who will be heard.

This chapter will argue that digital society produces contexts that enable victim-survivors' various modes of speech, however, their disclosures remain restricted by discourses that shape what is 'permissible' in said speech. The discussion connects two areas of scholarship concerning the politics of speaking out online: feminist literature about rape discourses and the (un)speakability of sexual violence, as well as contemporary digital criminological literature about victim-survivors' digital practices. Feminist scholars since Brownmiller (1975) have discussed how sexual violence is spoken about, how stories are told, and what these stories produce. For instance, in the four years since this research began, theorising around speaking out has resurfaced as a burgeoning topic for feminist scholars (see, for example Alcoff 2018; Andersson et al. 2019; Healicon 2016; Karlsson 2018; Loney-Howes 2018; Serisier 2018b). This chapter firstly engages with feminist conceptualisations of sexual violence and speaking out, presenting how speech is discursively scripted (Loney-Howes, 2018; Marcus, 1992). I outline poststructural, feminist, and sexual violence scholarship to illustrate how rape culture, media discourses, trauma frameworks, and legal structures shape victim-survivors' speech (see, for example Andersson, 2019; Gavey, 2005; Gavey and Schmidt, 2011; Loney-Howes, 2017, 2018; Phillips, 2017; Smith, 2019). Simultaneously, rape is framed as being so painful that it cannot be recognised, "witnessed," or acknowledged, rendering it "unspeakable" (Henry, 2010; Scarry 1985). That is, speaking out not only requires victim-survivors to navigate the process of speaking out but also the experience of being heard (or not) (see also Ross 2003a, 2003b). Considered holistically, this literature describes how power imbues the politics of speaking out, shaping how sexual violence can be spoken about, who can speak, and in what contexts. Following this, the chapter turns to scholarship concerning how victim-survivors speak out in digital society. These online disclosures are situated within scholarly conceptions of digital society (Lupton, 2015) and positioned alongside a review of empirical and conceptual literature concerning digital practices of speaking out (see, for example Ferreday, 2017; Fileborn, 2014b; Jane, 2014; Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016; Powell, 2015a, 2015b). By presenting these emergent scholarly discussions surrounding victim-survivors' digital practices *alongside* the 'non-digital' politics of speaking out discussed in the first half of the chapter, this discussion outlines two distinct areas of conceptual and empirical literature that are beginning to be connected by notable feminist and criminological scholars.

The discourses and politics of disclosing sexual violence

What are sexual violence discourses?

The term "discourse" places power in the realms of the textual, rather than the structural (Ramazanoğlu, 1993). Michel Foucault's (1980, 1989) widely adopted concept determines that language, or discourses, are imbued with a power that shapes cultural understandings of the world. Foucault's (1980) understanding of discourse indicates that 'truth' is a product of the power relations arises from the connection between power and knowledge. Considering the role of discourse within sexual violence was difficult for some feminist scholars and activists who formed the second wave of the Women's Liberation Movement and shaped radical feminist analyses of male violence (see edited collection by Bell and Klein, 1996). Contending with discourse was a challenge because the concept implied that the materiality of experiencing sexual violence was somehow less 'true' or 'real' (Alcoff, 2018; see also Alcoff and Gray, 1993; Marcus, 1992). However, one of the key premises of the feminist anti-rape movement has been that women need to speak out about rape and that there are healing and political potential in sharing stories of sexual violence (Brownmiller, 1975; Serisier, 2018b). As Sharon Marcus (1992: 387) observes, this creates a need to understand rape as a "language." That is, to understand rape, it needs to be spoken, written, or in another way expressed as rape, which in turn produces particular discourses. Feminist scholars who have embraced the role of discourse in shaping sexual violence have suggested that sociocultural scripts and norms (re)produce scripts that reiterate "permissible" experiences of rape (see Loney-Howes, 2017, 2018; Marcus 1992).

Importantly, feminist scholars have expanded Foucault's work, which was limited in understanding the specific ways in which power, knowledge, and discourse manifest in the context of patriarchy.[11] Feminists have utilised Foucauldian concepts to move beyond dualisms in theorising women's experiences within patriarchy (McNay, 1992: 25). Discourse and discursive formations can form a bridge between ideology and materiality. Individual subjectivity or experience does not typically constitute a discourse, however, collective subjectivities can "define a discursive space" which can "regulate and determine the spectrum of speech acts which can be taken seriously at any given historical moment" (McNay, 1992: 26). Foucault referred to this as discursive fields, and feminists have considered the ways that subjects form part of a discursive field to shape knowledge in ways that do not defer wholly to an "all-powerful subject" (Ramazanoğlu, 1993: 19–20). Within a

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[11]Feminists who build upon Foucault often critique his lack of engagement with gender and power (see Cahill, 2001; McNay, 1992; Ramazanoğlu, 1993). Foucault himself refused to acknowledge the sexual and gendered nature of sexual violence and contended that rape was merely an act of violence and should be categorised as a general form of assault (Cahill, 2000, 2001).

discursive field, not all discourses will have equal power, and counter-discourses can emerge to challenge knowledge, power and norms constituted through hegemonic discourses (Ramazanoğlu, 1993; Weedon, 1997). Counter-discourses, much like Nancy Fraser's (1996) 'counterpublics,' discussed further in Chapter 3, can shape new narratives and ways of knowing.

Feminist scholarship has described how discourses shape dominant 'truths' about sexual violence. Sophie Hindes and Bianca Fileborn (2019: 1) suggest that sexual violence is "discursively constructed as bounded and binary, leaving little room for ambiguous or uncertain experiences." This indicates that the dominant representations of sexual violence produce norms with limited space for 'grey areas' (Hindes and Fileborn, 2019). Gavey (2019: 248) argues that "entrenched yet not always visible psychosociocultural conditions…secure [rape's] place as a practice that remains imaginable and do-able 'in our modern world.'" This infers that society condones sexual violence through a multiplicity of discourses, factors, or "conditions." Moreover, Ann J Cahill contends that there is a relationship between dominant discourses and how victim-survivors relate to their experiences:

> The social function of rape deeply affects individual experiences of rape, and individual experiences in turn shore up that social function. The two levels are intricately related, for just as contemporary feminist theorists of the body insist that the individual subject and his or her surrounding political, social and historical context are ultimately inseparable – and that therefore it is both futile and undesirable to attempt to approach the subject in isolation from his or her context – so too any individual experience of rape is deeply embedded in the surrounding social and political environment, which is itself affected by the ways the victim, the assailant, their families, and various public institutions react to and represent the incident (Cahill, 2001: 126–127).

This establishes that there are many ways that victim-survivors' identities and experiences are shaped by discursive framings and representations of sexual violence and its aftermath. Therefore, it is important to examine the role of discourse because it can shape the material and experiential aspects of sexual violence. In the sections below, I outline some of these dominant discourses focusing on cultural discourses (including rape myths and rape culture), media discourses, legal discourses, and trauma discourses.

Cultural Discourses: myths, permissible 'scripts,' and the scaffolding of rape

As noted in the introduction of this thesis, sexual violence disclosures are produced within the context of thriving rape cultures. This refers to the various social, political, and cultural "scaffolding" that condones and normalises sexual violence (Gavey, 2005). Feminist scholars and activists have theorised the concept of rape culture since the second wave, with most agreeing that rape culture

proliferates in media by producing myths and stereotypes, influences societal victim blaming attitudes and behaviours, and shapes societal understandings and acceptance of rape (see, for example Buchwald, Fletcher and Roth, 2005; Burt, 1980; Estrich, 1987; Herman, 1984; Javaid, 2015a; Mortimer, Powell and Sandy, 2019; Phillips, 2017; Phipps et al., 2018). Rape culture can normalise particular experiences of sexual violence that prevail as hegemonic, otherwise known as 'rape scripts' (Marcus, 1992; see also Loney-Howes 2017, 2018; Mortimer, Powell and Sandy, 2019). Marcus (1992: 390) contends that societal norms, language, and structures shape an overarching narrative(s) of rape which exist as "a series of steps and signals." She argues that "rape is not only scripted, it also scripts" (Marcus, 1992: 391). This emphasises that sexual violence is affected by "signals" that can inscribe particular categories and experiences upon people who experience it. For example, masculine power and feminine powerlessness are (re)produced through dominant rape scripts (Marcus, 1992: 391). Marcus (1992) suggests that individuals can rewrite these scripts through physical or discursive resistance. However, despite this argument, rape culture and dominant cultural understandings of sexuality and gender continue to affect societal perceptions of sexual violence that impact upon victim-survivors whose experiences exist beyond "typical scripts" (Mortimer, Powell and Sandy, 2019).

Sociocultural norms and rape culture influence how victim-survivors, perpetrators, and the broader community perceive sexual violence. These norms affect who can understand their experience as constituting "real rape" (Estrich, 1987). As Susan Estrich (1987) posits in her influential book *Real Rape*, rape myths are dominant stereotypes about sexual violence that often misrepresent and conflate what it is. For example, a persisting rape myth is that women are predominately raped by strangers in dark alleyways when research evidence attests that women are most often raped by men known to them (Estrich, 1987). Rape myths often present scenarios that explain rape according to a 'cause and effect' logic, where victim-survivors are 'asking for it' through their behaviours (Burt, 1980; Gavey, 2005). These myths allow for dominating discourses that foster victim blaming and suggest that stranger rape is "real rape" while rape in the context of dating or intimate relationships is not (Estrich, 1987; Gavey, 2005). Indeed, these types of myths shaped the number of victim-survivors' who labelled their experience as constituting rape (see Gavey, 1999). Although Gavey (2005) suggests that by the 1990s, victim-survivors were more likely to consider force or coercion within relationships as rape, she also notes that the dominating and prevailing impacts of rape myths and rape culture influence how many victim-survivors' define their experiences.

How rape culture shapes dominant societal perceptions can be a factor in determining *who* can claim their experience as rape, and particularly impacts victim-survivors who are not adult white women. For instance, the rape myth that only women can be victims affects male victims' ability to

define their experiences as rape, or to seek supports (Abdullah-Khan, 2008; Javaid, 2015a, 2018; McMullen, 1990). Moreover, women of colour are impacted by rape myths that intersect with racism. Examples include that rape is only perpetrated against white women by black men or that black women are "sexually loose" and cannot be raped (White, Strube and Fisher, 1998: 162; see also Tillman et al., 2010). Indeed, sexual violence scholarship, particularly that which emerged in the second wave, has arguably contributed to these myths due to its narrow focus on the experiences of white women (White, Strube and Fisher 1998). Black feminist theory has rightly contended that women of colour encounter further barriers resulting from the racism that factors into whether they can define their experiences as rape (Tillman et al., 2010). When introducing the concept of 'intersectionality' Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991: 1242) noted that "the violence that many women experience is often shaped by other dimensions of their identities, including their race and class." When encountering rape myths, women of colour are impacted not only by stereotypes resulting from their gender but also their race (see also Shin, 2005). Additionally, throughout history children who speak out about abuse have been met with disbelief due to the powerful taboos of discussing child sexual abuse (Levett, 2003). Similar taboos surround incest and sexual violence that occurs within families which present barriers to victim-survivors who want to speak out (Bell, 1993). Lastly, dominant understandings of sexual violence are bounded by heteronormative and cisnormative frameworks of sex and gender, such that LGBTIQ victim-survivors cannot claim their experiences (Mortimer, Powell and Sandy, 2019). It is evident that the dominant social scripts and myths perpetuated by rape culture, racism, heterosexism and cissexism influences who can speak out and identify their experience as 'rape.'

Media Discourses: dominant representations of rape in media and popular culture

Feminist scholars have long critiqued how various media (notably news, film, and television) tells stories of sexual violence, and have demonstrated the negative impacts that this can have on victim-survivors and broader society (see, for example Cuklanz, 2000; Hesford 1999; hooks, 1994; Phillips, 2017; Royal, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c; Serisier, 2018a). Yvonne Jewkes (2004) has highlighted that news items that contain sex and violence make for particularly "newsworthy" stories. This leads to an overrepresentation of violent cases of sexual violence committed by a "compulsive male lone hunter" (Jewkes 2004: 48). Chris Greer (2017) further suggests that this fixation on and representation of graphic sexual crimes stems from decreasing societal taboos about sexuality. In the late 1990s, Cynthia Carter (1998) noted that the British tabloid media reporting normalised graphically violence cases of sexual violence to the extent that they became viewed as a "mundane" and "everyday" occurrences. The news media was less likely to acknowledge the sexual violence that occurs within domestic relationships due to its focus on graphic and violent cases (Carter, 1998; see also Stanko, 1990). People derive much of their knowledge about sexual violence from the media, which suggests

that society's perceptions are skewed (Berns, 2004). Kathryn Royal (2019a: 96) suggests that British news media continues to reproduce damaging rape myths and blame victims in ways that are "more subtle and more insidious, and therefore harder to challenge." Royal (2019b) further argues that victim blaming in news media has negative impacts on victim-survivors, especially when the media fixates on high-profile cases over long periods.[12] In a digital age, high-volume sharing of and commentary on these types of cases through social media might equally affect broader society's understandings of sexual violence. This has been a growing area of feminist research, activism and commentary in the aftermath of #MeToo (see for example Hindes and Fileborn, 2019; Fileborn and Phillips, 2019).

News media is increasingly digital rather than print-based, which influences how stories of sexual violence are reported, shared, and consumed. For example, the Stanford case received substantial media attention across a range of online news websites (see Phillips and Chagnon, 2018). When Buzzfeed News published Chanel Miller's Victim Impact Statement online, it was widely shared through social media (Miller, 2019). #MeToo likewise resulted in news media reporting on the unfolding hashtag and allegations made against high profile men and celebrities (see, for example Haire, Newman and Fileborn, 2019; Hindes and Fileborn, 2019; Fileborn and Phillips; 2019). Royal (2019c) has argued that in the post-#MeToo media environment, journalists need to ensure accurate reporting of the realities of sexual violence, which did not occur with many notable news outlets when reporting on Harvey Weinstein. Bianca Fileborn and Nickie D. Phillips (2019: 101) suggest that media is quick to shift into a backlash against victim-survivors and refocus on the "plight of the accused." The backlash within media and digital society to disclosures has tangible impacts within society and politics,[13] and likely impacts upon victim-survivors as well.

Mediated representations of sexual violence within television and other popular culture also shape how society understands sexual violence (Cuklanz, 2000). In the book *Beyond Blurred Lines*, Phillips (2017) demonstrates how representations of rape on television and within popular culture are widely discussed in online articles and blogs. Although television and popular culture continue to perpetuate rape myths, representations of rape are simultaneously becoming more and more graphic and realistic. Phillips (2017: 69) contends that popular media representations of sexual violence can come "too close for comfort – as disturbingly relatable." This creates an environment where consumers (including many victim-survivors) do not want to be "triggered" by popular culture

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[12] Royal's (2019a, 2019b) study explored the impacts of media reporting of the high-profile rape trials of Ched Evans, a professional footballer in the UK who was convicted of rape in 2012, with the conviction quashed on appeal in 2016, and at a retrial Evans was found not guilty.

[13] For example, Lauren Rosewarne (2019) highlights that Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation as a United States Supreme Court Justice, which occurred at the one-year anniversary of #MeToo despite the highly publicised testimony of Christine Blasey-Ford, indicates that the backlash against #MeToo benefited conservative political interests.

(Phillips, 2017: 92–3). This indicates that while popular culture can shape sexual violence discourses and how society understands rape, these discourses might also influence societal responses to rape.[14] Mediated representations of rape within popular culture incite commentary and public discourse about sexual violence, and often establish productive spaces to challenge the rape culture (re)produced in these contexts.

Legal Discourses: facts, evidence, and discursive disbelief through the law

> It is not evidence that primarily provides meaning to… investigation of the facts. Rather [people] rely on longstanding tropes and 'stock characters' of women who speak about sexual violence as lying, deceitful and vengeful, and men as the victims of their irresponsible speech (Serisier, 2018b: 106).

It is well established in feminist literature that victim-survivors and their narratives are placed under intense scrutiny in the context of rape trials (see, for example Andersson 2019; Edgren 2019; Ehrlich 2001, 2018; Ellison and Munro 2009; Smith 2019; Temkin and Krahé 2008; Waterhouse-Watson 2019; Wheatcroft, Wagstaff and Moran 2009). The rape trial, along with the laws the bind how sexual violence is legally defined in different jurisdictions across Western liberal democracies, present a dominating discourse that frames the ways that victim-survivors can understand and speak about their experiences. As Carol Smart (1989: 26) aptly noted, "the rape trial distils all of the problems that feminists have identified in relation to law. Here we find the problem of legal method, the problems of the 'maleness' of law, the disqualification and disempowering of women, and the public celebration of all of these things." Catharine MacKinnon's (1989) *Toward a Feminist Theory of the State* suggested that law and the legal system enacts male dominance over women. She provides connections between rape culture, discussed above, and the law, noting on the impacts of these two discourses combined:

> Most women get the message that the law against rape is virtually unenforceable as applied to them. Women's experience is more often delegitimated by this than the law is. Women, as realists, distinguish between rape and experiences of sexual violation by concluding that they have not "really" been raped if they have ever seen or dated or slept with or been married to the man, if they were fashionably dressed or not provably virgin, if they are prostitutes, if they put up with it or tried to get it over with, if they

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[14] An example of this is the emergence and popularisation of trigger warnings and content warnings, commonly put on social media to warn people that the content in an article or post contains something that could trigger the viewer. These warnings suggest that discussion of rape is likely to be traumatising and that warning an audience can ensure their safety. Roxane Gay (2014) and Jessica Valenti (2014) have both critiqued this, arguing that textual warnings are unlikely to anticipate the diverse range of triggers that might bring on a traumatic memory or experience. Indeed, Phillips (2017: 94) suggests that these types of "debates over trigger warnings…remain central elements in the current construction of rape culture."

were force-fucked for years. The implicit social standard becomes: if a woman probably could not prove it in court, it was not rape (MacKinnon, 1989: 179).

Victim-survivors' experiences and ways of understanding sexual violence are shaped by whether they can "prove it in court" (MacKinnon, 1989). This suggests that the law and criminal justice system can play a significant role in whether victim-survivors might identify and label their experience as being rape (see also Walklate, 2011). This view resonates with Serisier's (2018b) assertion at the beginning of the section, signifying that little has changed in how the law and criminal justice system disseminates rape myths, "stock characters" of victim-survivors, and victim blaming attitudes (see also Ehrlich, 2001).

Since the emergence of poststructural theory and the feminist uptake of Foucauldian analyses, scholars have widely discussed legal discourses of sexual violence (see, for example Bell 1993; Cahill 2000; Ehrlich 2001; Gotell 2006; Jordan 2004). Vikki Bell's (1993: 182) analysis of incest demonstrates that legal discourses "define…reality through its decisions about what will constitute incest in law." Susan Ehrlich (2001) argues that the "institutional coerciveness" of legal discourses as they relate to rape require victims to perform gender and sexuality in particular ways that often align with rape culture. Jan Jordan (2004) suggests that legal discourses frame victims as inherently deceitful, with their stories fallible. Alison Young (1998: 145–147) highlights that legal discourses rarely centre victim-survivors:

> In particular, legal discourse tends to assume that there is a fine line between consensual and non-consensual sexual intercourse: that is, behaviour which might look like rape can become consensual in the blink of an eye…. [The] line drawn between rape and legitimate sexual behaviour has been drawn in a location which erases the experiences of the majority of victims of sexual assault.

Importantly, these scholars together exhibit the power of legal discourses in determining how victim-survivors perceive and define their own experiences. Legal discourses and framings of sexual violence ultimately exclude many individuals from being able to consider their stories as constituting sexual violence, while simultaneously imposing rigid definitions on people that otherwise might not label themselves as victims (see Gavey, 1999). As will be discussed further in the following chapter, victim-survivors' negative experiences within legal settings illuminate a need to look beyond these institutions for 'justice.'

Trauma Discourses: aftermath, recovery, and the therapeutic pathology of sexual violence

Sexual violence is typically understood, even pathologised, as a traumatising experience from which victim-survivors must recover. This viewpoint emerged from feminist and psychological scholarship

concerning the impacts of domestic violence, sexual violence, and child sexual abuse (see, for example Bryant-Davis 2011; Caruth 1995, 1996; Herman 1992a, 1992b; Ussher, 2011). Ann Burgess and Lynda Holmstrom (1974) coined the term "rape trauma syndrome" to describe the various psychological symptoms of rape. A highly influential text on the subject is Judith Herman's (1992b) *Trauma and Recovery*, which outlines symptoms of psychological distress often experienced by trauma survivors, and presents different avenues to healing and recovery. 'Healing' and 'recovery' are dominant aspects of trauma framings of sexual violence, emphasising that the impacts of rape require therapeutic responses (Bryant-Davis, 2011; French, 2003; Herman, 1992b). In *Aftermath*, philosopher Susan J Brison (2002) explores trauma and her journey to a "remaking of the self" after experiencing rape. She understands the 'self' as relational, "capable of being undone by violence, but also of being remade in connection with others" (Brison, 2002: xi). A common thread that links trauma framings of rape is that speaking about the experience is a pathway to healing from it (Brison, 2002; Bryant-Davis, 2011; Harrell, 2011; Herman, 1992b).

Feminist scholars have critically engaged with these dominant trauma narratives, noting that they are produced by a "trauma of rape discourse" (Gavey, 2008; Gavey and Schmidt, 2011). Joan W Scott (1992: 34) argues that experiences are discursively shaped, that "language is the site of history's enactment." This indicates that the recounting of experience, 'traumatic' or otherwise, is socially situated in how that experience is framed and known in broader discourse (see also Brison, 2002: 33). Nicola Gavey and Johanna Schmidt (2011) contend that victim-survivors are themselves impacted by trauma discourses, which act to pre-emptively determine understandings of the impacts of rape. The trauma of rape discourse comprises of several key elements: a foundational view that rape is traumatic, that symptoms of such trauma are primarily psychological and likely to impact upon all facets of victim-survivors lives, that rape is "especially traumatic" and simultaneously beyond understanding, that rape trauma is "lifelong" and scarring, that victim-survivors who do not frame their experiences as traumatic are "in denial," and lastly, that 'healing' and 'recovery' facilitated by "professional help" are requisite goals of all victim-survivors (Gavey and Schmidt, 2011: 439). Naomi Scheman (1983) posits that pathologising victim-survivors in this way produces a psychological determinism that flourishes in liberal (now neoliberal) societies where 'solutions' to sexual violence are highly individualised. Likewise, Jane Ussher (2011) suggests that women who experience sexual violence are socially constructed as having "madness," which normalises psychological outcomes in the aftermath of sexual violence. Fiona Vera-Gray (2019) has noted that trauma models have shaped how some rape crisis services operate in "depoliticised" and "individualised" ways, signifying that rape crisis services have to navigate tensions between the personal experiences of individual victim-survivors and the political organising of anti-violence work. Kristen Bumiller (2008: 31-32) argues that within the neoliberal state, trauma models serve as an additional discourse to "verify" sexual

violence. If victim-survivors cannot frame their experiences through this "trauma talk" then they might not be allowed to access services or supports (see also Marecek 1999). This trauma discourse exemplifies how the languages of psychology and trauma discussed in the preceding paragraph mould structural responses to sexual violence and frame how victim-survivors should navigate the aftermath.

Feminist discussions of 'victim' and 'survivor' identities also exemplify the influence of trauma discourses. For example, Nina Reich (2002: 292–293) suggests that the 'victim' identity is socially constructed: "women are not made into victims only by their victimisation(s), but also by cultural understanding of what that word means in various sites and/or social practices (such as counselling or women's centres) and current gender, economic and racial relations." Here Reich demonstrates how rape identity is constructed through social interaction and is driven by sociocultural contexts as much as individual experiences. Sharon Lamb (1999) contends that the term victim has become synonymous with severe psychological impacts, effectively labelling and pathologising people who have experienced sexual violence. Likewise, 'survivor,' can place responsibility on victim-survivors to resist, heal, or recover from sexual violence, or potentially alienates those who feel like they have not 'survived' (Lamb, 1999). As noted in the introduction to this thesis, 'victim-survivor' and variations of it are common in contemporary research and policy literature to "retain the empowerment conveyed by the word survivor and the outrage implied by the word victim" (Koss, 2010: 219). Jan Jordan (2013) suggests that it is important to challenge the oppositional nature of the 'victim or survivor' debates, commenting that the power of the trauma discourse should be resisted and scholars need instead conceive of the varied ways that victim-survivors are likely to navigate identity in the aftermath of sexual violence.

Narrating Rape: storytelling, power, and sexual violence

Having established some of the dominant discourses that shape understandings of sexual violence in the previous sections, it worth discussing how these discourses produce particular modes of speaking out. Individual stories of sexual violence need to fit within dominant frames to be considered 'true' (Serisier, 2018b). For instance, cultural discourses might dictate that victim-survivors' narratives fit within a "real rape" framing (Estrich, 1987). Legal discourses shape narratives to fit within juridical framings, and stories are "authorised" by the law through a guilty verdict (Serisier, 2018b: 81). Trauma discourses shape narratives to fit within the 'unspeakable,' 'especially traumatic' framing of rape. Alison Healicon (2012: 33) contends that "for women who have experienced sexual violence, to tell another person is a *considered* and a *compulsive* decision." This suggests that speaking out is a significant act that individual victim-survivors navigate.

Some victim-survivors have greater opportunities to speak out than others do. Those who do not fit within stereotypical constructions of "real victims" (Stewart, Dobbin and Gatowski, 1996), such as men, women of colour, Indigenous women, and LGBTIQ people face further complexities in speaking out (Ison, 2019; Kagal, Cowan and Jawad, 2019; Ryan 2019). Scholars have noted that this is due to the social and cultural context in which rape is scripted as something that white, cisgender women predominantly experience (see Javaid 2018; Mortimer, Powell and Sandy 2019; Serisier 2018b). Serisier (2018b) discusses the importance of critically questioning white feminist's power in producing particular knowledge, especially concerning people of colour. She states: "in certain situations and relationships, feminists have significant power. This entails a responsibility to consider the political implications and effects of speech and the role that feminists play in producing, shaping and hearing stories of sexual violence" (Serisier, 2018b: 144). In "discoursing about discourse," scholars can resist reifying the discursive boundaries of sexual violence, which in turn, might create spaces for marginalised communities to speak to their own experiences (Serisier, 2018b).

Feminist scholars and activists have established the political nature of rape narratives and the importance of 'breaking the silence to end the violence' (see Alcoff and Gray, 1993). In *Against Our Will*, Brownmiller (1975) describes how speak outs became a key strategy for understanding the similar experiences of sexual violence that women shared. Discovering their shared experience, together second wave feminists developed the ethos 'the personal is political.' As a result, feminist scholars and activists often frame 'speaking out' as a political act to name the harms and gendered nature of sexual violence. In the decades since the first speak outs, how victim-survivors share narratives about sexual violence have grown and diversified, now ranging from face-to-face activism, traditional print-based media, through to digital media, as will be discussed in the latter half of this chapter. Serisier (2018b: 144) comments that speaking out is "a political practice, and that politics involves multiple vectors of power." Scholars have argued that speaking out presents an often vexed politics, that victim-survivors can face consequences and stigma from politicising their experiences (see Alcoff, 2018; Serisier, 2018b).

Storytelling about experiences of violence has long been a way to highlight harm and injustice particularly in the aftermath of mass atrocities such as genocide. Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi (2014: 15) describes the "immediate and violent impulse" he had to recount his experiences and to make "'the rest' participate in it." Giorgio Agamben (1999: 13) posits that the ordinariness of people who provided testimonies of Auschwitz makes these stories "infinitely harder" to grasp (see also Arendt, 2006). While these stories demand societal 'participation' in the narrative, Agamben (1999) also presents a paradox whereby these stories are unthinkable, unimaginable, and unactionable. Regardless, as Levi (2014) suggests and Healicon (2016) reiterates, many victim-survivors have a compulsive need to share these stories. The digital age has afforded, at least, new methods of

speaking out when held captive in such environments, and stories are mediated in new ways through mobile technologies.[15] However, stories of 'unspeakable' harm remain difficult for (mainstream) audiences to grasp (Agamben, 1999; see also Scarry, 1985).

Although discourses shape rape narratives, scholars have also argued that there is a relational impossibility in expressing and speaking about the pain of sexual violence (Caruth, 1996; Henry, 2010; Scarry 1985). This suggests that simultaneous to being 'scripted,' stories are lived, and felt. Elaine Scarry (1985: 3) has noted the difficulty in communicating about pain as it is intrinsically linked to politics, power and the capacity of human "expressibility." It is difficult to express one's pain just as it is impossible to fully understand another's, and so pain itself becomes a vexed matter. Scarry (1985: 19) suggests that the nature of the human condition emerges through the revelation of an "essential character of 'expressibility,' verbal or material." This suggests that through an inexpressibility of pain emerges the normalisation what is expressible and knowable as 'pain.' There is a paradox of whether one can speak to the true extent of pain, versus the impossibility of remaining silent in the aftermath of it (see also Henry, 2010; Scarry, 1985). Similarly, as Caruth (1996: 4) describes the inexpressibility of trauma:

> [I]t is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in the attempt to tell us of the reality or truth that is not otherwise available. This truth, in its delayed appearance and its belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.

Caruth (1996) further suggests that the unspeakable nature of violence and trauma further impedes those trying to speak, presenting a "double wound" that must be overcome. As such, to participate in storytelling about pain, violence, and traumatic experiences is to engage with a vexed and 'impossible' politics.

Speaking out about sexual violence is thus further complicated due to its 'unspeakability' (Henry, 2010; Marcus, 1992). Nicola Henry (2010) highlights tensions that arise concerning authenticity, speakability and representation when providing testimonies of sexual violence occurring in wartime contexts. As Scarry (1985) questions whether language can truly represent pain, Henry (2010) considers whether other signifiers, such as those only conveyed by non-language, will provide a more authentic testimony. As testimonies are a *representation* of pain, then the act of storytelling about violence is further complicated by the fear that the testimony is not enough to convey the

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[15] A contemporary example of storytelling of this kind is exemplified in Behrouz Boochani's (2018) *No Friend but the Mountains*, which detailed his experiences attempting to seek asylum to Australia, the realities of offshore detention camps in Papua New Guinea. The narrative was written primarily through text messages on a hidden mobile phone. Boochani's and other prisoners' have shared stories to the public in real time via Twitter (Boochani, 2018). This highlights the significance of different modes of storytelling within digital contexts, and the ways in which these narratives can be presented and shared in contemporary society.

harm of sexual violence, and may not be believed as a result (Henry, 2010). In institutional contexts where veracity and truth-telling are central to the process, testimonies can be impeded an expectation that particular signifiers will convey the traumatic nature and impacts of the experience (Caruth, 1996; Henry, 2010). In this way, testimonies of sexual violence, are likely to shaped by "permissible discourses" (as discussed earlier in the chapter) because to not fulfil these scripts is to risk not being believed (see also Loney-Howes, 2018). Testimonies are typically highly individual narratives, and often it is only permissible to speak to experiential harms rather than structural causes as part of one's narrative. For instance, Fiona Ross (2003a: 162) reflects on victim-survivors' experiences providing testimony to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa:

> Remembering and recounting harm is neither a simple nor a neutral act. The Commission's rubric of harm focused on the individual and on the sayable. Permitting the expression of pain of a particular kind, it emphasised bodily violation at the expense of a broader understanding of apartheid and its consequences. Foregrounding certain forms of violence in the public record, *it rendered some kinds of pain more visible while displacing other forms of experience and its expression*. Its work points to the ease with which women's experiences are homogenised and the range of expressions to give voice to experience restricted. (emphasis added)

This quote demonstrates, as Henry (2010: 1106) attests to further, that "the legal context fails to hear stories of wartime rape." Some experiences are deemed "more visible" and storytellers have little control over how the state responds (Ross, 2003a). Henry (2010) presents additional limitations to speaking out in the context of the International Criminal Tribunal of the former Yugoslavia. The expectations of storytelling in these settings are paradoxical; when victim-survivors were questioned about explicit details of their narrative, their inability to speak was interpreted as being unreliable. At the same time, some victim-survivors may not bear the responsibility of providing a full testimony, by narrowly discussing the facts of the experience to fulfil legal requirements. Therefore, in many instances "a criminal trial does not provide the witness an opportunity to construct her own narrative and she cannot use her own language to talk about how rape has impacted her" (Henry, 2010: 1106). Institutions restrict storytelling by limiting how victim-survivors can speak and not believing them when they speak outside of the parameters afforded to them. It is therefore worth questioning the purpose of this storytelling, for whom these narratives are told, and how they are heard.

Belief and witnessing: how are disclosures heard, and by whom?

The notions of truth and veracity are of some importance when considering how victim-survivors' stories are heard, particularly in the context of legal testimony. Audiences often have a "veneer of impartiality" when hearing stories of sexual violence, deriving from legal discourses or tropes such as

"he said, she said" (Serisier, 2018b: 105). Some audiences expect 'proof' in stories of sexual violence and will judge them accordingly. Ironically, when victim-survivors do 'tell the truth' audiences often deem them as unreliable, lacking credibility, or outright liars (Jordan, 2004). Jan Jordan (2004) refers to this as "the credibility conundrum," whereby victim-survivors are expected to share their stories and recall their memories of violence to appear credible, particularly in criminal justice contexts, and their claims are then evaluated and judged as being less credible for being reliant on memory. Despite this, often therapeutic contexts emphasise truth and memory, as Herman (1992b: 1) suggests, "remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims." Likewise, Healicon (2016) argues that victim-survivors' claims to truth are supported only when their narratives are framed according to therapeutic or trauma discourses, whereby their stories express how they were damaged by the experience. This indicates that audiences only deem narratives as 'true' by rendering the teller traumatised by the truth of their memories (see also Brison, 2002; Healicon, 2012). As such, the politics and act of speaking out are undoubtedly impacted by the likelihood that stories of sexual violence will not be believed.

In saying that, Brison (2002: x) comments on the importance of "empathetic listeners," which highlights the value in finding audiences of people who have experienced sexual violence. Scholars have repeatedly noted the importance of rape narratives being *heard* for victim-survivors to 'recover,' or as will be discussed further in Chapter 3, seek justice (see, for example Brison 2002; Loney-Howes 2017; McGlynn 2011; McGlynn, Westmarland and Godden 2012; Ross 2003b). Examples of empathetic or sympathetic listeners include audiences from the first speak outs that occurred during the Women's Liberation Movement, where women and feminists created women-only spaces for victim-survivors to share their stories of rape (Brownmiller, 1975; Serisier, 2018b). However, Serisier (2018b: 11) warns that even sympathetic feminist audiences "may want to hear a story told in a certain way or may interpret an experience differently to a survivor and insist on that interpretation." This indicates that even in the 'safest' of contexts, the politics of speaking out can be fraught and bear potential risks, consequences and impacts upon victim-survivors who choose to tell their stories. Caruth (1996: 5–6) similarly that trauma narratives simultaneously demand response and a witness, while also being incomprehensible to all who hear them. Henry (2010) thus refers to this paradox as the impossibility of bearing witness, which is doubly imposed upon victim-survivors through lenses of trauma and the law, both dictating restrictions and limitations in hearing stories of violence.

Serisier (2018b: 12) contends that with increasing disclosures occurring online, society has potentially entered a new "politics of belief," that is, a cultural context where victim-survivors' narratives and stories garner "greater cultural acceptance and a broader sympathetic audience." The feminist movement in confluence with a digital turn that has seen victim-survivors speaking out

more than ever before, and has ensured that many disclosures will be believed (Serisier, 2018b, 2019). Serisier (2018b: 109) posits that digital spaces have brought about new 'genres' of speaking out, and that collective narratives through movements like #MeToo "compel belief." She simultaneously warns against becoming complacent in these types of disclosures implicitly incurring belief, as "genre is simultaneously an enabling and constraining force" that produces both 'belonging' and 'exclusion' to the genre (Serisier, 2018b: 145). Moreover, in many cases, victim-survivors' accounts remain subject to traditional views and judgements, despite having sympathetic audiences in some circles (Serisier, 2018b; 2019). The following section delves further into the literature surrounding victim-survivors' digital practices, demonstrating that digital society presents new modes of speaking out as well as potential consequences.

Understanding victim-survivor's use of digital platforms

Situating digital society within feminism and criminology

Digital platforms[16] are enmeshed in the daily lives of most people, especially those in the Global North and Western liberal democracies where technologies are widely accessible. Indeed, these are 'digital societies,' and technology is necessary to effectively function within them (Lupton, 2015). Scholars have long discussed the significance of digital technologies in society (see, for example Castells, 2010; Cockburn, 1992; Lupton, 2015; Mackenzie and Wajcman, 1985). Notably, sociologist Manuel Castells' book *The Rise of the Network Society* provides a historical analysis of the Internet and its impact on society, introducing the notion that society itself is networked (Castells, 2010). Among others, Castells (2010: 5) refuted the notion of technological determinism, suggesting that "many factors, including individual intuitiveness and entrepreneurialism, intervene in the process of scientific discovery, technological innovation, and social applications, so that the final outcome depends on a complex pattern of interaction." From this, scholars have increasingly accepted that digital technologies do not determine how people live their lives, nor does society have complete power to determine the ways that technologies develop (Castells, 2010; Lupton, 2015; Powell, Stratton and Cameron, 2018). Deborah Lupton (2015) explains that the term 'digital society' acknowledges the embeddedness of digital technologies in everyday life, highlighting it as an important aspect of all research and scholarship.

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[16] Throughout this thesis, the terms 'digital' and 'online' are often used interchangeably. Similarly, 'digital platform,' 'online platform,' 'digital space,' and 'digital context' are also used interchangeably to describe spaces that might typically include social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Reddit, YouTube, tumblr, Instagram, forums, blogs, and so on. Scholars, and indeed society more broadly, typically consider these platforms to broadly sit under the umbrella term of 'social media' (Page, 2012).

Earlier developments of digital society in the 1990s and 2000s brought with them a sense of utopia and speculation at the potential changes that could emerge with modern technologies. Scholars have noted that the interpersonal use of the Internet, now commonplace and ubiquitous in digital society, was at the time, socially constructed by its users (Abbate, 1999; Castells, 2010). The ways that the Internet and its associated platforms and technologies are used in contemporary society arose through a set of circumstances that meant that the network would be used beyond its military origins (Abbate, 1999; Castells, 2010). The success of the Internet, and by extension digital society, thus developed from the democratic, accessible nature of the network; independent users in disparate locations and from diverse backgrounds develop, through email and the World Wide Web, a platform that facilitated discussions of greatest interest to them (Abbate, 1999). In 1999, Darcy DiNucci (1999) conceived of a "Web 2.0." which predicted the seamless connectivity of the web to numerous devices and appliances, via numerous platforms and for diverse purposes. Web 2.0 is a term used to describe the ways that platforms are increasingly participatory, interactive, and connected (O'Reilly, 2006). Majid Yar (2012a, 2012b) refers to such platforms as "new media" which extends to include blogs, image sharing sites, and social networking sites that allow users to connect in ways not possible through "old media." The user-based and crowdsourced nature of the Internet and associated digital technologies remains relevant today, especially when considering the prevalence of mobile digital media and technologies. Technology companies increasingly crowdsource software and apps from third-party developers and users (Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft, 2013). Despite the fast-paced and ever-changing nature of technology and its widespread entwinement with capitalism and commerce, digital society continues to provide users with ways to participate, create, and channel the directions of its future development.

One of the significant ways that digital society advanced after the widespread uptake of the Internet and Web 2.0 was through the advent of social media. The fast-paced growth and user participation in social media had substantial impacts on modes of social interaction and behaviours in digital society. Broadly defined, social media are digital platforms accessed via the Internet that facilitate and promote social connection, participation, and interaction between the people who use them (Page, 2012). Social media is a contested term, with some scholars arguing that all media are social, and others contending that social media needs to enable the communication between people (for discussion, see, Fuchs, 2014). Examples of social media range from discussion forums and blogs typical of early Internet platforms to social network sites and micro blogging sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, and Snapchat that developed from the mid-2000s onwards (Page, 2012). Social media can also be inclusive of podcasts and wikis, which are not necessarily set up as social networking sites but can encourage interaction and participation between creators and people seeking information. It is worth noting that with the Web 2.0 era came critiques to some of the

'digital utopia' framings of the Internet, with concerns about data, surveillance, and privacy becoming key aspects within critical social media discourses (see, for example Fuchs et. al., 2012).

With the increasing integration of social media in society and day-to-day communication and living, new digital behaviours have also emerged. For instance, John Suler (2004, 2016) argued that in digital contexts people experience "online disinhibition" where they feel less attached to the impacts or potential harms of their actions. Indeed, practices like online bullying, trolling, doxxing and hacking often (although not exclusively) rely on the anonymity or false identities of the partakers (Knuttila, 2011; van der Nagel and Frith, 2015). Sherry Turkle (1995, 2011) suggests that although "life on the screen" can allow for the manifestation of multiple selves and identities, digital practices come at the cost of 'togetherness' in other contexts. Scholars have also commented on how social media prompts affect and emotion in the people who use them, creating a "culture of disclosure" that encourages practices of sharing personal information and narratives, often based on shared norms and values (James et al., 2009: 26; Paasonen, Hillis and Petit, 2015: 20). Others have theorised the blurring of digital society and everyday life to the extent that it is largely accepted that the online world is an extension of the offline world; digital practices as part of peoples 'real lives,'[17] and communicating through platforms is not immaterial or neutral (Paasonen, Hillis and Petit, 2015: 8). Some use the term 'technosocial' to conceptualise the diversity of digital behaviours (see Brown, 2006), with Anastasia Powell, Gregory Stratton and Robin Cameron (2018: 4) suggesting that "'technosociality' captures the processes, cultures and practices that characterise our day-to-day lives." The connections, communities and behaviours that can develop through the use of social media and other technologies in digital society thus exist as a range of behaviours with varied and unforeseen impacts.

The ways that online communities form and how people establish relationships and identities within them has been a substantial topic in Internet research. In her book *Alone Together*, Turkle (2011: 238) is critical of whether online forums ought to be referred to as 'communities' at all:

> If we start to call online spaces where we are with other people 'communities,' it is easy to forget what that word used to mean. From its derivation, it literally means 'to live among each other.' It is good to have this in mind as a standard for online places. I think it would be fair to say that online confessional sites usually fall below this mark.

Researching within confessional sites where users post things that they need to come clean about (for example, the famous blog community 'Post Secret') Turkle (2011) comes to the view that these sites

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[17] In this thesis, I avoid using the term "real life" to describe people's everyday experiences outside of digital context. This is an attempt to avoid recreating the dichotomy of virtual/real, implying that experiences had in digital contexts are less meaningful or legitimate than those had face-to-face. Like most binary categories, the use of dualisms of online/offline, virtual/real, are reductive and lack analytical nuance required when considering the development of digital society and behaviours.

are not communities and that people come to expect less of face-to-face relationships as a result of their increased use of technology. Some scholars counter this, suggesting that it undermines the meaningful connections that people can make in these community settings (Banks, 2010; Robards, 2018). For example, David Banks (2012) criticises this view as being overly 'dualistic,' contending instead that the separation of digital and real life is "theoretically contradictory [and] empirically unsubstantiated" (see also Robards, 2018; Wajcman, 2004). Brady Robards (2018: 192) expands on this, suggesting that "experiences of community move across and between digital and physical spaces." Robards (2018) is one of several scholars that have framed online communities alongside the sociological concept of 'neo-tribes' (see also Clay, 2018; Dinholp and Gretzel, 2018). Anne Hardy et al. (2018: 1) argue that neo-tribes are "fleeting, ephemeral groupings of people that gather together" typically around a mutual experience, issue or passion (see also Maffesoli, 1996). Online communities, therefore, constitute types of neo-tribes where users gather together to discuss a topic or experience of mutual interest.

Unsurprisingly, the digital age has prompted extensive conceptual analysis across several academic disciplines, including feminist philosophy.[18] In a post Web 2.0 context, feminist media scholars have suggested that social media offers the opportunity for continued feminist activism, resistance, and collective organising (Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016; Mendes, Keller and Ringrose, 2018; Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller, 2018). Serisier (2018b: 95) discusses the difficulties in providing feminist critiques of social media and hashtag activism because as such events are often continually unfolding and structural implications "remain undetermined, to be decided by process of discursive activism, backlash and political contestation that is ongoing." She suggests that much of

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[18] Prior to the advent of social media, feminists had theorised whether technology might be potentially dangerous or emancipatory for women. Within feminist theory, discussions considering the role of technology in women's lives have been complex and highly contested, spanning differing feminist approaches (Hawthorne and Klein, 1999). Jan Zimmerman (1981) and Cynthia Cockburn (1983, 1985, 1992) initially argued that machinery and technologies oppress women by limiting their necessity in the workforce and further reducing them to traditional gender roles. However, with ongoing development of technology and its integration in society in the last thirty years, a 'new wave' of technofeminists and cyberfeminists conversely argued that the Internet and new technologies could offer a space for women to seek power in the face of oppression (Wajcman, 2004). For instance, Donna Haraway (1991a, 1991b) famously idealised the "cyborg," a human/machine hybrid that could toy with social reality by being both fictional and material. She considered the cyborg as invaluable to the liberation of women, and indeed, all oppressed people, as the combination of technology and society presents the opportunity to reject essentialism, dualism, taxonomies and hierarchies (Haraway, 1991a, 1991b). Sadie Plant (1997) similarly posited that engagement in cyberspace would provide greater networks, connections and and 'links' among women. Judy Wajcman (2004) examined the dualisms often present when considering gender and technology together. She noted that, depending on the conceptual lens utilised, feminists tended to look upon digital and scientific technology as either oppressive or emancipatory for women. Wajcman (2004) sees the necessity in this to some extent, as developing technologies present political quandaries for feminists, especially given their militaristic and patriarchal foundations and the capacity for them to be used to control the working, reproductive and everyday lives of women. However, simultaneously, she suggests that utilising a liberal ideology, technology could bring the emancipation and feminist utopia; "cyberfeminists have coffee in cyber cafes, surf the Internet, and imagine a gender-free future in cyberspace" (Wajcman, 2004: 3). She ultimately questions the extent to which feminism can strike a balance between technophobia and technophilia avoiding both unrealistic optimism and unproductive pessimism about the potential impacts of technology in the lives of women and feminists (Wajcman, 2004).

the scholarly analyses of online feminist activism is cautious about how social media platforms are themselves framed, focusing instead on how women engage in online feminist activism (Serisier, 2018b). Rosemary Clark-Parsons (2018) has linked online feminist communities to "safe spaces," suggesting that these sites might constitute new versions of women-only spaces. However, Jessica Megarry (2014, 2017a, 2017b, 2018) contends that feminists should critically question social media platforms, as digital contexts enhance patriarchal (both structural and individual) surveillance of feminist resistive politics. This suggests that feminist approaches to digital society must (at least) consider varying technologies within their historical milieu and the broader societal context of patriarchy.

The varying impacts of the digital age have also been discussed conceptually within the context of crime and criminology, although until recently had been restricted to discussions of cybercrime.[19] For the most part, criminologists have been slow to *theorise* the role of technology in crime, deviance, justice and victimisation, and instead have focussed largely on empirical research in areas such as cybercrime and surveillance (Aas, 2015). Sheila Brown (2006) advocated for criminologists to consider the technosocial nature of crime and justice.[20] In recent years, the emergence of a "digital criminology"[21] has seen scholars taking a critical approach to crime in the context of digital society (see, for example Powell, Stratton and Cameron, 2018; Smith, Moses and Chan, 2017; Stratton, Powell and Cameron, 2017). Digital criminology, like many critical and cultural criminologies, consists of multidisciplinary approaches, adapting theory and methodologies from sociology, health, social and feminist theory, media and cultural studies, surveillance studies, and so on (Smith, Moses and Chan, 2017; Stratton, Powell and Cameron, 2017). Emerging empirical and theoretical work falling within the scope of digital criminology has explored social movements such as Black Lives Matter, antisocial media, technology-facilitated sexual violence, and informal and viral justice occurring online, particularly in the aftermath of sexual and gender-based violence (see, for example Fileborn, 2014, 2017; Henry and Powell, 2016; Powell, 2015b; Powell, Stratton and Cameron, 2018; Salter, 2013, 2016, 2017; Smith, Moses and Chan, 2017; Thompson and Wood, 2018; Thompson, Wood and Rose, 2016; Wood, 2017b, 2017a, 2018). Of particular significance is the research that has explored victim-survivors' use of digital media in the aftermath of sexual violence, reviewed in greater detail in the following section.

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[19]Between the 1980s and 2000s, criminology primarily conceptualised types of crime and offending that might occur through technologies and web networks (Powell et al., 2018: 18–20). From the 2000s onwards, with the development of social media came criminological interest in harmful online behaviours and communications, along with consideration of the deep/dark web and big data (Powell et al., 2018: 20). There has been limited theorising within criminology that critically engages with digital society.

[20] Sheila Brown (2006: 225) uses the word technosocial to describe "a world where the 'objects' and the 'subjects,' the 'social' and 'scientific,' of criminology's purview are co-extensive and symmetrically active."

[21] The phrase "digital criminology" is influenced by Deborah Lupton's (2015) digital sociology, referencing the 'digital turn' in social sciences and humanities.

Activism, digilantism, disclosure? Digital practices in the aftermath of sexual violence

In digital society, victim-survivors use a diverse range of platforms and technologies to speak out about sexual violence. Scholars have noted that digital platforms can be a site of further harm that facilitates objectification, harassment of and violence against women (Henry and Powell, 2016; Megarry, 2017a). However, research also suggests that digital platforms are positive spaces for victim-survivors to seek support, advice, and share their stories in the aftermath of sexual violence (Burrows, 2011; Moors and Webber, 2013; Webber and Wilmot, 2013). Victim-survivors also engage with online advocacy and activism that raises community awareness about sexual violence victimisation (Loney-Howes, 2015). Some scholars, notably Anastasia Powell and Nicola Henry (2017) in their book *Sexual Violence in a Digital Age,* take the stance that technology itself should not be dichotomised as beneficial or harmful for victim-survivors. Rather, the impacts of technologies are shaped by the behaviour of people who use them. With these contrasting scholarly considerations about how technologies impact society, discussions about how victim-survivors use digital platforms become multifaceted. It is evident that there are numerous ways that victim-survivors discuss their experiences online, that these disclosures and conversations are not neutral (Wånggren, 2016), technologies and platforms are thus a site where a variety of complex and overlapping behaviours, beneficial, harmful and otherwise, can emerge.

The potential harms of technology, particularly how it facilitates violence against women, online bullying, doxxing,[22] trolling,[23] and other forms of harassment have been a topic of emerging scholarship in the last decade (boyd, 2014; Jane, 2017; Phillips, 2015; Powell and Henry, 2017; Seiler and Navarro, 2014). In instances of gender-based violence, perpetrators can use technology, including social media, to monitor, stalk and control victim-survivors. Powell and Henry (2017) examine how the interweaving of technology into society has impacted and extended the ways that sexual violence can be perpetrated, requiring innovative and appropriate responses in law, policy, and practice. They call for new understandings of sexual violence in these digital contexts, highlighting that technology can facilitate new and changing forms of online harassment and gender-based hate speech (Powell and Henry, 2017). Engaging with technology can bring a risk of harm and can itself be used as a tool to enact violence. Increasingly there are cases of image-based sexual abuse, technology-facilitated sexual violence, or so-called 'revenge pornography;' practices which typically

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[22] Doxxing is a form of cyber harrasment where a person's identifying information such as their name, address, phone number, workplace, and so on, are hacked and provided to a broader public (Phillips, 2015).

[23] Trolls are typically people who engage purposefully in antagonistic behaviours online for their (and other trolls') amusement, known as 'trolling.' Whitney Phillips (2015: 1) notes that there is a "fuzziness" inherent to the definition of trolling, it can be subcultural in specific communities such as Reddit and 4chan, but also is often generalised to include online bullying, antagonistic comments on social media, and online aggression.

refer to perpetrators using online platforms and other digital technology to share and create sexualised images of people without their consent (Henry and Powell, 2015a, 2015b, 2016; Powell and Henry, 2017; Stanley et al., 2016). Further, this abuse can extend to the sharing of images and videos of a victim-survivor's sexual assault or rape, for example, the Steubenville and the 'Jada Pose' cases (see Powell, 2015b). In these cases, the victim-survivors involved each had images or videos of their sexual assault shared widely on social media, and in the Jada Pose case, the victim-survivor's experience was turned into a widespread meme (for further discussion see, Powell, 2015b; Salter, 2013).

The perpetration, resistance to and disclosure of sexual violence in digital contexts exist within the same socio-cultural conditions as everyday society, and as a result, is influenced by (and at times reproduces) rape myths. Indeed, Powell and Henry (2017) suggest that rape culture proliferates in a digital age, and feeds into online rape jokes, misogyny, harassment, and other forms of abuse (Powell and Henry, 2017). Societal responses to such violence are akin to responses to other forms of sexual violence, whereby victim-survivors are routinely blamed and advised to stop taking intimate images, or, in the case of online harassment, to get off the Internet. This rhetoric denies victim-survivors the right to digital equality and has "consequences not only for victims' emotional and psychological wellbeing but also for their equal participation and enjoyment of public life" (Powell and Henry, 2017: 181). Powell and Henry (2017) note that victim-survivors experiencing online harassment and hate speech are forced to modify how they engage with digital platforms, for instance, by hiding their identity, gender, and other identifying details. Fileborn (2017: 1496) further suggests that online safety, particularly for victim-survivors of street harassment, is "contingent on how we engage with different online spaces." This suggests that the features of harassment and how safety can be sought in response to it will differ based on the platform.

The ways that broader society use social media to discuss high profile cases of sexual violence can have an impact upon victim-survivors. Firstly, the phenomenon of "trial by social media" (Milivojevic and McGovern, 2014) means that in some instances, victim-survivors' experiences of sexual violence can become the topic of (often uninformed) public consideration and debate. When cases of gender-based violence gain media attention or "go viral" the details of these cases will likely be discussed at length online, often resulting in victim blaming commentary (Wood, Rose and Thompson, 2018). Secondly, social media increasingly has the potential to impact upon justice processes and outcomes, such as jury selection and the right to presumption of innocence and a fair trial (Brown, 2012; Salter, 2013). In high profile cases, social media plays an important role in 'ordinary citizen' engagement with crimes. For instance, the well-known Australian case of Melbourne woman Jill Meagher who was raped and murdered by Adrian Bayley in 2012 is a clear example of social media encouraging a mob mentality (Milivojevic and McGovern 2014). Following

the arrest of Bayley, groups and posts on Facebook announced his guilt and called for the reinstatement of capital punishment (Milivojevic and McGovern 2014). The online accusations made by the public and subsequent trial by social media bore potential impacts on Bayley's trial, and many involved in the formal justice process condemned the social media users who were sharing images of the accused on Facebook (Milivojevic and McGovern, 2014). Lastly, as mentioned in the previous paragraph, social media platforms are rife with online harassment and gendered hate speech. Women and feminists are routinely subjected to trolling and other forms of digital harassment (Jane, 2016). Fileborn (2017: 1496) notes that victim-survivors who disclose their experiences on social media sites can experience backlash and trolling that can "do a lot of additional damage." As such, social media and digital platforms have the considerable potential of being risky or unsafe for victim-survivors of sexual violence.

Despite the potentially harmful nature of the digital sphere (Agustina, 2015; Henry and Powell, 2016; Salter, 2013, 2017; Suler, 2004) there are noted benefits for victim-survivors who use technology to seek support (Andalibi et al., 2016, 2018; O'Neill, 2018). Emerging research has established that technology-facilitated support interventions bear positive impacts for victim-survivors experiencing domestic and intimate partner violence (Berg, 2015; Tarzia et. al., 2016, 2017, 2018). Some rape crisis centres will refer victim-survivors to online options such as chat counselling as supplementary support for other therapies (Forgan, 2011). Online communities enable survivors to connect for peer support (Berg, 2015; Burrows, 2011). Although Clark-Parsons' (2018) argument about digital versions of "safe spaces" concerns activist communities, this concept might also apply to victim-survivors' use of online communities. Several specific online communities exist and are mostly set up as forums where survivors discuss their experiences. These communities are distinguishable as being 'private' or 'public' spaces. Private communities typically require an account or password to access (Burrows, 2011),[24] whereas public communities are accessible to anyone, such as those that exist on Reddit (see, for example Andalibi et al., 2016; Noack-Lundberg et al., 2019; O'Neill, 2018). In 2011, research conducted for the South Eastern Centre for Sexual Assault (SECASA) in Victoria, Australia, assessed the suitability of different online peer support communities for victim-survivors of sexual violence (Burrows, 2011). In her report, Avrille Burrows (2011: 34) compares different types of online communities, noting that discussion forums and chat rooms are more suitable for providing peer support than Facebook or Yahoo groups, which "appeared to be primarily for the provision of information and social networking." Her study primarily assesses the suitability of discussion forums and chat rooms are spaces for victim-survivors to seek support. The research assessed various communities according to factors such as privacy and

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[24] Examples include: 'Pandora's Aquarium,' 'After Silence,' and 'OurPlace,' along with private and secret Facebook groups.

safety, access and registration, navigation, response rate, and environment. Burrows' (2011: 45) notes that online peer support communities have existed for twenty years, with Pandora's Aquarium, a prominent community, being set up in 1999. This suggests that despite the dearth in the scholarly literature on victim-survivors' digital practices, these types of disclosures are not a 'new' phenomenon.

Having anonymity or pseudonymity is a typical feature of many online communities (van der Nagel and Frith, 2015), and bears particular importance for victim-survivors who disclose in them. Nanazin Andalibi et al. (2016, 2018) discuss the significance of anonymity in their research into sexual abuse disclosures and responses on Reddit. The researchers suggest that online communities are ideal social support spaces for disclosures of sexual violence and that the ability to be anonymous increases the likelihood of supportive responses from peers (Andalibi et al., 2018).[25] Kyja Noack-Lundberg et al. (2019: 3) emphasise the importance of online communities for transgender victim-survivors, whose experiences of violence are complex, "intertwined and often co-occurring." Online supports are an important and valuable option for transgender people who face stigmatisation and difficulties when seeking formal supports and rape crisis services (Noack-Lundberg et al., 2019). Despite the long existence of victim-survivor communities in digital society, these spaces are significantly under-researched, particularly amongst sexual violence and criminological researchers, and research that emerges may quickly become out-of-date.[26] While research within feminism (particularly the discipline of feminist media studies) has begun to discuss the significance of online communities, the current research contributes to a substantial gap and lack of conceptual knowledge regarding digital society within both sexual violence and criminological scholarship.

Given this lack of scholarship surrounding online communities within sexual violence and criminological research, it is worth noting key empirical studies from Internet and health research. There are various types of online communities, including those hosted on social media platforms, within chat rooms, online message boards, and forums; many scholars contend that these communities should be viewed as being as significant as 'real world' communities (Preece, Maloney-Krichmar and Abras, 2003). Just as in everyday life, online communities are made up of social norms, values and behaviours (Herring, 2004; Robards, 2018). Users choose to participate in online communities to varying degrees. For instance, online communities may be comprised of public and non-public members; people who post to the community, and people who 'lurk,' by passively consuming content. Blair Nonnecke et al. (2006) found that 'lurkers' might have less positive

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[25] Although Andalibi et al. ' (2016, 2018) studies into Reddit communities offer excellent insights into anonymity, they are perhaps limited in their discussion of the complexities of rape disclosures, perhaps due to the discipline of the studies being computer sciences.
[26] For instance, some of the resources listed in Burrows' (2011) report are no longer available as described. Furthermore, the rapid shifts in digital platforms, like Facebook, Twitter and Reddit, mean that new features, and indeed, platforms, can emerge over the time it takes to conduct scholarly research.

experiences compared to members who actively post. Kate Crawford (2009), conversely suggests that lurking ought to be reconceptualised as 'listening,' which places more value on community members who read the content posted by others.

There are several notable benefits for people who use online communities, particularly when seeking support. Online communities can offer their participants a sense of shared identity and belonging, shared experiences, interests or needs, and strong supportive relationships (Brandtzæg and Heim, 2008; Norris, 2002; Preece et al., 2003). There are differences in how users interact, depending on the platform, the age of the participants, and the type of community it is (Siriaraya et al., 2011). Some scholars have noted that computer-mediated communication can produce unique consequences compared with face-to-face interactions (Coulson, Buchanan and Aubeeluck, 2007; Goh, Phillips and Blaszczynski, 2011; Lewandowski et al., 2011; Siriaraya et al., 2011). Despite this, online communities are found to be empowering and a way to reduce loneliness, allowing individuals to have access to information and positive social outcomes (van Uden-Kraan et al., 2009). In some communities, high-frequency users must do "emotional work" to meet community needs (Winefield, 2006). Other studies have measured the role of anonymity, empathy and psychological impacts of online support communities, all indicating that higher participation in online communities led to better health outcomes and the facilitation of social support (Coulson, Buchanan and Aubeeluck, 2007; Coursaris and Liu, 2009; Mo and Coulson, 2008, 2013). This literature exemplifies the diverse ways that people can engage in online communities, and beneficial outcomes these communities might have, which might also extend to victim-survivors of sexual violence.

Beyond forum-style online communities, other web platforms and technologies enable victim-survivors to connect, share resources, disclose, and anonymously report their experiences of sexual violence. For example, 'Hollaback!'[27] is a website where victims of street harassment can anonymously report the details and location of sexual violence (Fileborn, 2014b). While Hollaback! is an activist and advocacy organisation, their web platform allows victim-survivors to crowd-source information about where street harassment occurs. It provides a storytelling function where victim-survivors can share their personal experiences, the site maps where harassment has occurred across public space, and users can 'like' one another's disclosures by clicking a button that reads "I've got your back" (Fileborn, 2014b). Communities like Hollaback! are significant in combining storytelling, mapping and activism around street harassment, a form of sexual violence that is often minimised in society and ignored in criminal justice contexts. For these kinds of sexual violence, digital society can present opportunities for resistance and validation.

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[27] Hollaback! originated in New York, and primarily exists in the US, Canada, and the UK, along with having an online presence and community. It has historically had chapters in Australia, and currently has chapters in 21 cities and 16 countries across the US, the UK, Canada, Europe, Asia and South America.

Scholars have suggested that online disclosures that contain visual elements, such as videos or photographs, produce particular 'affective' responses to sexual violence (Dobson, 2015; Ferreday, 2017; Harrington, 2018). One example is "Project Unbreakable,"[28] a Tumblr photography project where people submitted pictures of themselves holding posters with descriptions about their experiences and quotes from their perpetrators (Ferreday, 2017; Powell, 2015a, 2015b). Debra Ferreday (2017: 133) argues that selfies in this context transform individualised experiences of trauma into "collective action and mutual support." Similarly, YouTube creates a space for victim-survivors to make video disclosures, known in the literature as 'notecard stories,' that reveal a written story on cue cards, usually with a favourite song playing in the background (Harrington, 2018; Misoch, 2015; Powell, 2015a). Carol Harrington (2018) notes the increase of "my rape story" videos, a genre of video disclosures that are both note card style or narrated by the YouTuber. Amy Shields Dobson (2015) refers to these types of disclosures as "pain memes," highlighting the significance of silence in these videos as a potential reclaiming of *how* young people want to speak about their experiences. Mendes, Belisário and Ringrose (2019: 190) expand on this further, arguing that pain memes allow "experiences to be not just known, but *felt*." Platforms like Tumblr, YouTube and Instagram allow victim-survivors to share imagery alongside narratives of sexual violence, and unlike other forms of online disclosure, this illustrates the physicality of victim-survivors in the process of disclosing.

Similarly, podcast and audio projects including victim-survivors' narratives are increasingly shared online. For example, "After: Surviving sexual assault" is a BBC podcast started in 2019, where the creator interviews fellow victim-survivors about living in the aftermath of sexual violence and abuse (Morton, 2019). The podcast is attached to *Life Continues After,* an online community started in 2018 to share resources and content with victim-survivors, including music, movies, podcasts, art, and victim-survivor narratives. Victim-survivors can also contribute and suggest content to be uploaded to the community (Life Continues After, 2018). A final example is an anonymous reporting app and website titled 'SARA' (Sexual Assault Report Anonymously), which allows Australian victim-survivors to anonymously report their experiences of sexual assault to police. The app can also connect victim-survivors with supports from rape crisis services (South Eastern Centre Against Sexual Assault and Family Violence, 2019). The examples discussed here highlight some of the diverse ways that victim-survivors disclose and form communities outside of traditional text-based web forums. It is through these diverse digital practices that victim-survivors can share their stories, pursue creative interests, and connect simultaneously. Together, these examples indicate that victim-survivors engage with an array of digital media to share their experiences and to meet a variety of needs.

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[28] Project Unbreakable was a project spanning 2011-2015; its content and posts remain uploaded to tumblr.

Social media and social networking platforms provide additional ways for victim-survivors to disclose in more 'public' digital contexts than in online communities. For example, using hashtags on Twitter allows victim-survivors to share stories, connect with others, and engage in activism or awareness-raising about sexual violence. Hashtags relating to sexual violence have surged and dissipated throughout this ongoing era of 'hashtag activism,' but recent examples include reactions to sexual assault allegations towards Donald Trump, President of the United States, with #trumptapes and #notokay (Malkin, 2016; Noyle, 2016). These hashtags encouraged victim-survivors to share experiences of harassment and sexual assault in response to Trump's comments in 2016 about sexually assaulting a woman (Bogen et al., 2018, 2019; Malkin, 2016; Noyle, 2016). Hashtags often rise sporadically in response to events or prolific news media stories, as was the case with #BeenRapedNeverReported, and usually encourage survivors to share their experiences politically to critique broader social issues (Ferreras, 2014; Francis, 2015; Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016). #BeenRapedNeverReported saw victim-survivors sharing experiences of sexual violence on Twitter, with people describing in their tweets the reasons why they did not report their rape to authorities, simultaneously challenging rape myths, stereotypes, and public perceptions of the criminal justice system. Some scholars argue that hashtags can also foster hope and empowerment, by providing a space for victim-survivors to use their voice and challenge rape culture (Clark, 2014, 2016; Dixon, 2014; Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016; Williams, 2015).

At this point, it is important to discuss emerging literature about #MeToo, as it was a significant development in online discourse that occurred during this research. As mentioned at the outset of this thesis, the #MeToo movement, sparked on Twitter in October 2017, has undoubtedly had the biggest impact of any sexual violence related hashtag to date. The hashtag sought the disclosures of victim-survivors of sexual violence, although primarily centred on harassment in industries and workplaces due to its basis in Hollywood. Unsurprisingly, it has become a noteworthy topic of scholarly research. Some scholars see #MeToo as reigniting conversations about sexual harassment and violence within different industries (O'Neil et al., 2018). Jessamy Gleeson and Breanan Turner (2019) argue that #MeToo is an example of online feminist activism and consciousness-raising. Megarry (2017b, 2018) refutes this claim, critiquing the hashtag as a weak form of activism. The hashtag has been critiqued for "going too far" by naming celebrities as perpetrators in situations that exist as a 'grey area,' while simultaneously leading to questions around what constitutes sexual violence or assault (Fileborn and Phillips, 2019; Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019b). Hindes and Fileborn (2019) have further discussed how #MeToo spurred broader conversations around grey areas of consent in public discourse, noting that news media remains limited in its understandings and framings of sexual consent. #MeToo has been further criticised as a movement centred in whiteness, whereby white celebrities were able to spur widespread online

action while simultaneously erasing the grassroots activism and advocacy work of women of colour (Gómez and Gobin, 2019; Kagal, Cowan and Jawad, 2019; Onwuachi-Willig, 2018). Rachel Loney-Howes (2019: 30) suggests: "women of colour, women with disabilities, migrant women on temporary visas, working class women, refugee women, elderly women, and also the LGBTQ community, were, however unwittingly, left out of, excluded from, or marginalised by the #MeToo movement." As will be expanded on in later chapters, #MeToo has operated (perhaps inadvertently) to silence victim-survivors who cannot speak out publicly about their experiences of sexual violence.

In summary, the ways that victim-survivors use digital platforms are typically framed in the literature as having either beneficial impacts or adverse consequences. Research to date has suggested that the digital society can be harmful and risky places for victim-survivors and that these spaces can facilitate further violence or to impede formal justice processes. However, other studies simultaneously highlight that victim-survivors use digital platforms for activism, anonymous reporting, and seeking support which can provide positive outcomes. It is important, especially from the outset of this thesis, to recognise that 'real life' is not distinct from online engagement or digital platforms. As such, it might be less useful to examine victim-survivors participation in digital society as categorically positive or negative. Rather, as scholars within digital criminology suggest, we should look to digital engagement as a part of life in digital society which includes a range of practices that are socially and culturally contingent and can have a range of outcomes that are not fixed in nature (Powell, Stratton and Cameron, 2018). For this thesis, this means recognising that victim-survivors' digital practices might bring both implications and challenges, along with hopes, successes, and emancipations from experiences of sexual violence and trauma.

Emerging concepts: collective storytelling, affective solidarity and applying 'safety work' to digital society

Because literature surrounding victim-survivors' digital practices is still emerging and the contexts of online disclosures are multiple and changing, feminist scholars have discussed various theories that conceptualise digital forms of speaking out. Serisier (2018b: 103) suggests that victim-survivors use of Twitter, particularly in the context of the #MeToo hashtag, presents a form of collective storytelling which seeks to "counter the denial and disbelief that frequently greets individual women's stories." Serisier (2018b) argues that with enough repetition, these narratives permeate a "semantic thickness" that provides further truth and veracity to the story (Bourdieu, 2001; see also Waterhouse-Watson, 2013). Alongside other feminist scholars, Serisier (2018b) notes that the repetition of disclosures is also revelatory of the structural forces that influence gender-based violence (see also Karlsson, 2018). Serisier (2018b) utilises Derridean theories around genres of speech to discuss the "generic boundaries" of collective storytelling, whereby the boundaries dictate, much like the

discourses discussed earlier in the chapter, whose narratives are included. When a narrative does not 'fit' the genre, it is less likely to be believed. Serisier (2018b) discusses this through the example of Hollywood's disbelief of allegations of Woody Allen's abuse of his daughter, Dylan Farrow, which shifted towards belief within the context of the semantic thickness of the #MeToo movement (Serisier, 2018b). To further exemplify the idea of generic boundaries, Serisier (2018b: 115) discusses a video produced in the aftermath of #MeToo that encouraged victim-survivors to #KeepTellingPeople:

> In its focus on enabling speech, the video offers no possibility that the conditions that necessitate this speech might ultimately be changed by the speech that seeks to contest them. What 'everybody knows' becomes, through a seemingly common-sense formulation, an eternal truth rather than a contestable reality.

This highlights the impacts of producing a genre whereby the act of speaking out is so thoroughly enabled that it does not actively challenge the societal conditions and contexts in which rape occurs, nor can it conceive of a possible context that one day, such speaking out may not be necessary. Serisier (2018b: 115) suggests that the "ongoing legacy of #MeToo is imagined as ongoing maintenance of #MeToo" which indicates that the ongoing and evolving nature of the hashtag places an expectation on victim-survivors to continue to participate, and in doing so, enforces a cultural hegemony or "sameness" of speaking out as a political response to sexual violence.

In Mendes, Ringrose and Keller's (2019) *Digital Feminist Activism*, the authors take the opportunity to conceptually and theoretically develop their several earlier contributions regarding how digital activism can be utilised to challenge rape culture. Primarily drawing from concepts relating to affect theory, the authors examine the emotional rewards, labour and reactions to doing feminist activism (Mendes, Ringrose and Keller, 2019). Particularly utilising Ahmed's (2017) conceptualisations of the "stickiness" of affect, and the ways that affect is contemporaneous to doing feminist activism, Mendes, Ringrose and Keller (2019) note the transformative nature of affect and affective solidarity in the lives of digital feminist activists (see also Hemmings, 2012; Paasonen et al., 2015; Papacharissi, 2015). The authors also utilise the notion of "platform vernacular" to describe the varying common conventions that develop across digital platforms (see also Gibbs et al., 2015; Mendes, Ringrose and Keller, 2019). Using these ideas about affect and platform vernacular, Mendes, Ringrose and Keller (2019) develop key concepts about how digital activists challenge rape culture. Key to this thesis are their discussions of the participatory and pedagogical nature of platforms such as Twitter for feminist activists, which can be used to learn, reinforce, and police feminist values (Mendes, Ringrose and Keller, 2019). The authors also discussed how their participants exhibited digital literacy in their navigation of safety in digital spaces, highlighting, as Fiona Vera-Gray (2018)

has noted, the diverse ways in which women conduct 'safety work' to protect themselves from harassment.

As is revealed in later chapters, safety emerges as an important focus in this thesis. In Fiona Vera-Gray's (2017; 2018) research, "safety work" occurs when women are in public space and under near-constant threat of danger of street harassment. She contends that:

> [W]omen's freedom is in tension with their safety. In order to increase the latter, many women and girls routinely incorporate practices that limit the former, restrictions that are reconfigured as an act of choice. And it *is* a choice in a way, and that gives us an escape…But the challenge is how to acknowledge this at the same time as recognising that choices are made in a particular context, one where we are responsible for preventing violence against us, and one where we are blamed for failing (Vera-Gray, 2018: 128–9).

Vera-Gray (2018) draws from Liz Kelly (1987, 1988, 2017) who has described safety work as an "automatic reflex." Moreover, she builds upon Elizabeth Stanko's (1990) discussion of how women and men experience and navigate the potential danger of sexual and physical violence in their everyday lives. Stanko (1990) noted the typical rhetoric that warns women of the dangers of stranger rape and tells them to 'be cautious' undermines the work that women already do to ensure their safety (see also Vera-Gray, 2018). Indeed, it might not be such a leap to consider the safety work that likely occurs in digital society, given the potential for harassment and negative responses to victim-survivor disclosures.

Considering the politics of speaking out in digital society, Serisier (2018b: 116) aptly notes that "the question… seems difficult or even impossible to answer within a political frame in which the act of speech is so dominant." That is, it is difficult to develop a broader politics amidst a cultural moment where the speaking out is rapidly occurring, shifting and with consequences still emergent. Within a climate in which so much speech about experiences of sexual violence abounds, it is pertinent to consider the extent to which speaking out remains connected to its origins as a feminist political act (Serisier, 2018a, 2018b). While sexual violence disclosures remain culturally, socially, and politically shaped through discourse, the proliferation of speaking out online might suggest that speak out practices are no longer *unreservedly* aligned with the purposes or aims of the feminist movement that existed in the context of the first speak outs.[29] Rather, speaking out has, to an extent, 'exceeded' the discursive and political boundaries set forth by feminists (Serisier, 2018b: 12). As

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[29] I say this not to suggest that feminist perspectives or the aims of the feminist movement are unimportant or not central to the chapter and indeed this thesis, but rather to flag the complexities of sexual violence disclosures in digital society, and to avoid the danger of suggesting or assuming that all disclosures are 'feminist' when indeed, they are not. The feminist history of speaking out about sexual violence cannot be disputed. However, it cannot be assumed that all people engaging in online disclosures of sexual violence are engaging in a feminist politics.

Nicola Gavey suggests, despite the amount of activism and victim-survivor voices that exist in the public domain, the public is quick to criticise and refute their narratives (see also Fileborn and Phillips, 2019; Gavey, 2019: 249). This suggests that the need to connect with feminist theorising with regards to sexual violence, as this chapter has, remains vitally important to ensure that speaking out remains a viable and productive experience for those victim-survivors' who participate. It is also necessary to acknowledge concepts pertaining to normative discourses and neoliberalism that shape individuals' 'choices' to speak out, what they can say and to whom.

Conclusion: The politics of 'speaking out' online

Sexual violence scholarship is just beginning its conceptual engagement with victim-survivors' ways of 'speaking out' in digital society. Before recent studies by Serisier (2018b), Loney-Howes (2017, 2018) along with Ringrose, Keller and Mendes (2019), feminist scholars were yet to comprehensively connect theories of sexual violence to the phenomenon of victim-survivors 'speaking out' in digital society. This chapter has thus sought to exemplify how these two sets of literature, that is, 'traditional' sexual violence scholarship and 'new' research into victim-survivors use of digital platforms, can conceptually converge. At the outset of the chapter, dominant sexual violence discourses were presented to highlight how cultural, media, legal and trauma discourses frame how victim-survivors experience sexual violence. Following this were discussions of the impacts of these discourses on who can speak out, what they can say, and the difficulties in speaking to 'unspeakable' pain (see Scarry, 1985). Together, the first section of the chapter presented how stories of sexual violence are told in differing contexts, contributing to discursive scripts that shape permissible and impermissible ways of understanding sexual violence and speaking out. Despite existing in a cultural moment in which rape narratives are being acknowledged and at times widely shared through digital society, it remains that victim-survivors are silenced, not believed, and not able to speak when they exist in the margins. Rape narratives remain constrained by discursive power.

In digital society, it seems that there are ample and diverse opportunities for victim-survivors to speak out, as was discussed in the latter half of this chapter. While not without limitations, victim-survivors' uses of digital media for storytelling about sexual violence echoes some of the 'utopia' framings of the development of digital society. Online spaces and digital technologies provide different ways for people to connect, speak to their pain, and advocate for change. This includes a range of digital practices, from social media activism to the use of online communities to seek support. Moreover, the opportunity for large and diverse audiences in the digital public sphere brings the potential for the wide and viral consumption of rape narratives, to the extent that perceptible shifts and changes occur in society. For instance, activism following Buzzfeed News' publication of Chanel Miller's Victim Impact Statement led to the recalling the judge who sentenced Brock Turner

(Miller 2019). The millions of victim-survivors who spoke out through #MeToo have (arguably) led to the accused perpetrators such as Harvey Weinstein losing power and status (Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019b). Moreover, speaking out online has led to some discursive shifts, both progressing and regressing dialogues of sexual violence and how it is perceived by the broader public (Fileborn and Phillips, 2019; PettyJohn et al., 2018). Digital society has fostered an environment that supports victim-survivors publicly reclaiming their identities and telling their stories but is simultaneously bounded by the ways that sexual violence itself can be spoken about.

Many feminist activists from the 1970s onwards saw 'speaking out' as a means to effect change. However, as Serisier (2018b: 12) notes, the cultural change effected by speaking out has resulted in a multifarious politics:

> The success of speaking out has produced, I argue, a more complex set of risks, pitfalls and ethical dilemmas for feminists and survivors. All of these are underwritten by a central paradox. Breaking the silence, despite its significant cultural impact, has not ended sexual violence, nor does it seem to have significantly reduced it, or to have eradicated the stigma with being a rape victim.

The paradox that speaking out has yet to effectively end sexual violence or de-stigmatise victimisation presents a backdrop for considering rape justice in digital society, as does the typically neoliberal responses to rape (see also Bumiller, 2008; Carmody and Carrington, 2000). The discussion in the following chapter considers the role of justice in the aftermath of sexual violence, and whether speaking out online might constitute an 'informal justice.'

3
Theorising 'Rape Justice' in Digital Society

> When widening the scope [of justice], we see that the standard advice to victims – 'call
> the police' and engage criminal justice – may not be possible or realistic in most contexts
> of victimisation (Daly, 2015: 37).

As critical criminologist Barbara Hudson (1996) contended throughout her career, a perfect answer to the question of justice may forever elude scholars, especially those who remain critical of oppressive structures. Typically underpinned by the values of fairness and equality, justice can be distinguishable as both concept and action; as a result, it is both abstract and tangible. For individuals, justice becomes an expectation after experiencing a wrong. For broader society, justice is often synonymous with either justice mechanisms (criminal, civil, transitional, restorative, or otherwise) or social justice, and is typically envisaged as a corrective to harm. In contemporary society, how one considers justice can be dependent on politics, culture, geography, gender, class, and so on – it is, as is everything, shaped by the social. Historically, from Ancient Greek philosophy through to John Rawls (1999) and beyond, justice is framed within contexts of liberalism as being retributive, utilitarian, libertarian, and communitarian (see Johnston, 2011).[30] In the late 1970s, scholars in critical criminology, feminist jurisprudence, and political theory began to question liberalism and whether justice could ever reflect fairness and equality, given its historical and philosophical roots in patriarchy, retribution, and racism (Cornell, Rosenfeld and Gray Carlson, 1992; Derrida, 1992; Fraser, 2008b; Hudson, 1996, 2003; Young, 1990). These disciplines were rightly concerned with how justice was (and continues to be), moulded precisely to the interests of white men and oppressive structures of power. The theoretical framework outlined in this chapter combines critical, poststructural, and feminist understandings of justice primarily from the 1990s onwards with sexual violence literature that conceptualises justice from the perspectives of victim-survivors.

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[30] John Rawls' (1999) *A Theory of Justice* is arguably the most significant contributions to the philosophy of justice in the last 50 years. Rawls' (1999) contribution to contemporary understandings of social justice is significant, and his notions of fairness and equality have proliferated in modern understandings of justice. His understandings of how this should occur were based upon a thought experiment known as the 'veil of ignorance' through which two key principles of justice emerged. Firstly, the concept of liberty entailed the premise that within liberal societies, human beings are entitled to an equal and extensive array of basic liberties, which include civil and political rights. The second was divided into two, the 'fair opportunity' and the 'difference' principles, respectively. Together, these principles indicate that justice occurs through an array of outcomes; for example, offering equal civil and political rights, fair and equal opportunity, and distribution of income and wealth (Rawls, 1999).

This chapter follows in three sections, the first of which outlines victim-survivors' typical experiences and perceptions of formal justice. It summarises the failures of procedural justice as a response to sexual violence, along with the progress and challenges of informal mechanisms beyond the criminal law, including restorative and transformative justice. A key concept of the framework concerns how victim-survivors perceive justice, which emphasises the importance of building from victim-survivors' expert knowledge of their experiences and their 'justice needs' (Clark, 2015; Herman, 2005; Jülich, 2006; McGlynn, 2011; McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018; McGlynn, Westmarland and Godden, 2012). Scholars have noted that through victim-survivors' perspectives, it becomes clear that justice is multiple, changing and unfixed (McGlynn et al., 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018). Victim-survivors' justice needs are not singular entities and often go well beyond the capabilities of what the traditional justice system can provide (Clark, 2010, 2015).

The second section of this chapter discusses how social and political justice has been conceptualised within critical, poststructural and feminist theories, drawing notably on the productive discussions concerning justice as a 'politics of difference' and a 'politics of recognition' between Iris Marion Young, Nancy Fraser, Judith Butler, and Lois McNay spanning the 1990s and 2000s (Butler, 1997; Fraser, 2008b; Fraser and Honneth, 2003; McNay, 2008a, 2008b; Young, 1990, 1997). This discussion presents concepts where justice occurs through mechanisms beyond the state, drawing on transformative justice and queer theory to demonstrate how communities with complex histories of oppression pursue justice outside of state-based structures (Hammer and Gossett, 2016; Hudson, 2000, 2003, 2006; Nagy, 2015; Nelson, 2016; Picker, 2016). With these theories and concepts, I argue that there is it possible to look beyond the state for alternatives to justice. In this research, I contend that these alternatives occur in digital society.

The final section, therefore, outlines how criminologists have conceptualised informal justice occurring in digital society through activism, online counterpublics, 'digilantism,' and viral justice (Fileborn, 2014b, 2017; Powell, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Powell, Stratton and Cameron, 2018; Salter, 2013, 2017, 2019; Stratton, Powell and Cameron, 2017; Thompson, Wood and Rose, 2016). This chapter exhibits a conceptual framework that advocates for understanding justice from the perspective of victim-survivors, along with considering it beyond the restrictions and structures of law and the criminal justice system. It emphasises the importance of identity, recognition, and community to propose the conceptual *potential* for rape justice[31] in digital society. To an extent, this

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[31]The term rape justice is borrowed from sexual violence scholars Powell, Flynn and Henry (2015) whose edited collection is titled *Rape Justice: Beyond the criminal law.* In discussing the title of their book, they acknowledge the provocative nature of the phrase, but also comment that much like the term 'rape culture,' 'rape justice' is useful shorthand to capture the diverse ways that victim-survivors can seek justice in the aftermath of sexual violence (see Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2015: 8-9)

literature bridges concepts of justice to the concepts discussed in the preceding chapter, together, these chapters present a framework that guides the research. In later chapters, I argue that addressing victim-survivors' digital practices from these varying conceptual lenses reveals a multiplicity of speaking out and justice in digital society.

Experiencing justice after sexual violence

In Western liberal democracies such as Australia, the UK and the US, the criminal justice system is the primary structure that delivers justice to victim-survivors and includes policing, courts, and prisons. Alternative mechanisms such as mediation, civil law, redress schemes, tribunals, truth commissions, and memorials can also administer justice, but penal populism via the criminal justice system has become the prevailing norm (Hudson, 1996). Alongside penal populism are legal-juridical discourses, discussed in Chapter 2, that normalise criminal justice interventions as one of the 'scripted' responses in the aftermath of sexual violence. If individuals pursue justice after experiencing sexual violence, it is typically through these types of procedural avenues and institutions, which feminist scholars have found routinely fail to meet victim-survivors' needs (Clark, 2010, 2011, 2015; Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2015; Lievore, 2003; Temkin and Krahé, 2008). The following sections review aspects of procedural justice because, as will be revealed in later chapters, these procedures constitute dominant frameworks for how victim-survivors perceive justice.

Traditional and alternative procedural justice responses to sexual violence

Despite decades of rape law reform, activism and advocacy, rape and sexual assault remain as some of the most underreported crimes across Western liberal democracies (see Allen, 2007; Clark, 2015; Clay-Warner and Burt, 2005; Kelly, 2001; Lievore, 2003; Muldoon, Taylor and Norma, 2016). Kate Wolitzky-Taylor et al. (2010) found that rates of reporting rape in the US have not shifted significantly since the 1990s. Meanwhile, rape conviction rates have fallen to "all-time lows" (Larcombe, 2011). Scholars have consistently argued that victim-survivors are reluctant to engage with the criminal justice system due to its failures. For instance, it is well established that victim-survivors often experience difficulties and re-traumatisation in the justice system because reporting to police and going through investigation and trial can be tantamount to a "second rape" (Campbell et al., 2001; Madigan and Gamble, 1991; Martin and Powell, 1994; Ullman, 2010). Although police investigation processes have improved over time, Corey Yung (2017) suggests that policing cultures and practices continue to act as gatekeepers to rape justice. Wendy Larcombe (2002: 146) posits that victim-survivors who are successful in securing a legal conviction not only endure a "courtroom rape" but also must endure the system's denial of their "reality and subjective sense of self." The discursive stereotypes about "real rape" and "real victims," discussed further in Chapter 2, impact

upon victim-survivors' willingness to report or engage with the criminal justice system (Du Mont, Miller and Myhr, 2003; Estrich, 1987; Stewart, Dobbin and Gatowski, 1996). Moreover, victim-survivors who do not fit within the confines of what a victim of sexual violence should look like, such as male rape victims, face further barriers to reporting to police and pursuing procedural justice (Javaid, 2015b, 2016, 2017; Lowe and Rogers, 2017). Similarly, LGBTIQ people face difficulties in reporting sexual violence to police despite evidence that suggests their experiences of victimisation are higher than heterosexual and cisgender people (Dickson, 2016; Fileborn, 2012, 2014a; Langenderfer-Magruder et al., 2016). Indigenous people and people of colour who have experienced sexual violence, especially those in the US and Australia, have to report to white and/or settler-colonial justice systems which incarcerate them at the highest rates of any group in the world (Anthony and Baldry, 2017; Hudson, 2006). Refugee victim-survivors fleeing their home countries face hostile systems and reporting sexual violence might impact their claims for seeking asylum (Baillot, Cowan and Munro, 2009). The reach of the Western criminal justice system extends to international settings, with victim-survivors in post-conflict contexts having to report to international courts and protocols which (at times, unnecessarily) replace functioning customary justice systems (Schia and Carvalho, 2015). Despite the significant failures and barriers that impede victim-survivors from reporting, criminal justice responses are the main way in that the state responds to sexual violence. As a result, procedural justice for victim-survivors is administered through institutions that, despite continuing reform, typically fail to meet the varying needs of all people who experience sexual violence.

A continuing goal of the feminist anti-rape movement has been rape law reform. Significant successes have included the acknowledgment of marital rape, the introduction of affirmative consent models, the increasing recognition of victim's rights and the use of victim impact statements in sentencing (Caringella, 2009; Gotell, 2008; McGlynn and Munro, 2010; Spohn and Horney, 1992; see also Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2015b: 3). Feminist scholarship has long argued that the key goals of rape law reform are to address the failures of the criminal justice system, that is, to decrease attrition rates and increase criminal convictions (Larcombe, 2011). Larcombe (2011) contends that feminist scholars and activists have had mixed responses to such goals, with some advocating for changes to trial procedures and others suggesting that falling conviction rates signify the general failures of criminal justice. Although the progress made through rape law reform cannot be disputed, it remains evident that victim-survivors (especially people of colour or LGBTIQ people) are less likely to engage with police or the justice system due to fear of how they will be treated (Dickson, 2016). The process of investigation requires victim-survivors to discuss their experiences according to procedures, to collate and present evidence, and to prove non-consent (Clark, 2010, 2015). In adversarial courtroom settings, victim-survivors are the ones put on trial, with every aspect of their

experience scrutinised throughout the process (Rozee and Koss, 2001; Spohn and Horney, 1992). The movement towards rape law reform has thus not equivocally resulted in justice for all people who experience sexual violence.

Despite using the law as a site for change, many feminists have remained steadfast in their critique of the use of the law and criminal justice system to dismantle patriarchy or achieve gender equality. Second wave feminist scholars such as Catharine MacKinnon (1989) and Carol Smart (1989) were critical of the law being inherently male and noted that its reform, while vital in the short term to ensure liberties for individual women, would not be able to dismantle patriarchal systems of power and oppression. As the Women's Liberation Movement progressed, however, rape law reform consistently prevailed as the significant way that feminist organising brought about change for victim-survivors (Bumiller, 2008). Indeed, the reliance of the feminist anti-rape movement on the law and the state to pursue change has been widely critiqued as being a carceral approach that pursued reforms primarily benefitting middle-class white women at the expense of people of colour (Bernstein, 2010; Bumiller, 2008; Carlton, 2018; Hudson, 2006; Taylor, 2018). Elizabeth Bernstein (2007, 2010, 2012) describes carceral feminism as the commitment by feminist activists to a law and order agenda. Marie Gottschalk (2006: 115) links this perspective explicitly to the anti-rape movement, commenting that "some of the very historical and institutional factors that made the U.S. women's movement relatively more successful in gaining public acceptance and achieving its goals for women were important building blocks for the carceral state that emerged simultaneously in the 1970s." Kristen Bumiller (2008) likewise contends that the neoliberal state co-opted the aims of the anti-rape movement and channelled it into the carceral and medical apparatuses that became the primary institutions (and discourses) through which victim-survivors are encountered. Lise Gotell (2015) adds nuance to this view by reminding that the critiques of the feminist movement for being complicit in law and order politics do not give due credit to scholars such as MacKinnon and Smart who were, all the while, critical of feminist reliance on the law. Perhaps due to these critiques of the criminal justice system, its failures, and the feminist movement's long-standing reliance on the law as a way to pursue equality for women, the anti-rape movement has looked towards alternative justice procedures beyond the criminal law. In the introduction to their edited collection titled *Rape Justice: Beyond the Criminal Law*, Nicola Henry, Asher Flynn and Anastasia Powell (2015: 4) contend that sexual violence scholars and activists are increasingly conceptualising "alternative justice sites, measures and mechanisms" which can individually and collectively empower victim-survivors, while shifting societal perceptions about rape.[32]

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[32] This edited collection outlines an array of approaches to rape justice beyond the criminal law, including formal mechanisms such as specialist courts (Flynn, 2015), tort law (Godden-Rasul, 2015), restorative justice programs (Daly, 2015) and civil society tribunals (Henry, 2015b). The collection also highlights opportunities outside of formal

While feminist critiques of law and legal procedure have centred on how women are impacted, broader critical conversations occurring amongst criminologists, legal scholars, and activists have made space for alternative and innovative approaches to develop. Several key perspectives have emerged advocating for consideration of victims and other stakeholders within justice processes, including community justice, restorative justice, transformative justice, and transitional justice (Crocker, 1998; Harris, 2011; Hudson, 2003). For example, emerging from communitarianism,[33] community justice prioritises community-based institutions and groups, such as the family, and relies upon a foundational assumption that individuals are motivated by community values (Hudson, 2003; Williams, 2005). In response to crime, it encompasses the strategies of community policing, crime prevention and restorative justice (Hudson, 2003). Community justice is conceptually broad, Todd Clear and Eric Cadora (2001: 60) note that it can be "at once a philosophy of justice, a strategy of justice, and a series of justice programs… the community justice approach seeks not only to respond to the criminal event but also sets as a goal the improvement of quality of community life, especially for communities afflicted by high levels of crime." This approach considers both criminal and social justices simultaneously, and advocates for *informal* rather than formal approaches to deviance and social control (Clear, Hamilton and Cadora, 2011). Community justice prioritises flexibility and informal justice responses outside of the traditional systems, which signals the broadening of contexts where justice can occur. However, as Hudson (2003) and Gordon Hughes (1996) contend, the weakness in communitarian ideology is the routine failure to be critical of power, leaving majority held values and morals to prevail as representing a whole community, which leads to the emergence of a dominant group or perspective at the exclusion of others. As such, community justice becomes limited in its responses to individual and marginalised needs due to its priority of broader values.

By contrast, restorative justice advocates for the consideration of the individuals and the community involved in crime, and some contend that it constitutes part of the community justice movement (Hudson, 2003; Ptacek, 2010).[34] Restorative approaches were developed as a procedural

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[33] Amitai Etzioni (1993) notes that communitarianism refers to the societal commitment to 'community,' in doing so, acknowledging that with rights come responsibilities to the moral goals and values of one's community. In theory, it purports to be committed to the 'betterment' of society, but when critically engaging with the concept and the perspectives that have stemmed from it, it is important to note the ways that communitarianism is homogenising to the extent that a 'dominant' position prevails. Thus, despite Etzioni and other communitarians 'best intentions,' the political position on the whole seems less applicable to communities in contemporary societies which are often comprised of diverse populations, as it fails to acknowledge that people who form communities based on shared experiences are likely to have some differences in values (Hudson, 2003). As such, here I am not advocating for a communitarian perspective, per se, but rather noting the origins of alternative justice mechanisms within the political position.

[34] Restorative justice emerged in the 1960s and 1970s in the aftermath of civil rights movements and the Women's Liberation Movement, which created a context in which offender's and victim's rights were raised, and the notion of penal justice was critiqued as the prison abolition movement gained momentum (Hudson, 1996; Ptacek, 2010). From the 1970s, critical criminologists began to question and critique the role of punishment in the concept of

means for victims, offenders, and the community to facilitate reconciliation and acknowledge harms caused by crime and violence. Examples include victim-offender mediation, restorative conferences, and circle sentencing,[35] which aim to create a dialogue between victims and perpetrators of crime (Sawin and Zehr, 2006). Hudson (1998: 241) highlights the general benefits of these approaches compared with penal justice:

> It makes the perpetrator face the fact that real harm has been done to an actual victim by his or her action; that if the perpetrator is a party to the outcome, he or she is less likely than with a punitive system to displace remorse for the action into resentment of the punishment; above all, it is much more likely than the present system to provide for a balance between the needs and rights of both offenders and victims.

While restorative approaches have not replaced formal justice systems or retributive justice, these types of processes have become an alternative measure through which both offenders and victims' rights and needs are considered. Restorative mechanisms have been implemented for various offences in jurisdictions within the US, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the UK since the 1990s, and are progressively available as a response to domestic and sexual violence (Ptacek, 2010).[36] Although restorative justice presents significant promise in comparison to traditional justice systems, it is worth pointing to emerging research by Harry Blagg and Thalia Anthony (2019) in their book *Decolonising Criminology* which argues that the justice system's implementation of restorative practices actually constitutes further colonial enforcement of Indigenous sovereignty by coopting practices such as healing circles and converting them into punishment for Aboriginal youths. Therefore, while restorative justice principles show some promise for victims, offenders, and the community, these practices must be simultaneously questioned and considered within contexts of colonisation, as well as patriarchy and other oppressive structures.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, restorative justice mechanisms have been controversial as a response to gender-based and sexual violence, and as a result are hotly debated amongst feminist researchers

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justice, and the abolition movement emerged. Abolitionists not only critiqued the role of the prison and the criminal justice system in diminishing the rights of offenders, but were also some of the first scholars to highlight how justice systems did (and arguably still do) little to consider victims' experiences or allow them to share their stories (Christie, 1977; Clark, 2015).

[35] In distinguishing between conferences and circles, it is important to note the Indigenous history of circles, whereby community members, elders and the people involved in offending meet to discuss a crime and come to appropriate community-based responses. Both Donna Coker (1999) and Julie Stubbs (2010) note the potential of restorative circles to be more inclusive of the needs of Indigenous women compared to western justice processes. Restorative justice conferencing is more of a 'mediation' between victim and offender, and as Mary Koss (2010) notes, it might occur at any point in the justice process.

[36] Daye Gang et al. (2019) recently reviewed existing restorative justice programs for sexual and family violence in scholarly literature, noting that there are "at least 17" programs where a minimum of 75% of the cases taken on are sexual or family violence. It should also be noted that in restorative justice literature, feminist discussion of restorative justice often conflates sexual, domestic, and family violence, when the needs of victim-survivors may differ based on the type(s) of violence experienced.

(Cossins, 2008; Daly, 2015, 2017; Daly and Bouhours, 2011; Daly and Curtis-Fawley, 2006; Jülich, 2015; Jülich and Buttle, 2010; Koss, 2006, 2010; Marsh and Wager, 2015; Stubbs, 2007, 2010). Mary Koss (2010: 221) suggests this is partly due to sexual violence being "a more severe violation of personal trust than other crimes such as burglary." A primary concern raised by Hudson (1998), along with Braithwaite and Daly (1994), is the balance struck between providing alternative justice measures that benefit victims and offenders, ensuring that sexual violence is both taken seriously and responded to appropriately, and indeed, that justice is administered for victims and the community, either tangibly or symbolically (for further critical discussion, see Busch, 2002; Daly and Stubbs, 2006; Stubbs, 2007; McGlynn, 2011).[37] As there have been a limited number of restorative justice programs and evaluations of these programs specific to sexual violence (Gang et al., 2019; Koss, 2014), feminist scholarship has raised valid concerns about the appropriateness of restorative justice for gendered violence (Daly and Stubbs, 2006; Stubbs, 2002). Key concerns raised include how victim-survivors experience restorative processes, whether the process meets or centres their justice needs, and whether it is effective in improving safety or increasing offender accountability (Hopkins, Koss and Bachar, 2004). Hudson (1998) contends that there are likely to be power imbalances in these processes, given restorative approaches centre relationships between victims and offenders, rather than offenders and the state acting on behalf of the victim and community. There are assumptions inherent to these approaches "that there is some common understanding, some agreed perspective, which can be arrived at between victim and offender" (Hudson, 1998: 248). Thus, despite the important potential as a justice alternative, restorative approaches can be limited in their scope to respond to sexual violence in comparable ways to the traditional criminal justice system.

This is not to say, however, that restorative justice mechanisms have no value or that they cannot be positive and beneficial alternative justice options for victim-survivors of sexual violence. Loretta Frederick and Kristine C Lizdas (2010) contend that there are similarities between the goals of restorative justice and the feminist anti-violence movement; both paradigms seek to restore victim-survivors, stop reoffending, promote the role of community in responding to crime, and address social contexts in which crime occurs. Nikki Godden-Rasul (2017: 20) highlights that when acknowledging rape as a "shattering of personhood" or a trauma capable of being rebuilt through therapeutic discourses, restorative justice exemplifies a potential healing process for victim-survivors. Susan Miller (2011: 181) notes the importance of storytelling in restorative justice, and that through the dialogue that occurs with offenders, victim-survivors can "shift the power" that is often typical in gendered violence. Sexual violence scholars are increasingly commenting on the voice, recognition, and validation that restorative approaches offer victim-survivors (see Daly, 2017; Godden-Rasul,

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[37] Hudson (1998) further notes, historically the criminal law has disregarded sexual and racial violence. Resultantly, the introduction of alternative justice mechanisms may seem lenient, and act to diminish "the symbolic force of criminal law" (Hudson, 1998: 245).

2017; McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018; McGlynn, Westmarland and Godden, 2012; Zinsstag and Keenan, 2017). These studies indicate that restorative justice can broaden what justice looks like for victim-survivors by emphasising that it can comprise of flexibility and individualised responses (Daly, 2015; Keenan, Zinsstag and Aertsen, 2017). Within contemporary sexual violence theory and empirical research, there is much that restorative processes have to offer and as with community justice, these approaches provide a symbolic nod to the potential for alternative and informal variations of procedural justice for victim-survivors.

In her book *Stories of Transformative Justice,* Ruth Morris (2000) argues that transformative justice presents an alternative to restorative justice that more holistically encompasses community interests:

> Transformative justice sees crime as an opportunity to build a more caring, more inclusive, more just community. Safety doesn't lie in bigger fences, harsher prisons, more police, or locking ourselves in till we ourselves are prisoners. Safety and security — real security — come from building a community where because we have cared for and included all, that community will be there for us, when trouble comes to us. For trouble comes to us all, but trouble itself is an opportunity (Morris, 2000: 21).

Transformative justice presents an alternative view in which more can be done *beyond* the criminal justice system, whereby those impacted by crimes such as sexual violence might participate in a justice process that seeks to challenge and disrupt the carceral system while prioritising community healing, accountability and forgiveness. This is further discussed in later sections of this chapter with regards to activist communities that prioritise justice beyond the state, outlining the tangible ways that transformative justice occurs within marginalised and oppressed communities.

Transitional justice procedures as a response to wartime sexual violence present another significant development in alternative justice options for victim-survivors. Transitional justice often centres the storytelling and testimony of victim-survivors to redress the harms of sexual violence. Emerging after World War II, transitional justice mechanisms emerged as a response to human rights abuses occurring in Europe and Japan during the war. There is much that falls within the scope of transitional justice, which can include both legal and non-legal responses. While it often occurs through the criminal prosecution of perpetrators, transitional justice also encompasses memorials, public apologies, truth and reconciliation commissions and tribunals, political reform and shifts towards peace, democracy, and equality (Crocker, 1998; Henry, 2016). Transitional justice developed as a way of promoting healing, peacebuilding, redress, and public acknowledgement of the mass harms perpetrated by both individuals and the state in contexts of war and colonisation (Backer, 2003; Balint, Evans and McMillan, 2014). Victim-survivors of sexual violence have taken part in international criminal tribunals, truth and reconciliation commissions, and civil society tribunals in

Japan, South Africa, and the former Yugoslavia (see further Henry, 2010, 2011, 2015a, 2015b; Ross, 2003a, 2003b). Importantly, transitional justice procedures have attempted to prioritise victims in the process, providing an opportunity for storytelling in a formal setting and for the development of collective memory of harms that occurred. As noted in the previous chapter, transitional justice settings have allowed victim-survivors to share their testimonies and for the international community to "bear witness" to mass atrocities, including wartime rape (Henry, 2010). Henry (2010: 1099) states that "telling one's story is imperative not only for interpersonal psychological recovery but also for recognition, vindication, and collective justice." Transitional justice mechanisms that allow for storytelling are a significant example of how justice procedures have expanded in an attempt to better meet the needs of victim-survivors of sexual violence occurring in the context of wartime and other political conflicts.

While transitional justice undoubtedly symbolises a greater effort on the part of the international community, the implementation of these alternatives to justice has sparked critique. In *Eichmann in Jerusalem,* Hannah Arendt (2006) cautioned against using law as a symbolic means to pursue justice, as the law can only deliver justice through its prescriptive means of punishment, and any justice beyond that is "impossible" in the aftermath of atrocities like the Holocaust (Arendt, 2006). Moreover, Niels Schia and Benjamin de Carvahlo (2015) contend that in post-conflict Liberia, the international community ignored functioning customary justice mechanisms, and the resulting introduction of peacekeeping measures exemplified a revival of colonial practices in the guise of delivering democracy and justice (see also Ahmed, 2000; Carrington, 2014). Likewise, Sara Davies and Jacqui True (2015) emphasise that in many post-conflict contexts, sexual violence is considered as a by-product of the conflict rather than an act of political violence. As Henry (2011) further comments, international law and criminal trials have typically considered sexual violence as supplementary or alongside other crimes against humanity that war criminals were answering to. This indicates that international law creates dominant collective memories of mass atrocities that often overshadow victim-survivors experiences of sexual violence (Henry, 2011). More recently, during the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa, women who testified about their general experiences of violence were reduced to being victims of rape, and as a result experienced a loss of control over their narrative when it was reproduced in print media (Ross, 2003b). Fiona Ross (2003a, 2003b) questions whether victim-survivors have a voice when their testimonies are not respected nor heard appropriately. As such, despite the potential of transitional justice mechanisms to offer victim-survivors the opportunity to have a voice and be heard, this does not seem to guarantee that these processes are victim-centred.

Transitional, transformative, and restorative approaches offer significant discursive frames for addressing the question of what justice can be for victim-survivors of sexual violence. Each

perspective advocates for providing victim-survivors with a range of ways to tell their story and to be recognised, heard, and supported throughout the process. To this effect, these approaches are often discussed in the literature as having potential therapeutic *and* justice outcomes, to the extent that sometimes these outcomes are blurred (Daly, 2017). Ross (2003a, 2003b) notes the potential of storytelling within transitional justice allow victim-survivors to pursue individual healing and recovery. Henry (2010: 1099) refers to this as a "therapeutic assumption" linking justice mechanisms and memory instruments to recovery. Judith Herman (2005) suggested that victim-survivors recovery processes are likely to impact and influence their perceptions and needs of justice, as will be further discussed in the following section (see also Seidman and Vickers, 2005). On the other hand, Kathleen Daly's (2014, 2017; 2017) recent work has critiqued this focus, contending that victim-survivor 'wellbeing' should not be confused with justice outcomes, nor should this become an expectation of restorative justice mechanisms. Koss (2006) has also distinguished between "survival needs" and "justice needs" in her discussions of restorative justice. Marie Keenan et al. (2017), along with Elise Lopez and Koss (2017) also argue contend that therapeutic and justice outcomes should be considered separately. Nadia Wager (2013: 22) conversely suggests that there are "synergies and similarities" between healing and justice outcomes and they ought to be considered together. Clare McGlynn and Nicole Westmarland (2018) find a middle ground between these views, acknowledging that within a bevy of justice interests, "connectedness" might increase victim-survivors' wellbeing.

Thus far, this chapter has noted how procedural justice mechanisms have both failed and progressively developed as a response to sexual violence. This discussion outlined the dominant justice options that victim-survivors in Western liberal democracies have available to them, whilst pointing towards the need for alternative sites of justice. Although there have been immense gains and breakthroughs in rape law reform, as well as the development of alternative and specialist courts (Flynn, 2015), restorative justice programs, and transitional justice, these procedures ultimately seem rife with limitations when it comes to meeting victim-survivors' needs. Victim-survivors' 'justice needs' are varied, complex and might shift over time, and as such, an array of informal and alternative responses *beyond* law and procedure are needed (Clark, 2015; Henry, Flynn and Powell, 2015). Indeed, this thesis is concerned with digital society as a site for such alternatives.

Centring justice from the perspectives of victim-survivors

Typically, the way that justice is defined is outside the control of those who are subject to its formal processes and outcomes. For instance, Leigh Goodmark (2015) suggests that justice in response to intimate partner abuse defined by agents of the legal system, and not those who experience abuse. McGlynn and Westmarland (2018: 3) take this notion further, commenting that victim-survivors are rarely centred in "most debates over what justice means." However, a small but significant body of

feminist research has examined victim-survivors' perceptions of justice and their experiences of the justice system. For example, Herman's (2005) article *Justice from the Victim's Perspective* was significant in offering new meanings of justice that reflected the needs of victims of sexual and domestic violence, emphasising that often retributive legal processes do not align with victim-survivors justice needs. Criminal justice systems have historically disregarded victim-survivors' needs due to a long-existing assumption that they prioritise vengeance or advocate for punitive punishment (Herman, 2005). Herman's (2005) study was groundbreaking in examining what justice means drawing from the testimonies of victim-survivors. She determined that the meaning of justice can be varied and dependent on the context and experiences of the person who has experienced sexual violence, noting that the two most important justice outcomes for victim-survivors of sexual and domestic violence were 'validation from the community' and 'vindication' (Herman, 2005). Beyond this, features of justice were varied and discordant. For instance, some victim-survivors thought that an apology from the perpetrator would fulfil their justice needs (Herman, 2005). However, others thought that a true apology could not occur, nor would it be enough to satisfy their needs for accountability for the harms they experienced (Herman, 2005).

A significant finding from Herman's (2005) analysis of justice from the victim-survivor's perspective is that they are rarely vengeful nor do they seek retributive punishment. However, most also felt that reconciliation with the perpetrator was undesirable and that expectations of victim-survivors to forgive perpetrators was another form of injustice (Herman, 2005). Indeed, Herman (2005: 593) highlights that many victim-survivors wanted to "achieve a state of mind where the offender and his offence no longer dominated their thoughts." This further suggests that from the victim-survivor's point of view, justice can encapsulate needs beyond what justice mechanisms and settings can provide (see also Clark, 2010, 2015). Herman (2005) suggested that of the four primary aims of criminal justice; punishment, deterrence, rehabilitation, and community safety, the one that victim-survivors prioritised most was safety. She states that "justice, from the perspective of these informants, was neither restorative nor retributive in the conventional sense" (Herman, 2005: 597). Rather, justice from their perspectives had layers of complexity, at times drawing from various justice models with outcomes that had both the victim-survivor, the perpetrator and the community in mind.

Alongside Herman (2005), sexual violence scholars have continued to examine victim-survivors' perceptions and needs of justice, resulting in a small but significant body of literature. Ilene Seidman and Susan Vickers (2005) noted that the trauma of rape has longstanding and adverse consequences for victim-survivors, meaning that justice responses should offer a means to meet potential economic, housing, emotional, and safety needs, particularly in the first six months following an experience of sexual violence. Moreover, in their study analysing youth justice

conferences relating to sexual offences, Kathleen Daly and Sarah Curtis-Fawley (2006) highlight the diverse needs that young victim-survivors have, noting in particular that they are likely to feel dissatisfied when agreements are made without their input. McGlynn (2011) suggests that "having a voice and being heard" are key justice needs. Later, McGlynn, Westmarland and Godden (2012: 231) note that (procedural) justice should "honour the experience" whereby victim-survivors are believed, offered safety and support services, treated with dignity, can feel in control, and make informed choices. Shirley Jülich (2006) interviewed adult victim-survivors of child sexual abuse to understand how they view justice and the implications for restorative programs in Aotearoa, New Zealand. Jülich's (2006) study highlights that different experiences of sexual violence, along with the relationship between victim-survivor and perpetrator, are likely to impact their needs. For instance, adult victim-survivors of child sexual abuse needed a space to safely share their story and the impacts of abuse on their lives; reporting to formal authorities rarely provided that opportunity in a holistic way (Jülich, 2006). These victim-survivors needed the community and their offender to acknowledge the extent of harms and ongoing, lifelong impacts of experiencing sexual abuse as a child. Furthermore, Jülich (2006: 131) emphasises that being able to "co-exist with offenders and bystanders in their shared community was a high priority for many survivors." These types of justice needs might not be shared by a victim-survivor who experienced stranger or acquaintance rape as an adult.

Often, researchers discussing the needs of victim-survivors link their discussions to the potential efficacy of restorative justice programs and conferences (see Daly, 2006, 2017; Daly and Curtis-Fawley, 2006; Daly and Wade, 2017; Herman, 2005; Jülich, 2006; Koss, 2006; McGlynn, 2011; McGlynn, Westmarland and Godden, 2012). These studies also demonstrate how dominant legal discourses and structures shape individual understandings of justice and justice needs. For instance, participants in Daly and Curtis-Fawley's (2006) analysis were disappointed with restorative outcomes that seemed too lenient, whereby perpetrators did not receive punishment or community service work that might have been an outcome of a court process. This indicates the link between victim-survivors' expectations of justice and the dominant scripts of what the justice system is 'meant' to provide. Haley Clark (2015: 19) recalls one of her participants who said "it's very hard to look beyond the justice system when the system is what you've got," which suggests that victim-survivors' perceptions are in part shaped by the language and structures available to them. McGlynn (2011: 837) contends that punitive needs are culturally shaped by penal populism, creating an expectation amongst victim-survivors that justice equates to imprisonment, but that these types of justice outcomes can leave them feeling "hollow" (see also Miller, 2011). Furthermore, despite the potential efficacy of restorative approaches in contrast to other justice mechanisms, Jülich (2006) emphasises that many victim-survivors were not interested in pursuing justice through the restorative programs

that were available to her participants. This suggests that having restorative justice approaches is not enough to meet the justice needs of all victim-survivors, some of whom may want these needs met within their communities or through other informal means.

McGlynn, Westmarland and Downes (2017) have developed the concept of "kaleidoscopic justice" (see also McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018). Kaleidoscopic justice draws from victim-survivors' knowledge to imagine justice outcomes as being variable and in flux:

> Kaleidoscopic justice is justice as a continually shifting pattern; justice is constantly refracted through new circumstances, experiences and understandings; justice as non-linear, with multiple beginnings and possible endings; and justice as a lived, ongoing and ever evolving experience without certain ending or result…there are a number of different elements to the kaleidoscope including social and cultural change, prevention, voice, recognition, consequences, dignity and support (McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017: 181).

With justice being conceptualised as being shifting and changing over time, there is potential to theorise how it occurs in settings beyond the formal systems and mechanisms that often fail to provide justice to victim-survivors. McGlynn et al. (2017; 2018) indicate that restorative approaches should only be one aspect of broader ways of thinking about justice in response to sexual violence, further highlighting that justice can be linked to therapeutic support and recovery through "connectedness." Furthermore, the concept provides flexibility to acknowledge that understandings of justice are likely to shift in tandem to recovery and other personal experiences that occur in the aftermath of sexual violence.

Kaleidoscopic justice is significant in acknowledging 'themes' of justice, as McGlynn and Westmarland (2018: 15) argue, conceptualising justice in this way makes for an "iterative process." McGlynn and Westmarland (2018: 18) also contend that kaleidoscopic justice is broader than individual cases:

> Justice, therefore, is not the preserve of the conventional criminal justice system or the state, vital though these responses are for all forms of sexual violence. It is not only about convicting an individual offender, but also about preventing attacks on victim-survivors' sisters, mothers, daughters and friends. Justice, here, is a 'collective, rather than individual, pursuit'. Justice is also felt through a myriad of often small, cumulative and interconnected events and responses, across families, communities, criminal justice agencies and public or state authorities. A sense of justice may begin to be felt when women begin to experience freedom to live their lives, to regain a sense of power.

Kaleidoscopic justice, therefore, combines notions of restorative, transitional, and transformative justice whilst theorising from the victim-survivors' perspective. Fileborn and Vera-Gray (2017: 222) expand on this by explicitly linking transformative and kaleidoscopic justice, highlighting that for victim-survivors of street harassment, justice needs manifest in a desire to transform social structures because 'typical' forms of justice were neither accessible nor desirable as a response to their experiences. They argue that justice responses exist in a "hierarchy" that needs to be reorganised such that alternatives to the criminal justice system are not deprioritised (Fileborn and Vera-Gray, 2017: 222). Kaleidoscopic justice instead allows for a non-linear understanding of justice reponses and needs:

> [Kaleidoscopic justice] assists in answering our questions about competing justice needs and the problematic idea of a linear progression towards absolute and irreversible 'transformation'. By understanding transformative justice as being 'kaleidoscopic' in nature, we are better able to take into account the complex, fluid, and fragmented nature of social and cultural transformation, and the diversity of individual victim's justice interests. The transformation called for through transformative justice can then be conceptualised as an ongoing process, rather than having a finite end point where transformation has been definitively achieved (Fileborn and Vera-Gray, 2017: 224).

As such, kaleidoscopic justice is an evolving concept rather than a 'model' of justice (McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; Fileborn and Vera-Gray, 2017). This allows for potential expansion of the concept into new and emerging realms such as digital society (see also Fileborn, 2017).

The conceptual framework of this thesis prioritises the voices and narratives of victim-survivors of sexual violence in understanding what justice means to them in the context of digital space. An important element of Herman's (2005) study was that it acknowledged that victim-survivors are highly capable of negotiating the complexities of what justice can mean, contradicting common assumptions that those who experience sexual and domestic violence are likely to be clouded by emotions or a need for vengeance and that focusing on their perspectives would bring bias into justice processes. Herman (2005: 587) gave legitimacy to the "sophisticated and nuanced view" of the group of victim-survivors who participated. She noted that while victim-survivors were not experts in all matters of justice, they were knowledgeable, and their perspectives mostly reflected a more holistic approach to justice than that offered within typical justice settings in Western liberal democracies. McGlynn and Westmarland (2018: 5) have expanded on this, commenting that the "experiential expertise" of victim-survivors is precisely what is needed to develop knowledge in how justice can be operationalised in response to sexual violence. Daly (2017: 109) points out that in these contexts, "a victim's perspective is not narrow or self-centred, but widens to embrace others in a justice activity," indicating both the individual and collective nature of these understandings of

justice. Together these scholars highlight the value in utilising victim-survivors' perspectives as a foundation from which to theorise justice.

A limitation of many of the studies discussed here is that some tend to focus on how justice can be more victim-centred within the criminal justice system rather than discussing the ways that justice can occur outside of it. But, as several scholars note, there is little that can be done to make victim-survivors more likely to access the justice system, because the system is fraught with power imbalances to the extent that formal processes of seeking justice continue to be unappealing (see Clark 2010, 2015; Jülich, 2006). As Clark (2015: 20) notes, "many participants reiterated that individual justice in an absolute sense, as they understood it, could never really be achieved…any attempt at redress would ultimately fall short: nothing could undo what had been done to them and so no process would be able to fully compensate for the crime." Given this, it is important to consider how a sense of justice can occur for victim-survivors outside of formal mechanisms or interpersonal processes. That is, justice also occurs at a collective level through social justice movements, activism, and advocacy. It is through social and political justice that marginalised peoples push for human rights, law reforms, changes in policy, and other structural changes that increase fairness and equality. In the example of sexual violence, procedural law and justice system reform has been fundamental within the anti-rape movement, but this may not have been achieved without the agenda of the Women's Liberation Movement (see Brown, 2011; Caringella, 2009; Clark, 2015; McGlynn and Munro, 2010; Seidman and Vickers, 2005). As such, types of justice operating at levels other than the procedural systems and individuals' needs are relevant in discussions of rape justice (Clark, 2011; 2015).

Conceptualising justice after sexual violence

> One cannot speak *directly* about justice, thematize or objectivize justice, say 'this is just,' and even less 'I am just,' without immediately betraying justice (Derrida, 1990: 237 emphasis in original).

> [W]e need to think of justice as that which we must work for, rather than being that which 'founds' the work that we do (Ahmed, 2000: 65).

The previous section of this chapter how victim-survivors experience procedural justice, pointing towards alternatives that have been theorised from their perspectives. The coming discussion complicates understandings of justice by conceptualising it beyond the experiences of individuals. The theories discussed engage with and highlight tensions in framings of social and political justice, drawing notably from theorists Iris Marion Young's (1990) "politics of difference" along with Nancy Fraser's (1995b, 1998, 2008b) "dual systems" theory. Scholars have substantially debated whether

justice occurs through recognising differences ('cultural' factors), through redistributing wealth ('economic' factors), or through representation ('political' factors) (see, for example Butler, 1997; Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Honneth, 2004; Fraser, 2008a; McNay, 2008b, 2008a). This section of the chapter critically engages with 'difference feminism' by presenting these debates alongside examples where social and political justice is tangibly pursued outside the state, such as through decolonisation (Blagg and Anthony, 2019; Nagy, 2015), queering (Butler, 1993; Hammer and Gossett, 2016; Nelson, 2016; Picker, 2016; Swadhin, 2016), or through community action (Ahmed, 2000; Harris, 2011).

Scales of justice? Critically engaging with a politics of recognition

What scholars now often refer to as 'difference feminism,' the 'politics of difference' and the 'politics of recognition,' emerged through feminist engagement with poststructural and critical theorists Jacques Derrida[38] and Jürgen Habermas, along with Hegelian philosophy. Also known as the "cultural or linguistic turn," the increasing feminist engagement with poststructuralist deconstruction shifted analyses of justice away from material equality and into discussions of cultural equality, that is, the acknowledgement of difference (Lovell, 2007). Throughout this period, political theory and discussions of social justice were chiefly concerned with the concept of distribution and redistribution, influenced by Rawls (1999). The distributive paradigm theorises justice as the equal distribution of wealth, income, and material goods. Feminist scholars, notably Fraser (2000, 2007), acknowledged that distributive justice extends to include the distribution of non-material goods such as opportunity, power, and self-respect, while others, like Young (1990: 16), considered this inclusion problematic. Thus, alongside redistribution was the notion of recognition and scholars theorised that the acknowledgement of difference, oppression, and identity was foundational to social and political justice. Recognition theory conceives of people pursuing and achieving identity through mutual identification (or feedback) from others, with inadequate recognition (also known as experiencing 'misrecognition') resulting in individuals and groups experiencing harm and the destruction of self (Taylor, 1997). Recognition scholars frame "misrecognition" as an injustice that can occur through structural and political oppression and inequality, as well as interactions between individuals (Taylor, 1997). The tensions that arose from considering economic and 'cultural' equality resulted in significant discussion and debate amongst theorists considering justice in society.

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[38] Derrida's theory of deconstruction suggests that the concept of justice is not definitive or bounded to the law, but a vast and ongoing process to reveal numerous potential meanings. To this end, he suggested that "deconstruction is justice" (1990: 243). As Douzinas (2005, p. 177) further explains, Derrida argued that justice is an ideal that may never be obtained, but has been constructed regardless within the finite constraints of the law. Habermas' (1989) 'public sphere' refers to discursive relations whereby a group of people assemble to discuss either mutual interests or commonly held public concerns. Habermas contended that the public sphere acts as intermediary between the state and society, and presents an opportunity for discussion about political and social issues (precluding, he contended, private matters). Hegel theorised of the significance of recognition, where a person's conceptualisation of the self is constructed through their relations and conflict with the 'other' (McNay, 2008a).

In her book, *Justice and the Politics of Difference,* Young (1990) noted that different social and cultural oppressions should not be considered separately to the question of justice. Young was critical of the liberal perception that democracy is tantamount to the fulfilment of justice and equality. Rather, she advocated for a broader definition of justice as the "elimination of institutionalised domination and oppression" (Young, 1990: 15). Oppression is a structural symptom of liberal societies, and "its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules" (Young, 1990: 41). Young was wary of considering redistribution as a primary way to achieve social and political justice because it presents goods, both material and non-material as "static things, instead of a function of social relations and processes" (Young, 1990: 16). Distributive justice models such as these assume a "homogenous public" and fail to address that people in diverse societies may adhere to alternative cultural norms. As a solution, Young turned towards a "politics of difference" model, whereby justice should reflect the unique differences and oppressions that various subjects face to allow for group representation. She contended that oppression comes in five forms; exploitation, marginalisation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.[39] Each of Young's (1990) "faces of oppression" are linked to structural forces, notably capitalism, racism, and colonialism. In responding to the injustice of oppression, Young posits that "justice should refer *not only* to distribution, but also the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation" (Young, 1990: 39, emphasis added). Individuals experiencing injustice should be able to self-determine how they are represented in public life (Young, 1990: 260). The strengths of this conceptualisation lie in its acknowledgement of individual experiences of oppression and injustice, along with the structures that cause and enhance such injustices.

Conversely, Fraser (1995a, 1995b) initially argued that distributive justice was of greater importance than the recognition of difference, particularly when considering justice in the context of a globalising world. Lovell (2007) explains that Fraser's theory of justice grouped Young's five categories of oppression into two; firstly, economic injustice that would be met through redistribution, and secondly, socio-cultural injustice that would be met through recognition. This was

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[39] According to Young (1990: 48–63), the five faces of oppression can be understood as follows:
'Exploitation,' influenced by Marxism, refers to the ways in which people are exploited through labour to produce profit, and how this adversely impacts people who are further marginalised by their race or gender. 'Marginalisation' refers to the ways in which groups of people are excluded from participation in society and oppressed on the basis of difference, usually race. Young (1990, p. 53) refers to it as the "most dangerous" form of oppression. 'Powerlessness,' again influenced by Marxism, refers to the social stratas of power, usually delineated by class and capital. Those oppressed by powerlessness will have less power, capital, and opportunity than those with power. 'Cultural Imperialism' refers to imperial ways of establishing cultural norms and practices, which then establish a ruling class. It refers to the structural ways that power and racism merge, creating a 'universal' culture that dominates those who are marginalised. Lastly, 'Violence,' perhaps the most visible face of oppression, refers to ways in which groups of people live in fear of violence due to the other oppressions they experience.

labelled a 'dual-systems' theory that became somewhat contentious amongst proponents of difference politics (Butler, 1997; Young, 1997). Fraser's dual-systems theory argued that recognition theory emphasises individual identity and neoliberalism at the loss of distributive justice, that is, the spreading of equal wealth, jobs, and material goods. Fraser (1995a, 1995b) saw that while there was a role for recognition, it was necessary to conceptualise it within a framework that also accounted for redistribution. Thus, she aimed to posit a "critical theory of recognition, one which identifies and defends only those versions of the cultural politics of difference that can be coherently combined with the social politics of equality" (Fraser, 1995a: 69). Fraser (1995a) sees injustices as complex and at times overlapping, whereby individuals might require remedies that incorporate both redistribution and recognition. She acknowledges that those in lower classes do not only experience economic injustice, but also misrecognition for their social contributions. Similarly, individuals who experience misrecognition, for instance, due to race, gender, or sexuality, are also likely to face economic injustice (Fraser, 1995a). Her dual system approach indicates that one injustice should not be prioritised over another and that having one-sided approaches to injustice may result in unintended consequences. She calls for undertaking a dual analysis of situations of injustice while also undertaking a critical evaluation of the effects and impacts of redistribution and recognition (Fraser, 1995a). However, the limitation evident to this framework is that particular "versions" of recognition be prioritised, which potentially allows oppression to continue. Moreover, those favouring cultural recognition were not necessarily admonishing the importance of redistribution (Young, 1997). Indeed, the tensions between recognition and redistribution led theorists to an impasse.

The dual-systems approach encountered critiques, and productive debates amongst theorists resulted in Fraser's (2007) shifted position in later works (Butler, 1997; Young, 1997; along with edited collection by Fraser, 2008a). The concept of the "principle of participatory parity" became an essential aspect of her theory:

> According to this principle, justice requires social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers. For participatory parity to be possible, at least two conditions must be satisfied. First, the distribution of material resources must be such as to ensure participants' independence and 'voice'...In contrast, the second condition for participatory parity is 'intersubjective.' It requires that institutionalized patterns of cultural value express equal respect for all participants and ensure equal opportunity for achieving social esteem (Fraser, 2007: 27).

Here Fraser (2007) is suggesting, somewhat similarly to Young (1990), that for justice to occur, societal structures, material resources, and socio-cultural differences and hierarchies need to shift to allow people experiencing injustice to meet as equal peers. She argues that this type of approach allows theories of justice to avoid being overly neoliberal, retain Marxist influences of economic

distribution, and learn from proponents of cultural recognition (Fraser, 2007: 34). Later still, in her book *Scales of Justice*, Fraser (2008b: 114) adds the notion of representation to her framework, which includes "ensuring equal political voice for women in already constituted political communities; in addition, it requires reframing disputes about justice that cannot be properly contained within established polities." Here, she is suggesting justice requires consideration within and beyond political systems and structures, ultimately advocating for an all-encompassing framing of justice through a "three-dimensional politics" of recognition, redistribution and representation. Having refined her position to a broader politics, Fraser's (2008b) framework offers important strengths of considering justice from the varying positions of individuals, societal and structural – noting that these different positions need to be considered equally and as overlapping entities to envisage social and political justice. Moreover, it is worth noting that Fraser (2008b) is particularly interested in global gender justice, and her work imagines justice in a context that unbounded by territory.

The theories discussed in this section have thus indicated how justice can be conceptualised on the level of discourse, structures, groups, and individuals. The use of these poststructural, feminist, and political theories exhibits how justice is an unfixed goal. These concepts benefit this research because they present the multiple levels at which justice can occur, which, as will be argued in later chapters, is applicable in digital society. While this section has presented a view of justice that connects the social, economic, and political, the following section seeks to examine how justice has been theorised beyond the state, particularly within the lived experiences of marginalised and oppressed communities.

Global justice, counter publics, and queering: Imagining community led justice beyond the state

Communities impacted by oppressive structures such as capitalism, heterosexism, colonialism and racism have transformed ways of pursuing justice (see Harris, 2011). This section discusses the value in looking beyond the state to theorise alternatives to justice that are less concerned with carceral systems and politics. Indeed, this reasserts the ways that justice is multiplicitous and culturally contingent. There is significant potential to broaden understandings of justice by thinking beyond the state, particularly by looking beyond the Western-centric theorising that stems from the Global North. In *Feminism and Global Justice,* Kerry Carrington (2015) highlights a need to acknowledge the longstanding and diverse forms of justice-seeking practices that women in the Global South have utilised to challenge violence. She contends that when utilising a global lens, a "transnational feminist intersectionality" emerges, signalling a productive site for conceptualising gender justice beyond Western feminism (see Carrington, 2015: 176–9). Similarly, Sara Ahmed (2000: 69) argues for transnational feminism to "get closer to others in a way which does not appropriate their labour as

'our labour,' or their talk as 'our talk,' that makes possible a different form of collective politics." She contends that through collective politics, justice is rendered possible locally and globally. This suggests that rather than a dominant group enacting power to define collective norms, goals and needs, communities ought to be strived for (and not assumed) *alongside* social and political justice. Carrington et al. (2018: 8) have further noted the potential redefining of justice utilising southern theory, noting that "marginalized and neglected spaces often afford opportunities for innovation in justice strategy and, equally, for rethinking received concepts and the role of traditional legal institutions." Considering justice through a global lens allows for multiple understandings and practices to emerge. It bears relevance when considering the potential for justice in digital society, particularly where social media and other platforms can connect disenfranchised groups and spur new forms of global collective politics.

Oppressed communities and groups often shape counterpublics, which redefine and challenge dominant views contained within the public sphere; this too has been theorised as a means of resistance and justice. Counterpublics emerged as a term initiated by feminists concerned with and critical of Habermas' (1989) notion of the public sphere.[40] For instance, Fraser (1996) suggests that the public sphere, while important in demonstrating the role of discursive relations in political life, was ultimately limited in its understanding of diversity and conflict within society:

> We can no longer assume that the bourgeoisie construction of the public sphere was simply an unrealised utopian ideal; it was also a masculinist ideological notion that functioned to legitimate an emergent form of class rule…the official public sphere then, was, and indeed is, the prime institutional site for the construction of the consent that defines the new, hegemonic mode of domination (Fraser, 1996: 116–117).

Here, Fraser (1996) argues that the impact of a dominating public sphere is that it determines which public concerns and issues are of importance, acting as a homogenising force within society. She indicates that counterpublics have always existed to challenge this force and to suggest alternative norms of political behaviour (Fraser, 1996). Indeed, she contends that counterpublics are an essential aspect of political equality, that society should accommodate the plurality of publics, such that her "principle of participatory parity," discussed above, might be tangibly realised (Fraser, 1996: 122). Throughout history, disenfranchised communities such as women, LGBTIQ people, people of colour, and workers, have formed what Fraser (1996: 123) refers to as *subaltern counterpublics*: "parallel discursive arenas where members of subordinated social groups invent and circulate counter-discourses to formulate oppositional interpretations of their identities, interests, and needs."

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[40] Fraser (1996) highlights that Habermas' conceptualisation of the public sphere is limited in its assumptions about society, power and liberalism, as it assumed that there was only one public, and his idea did not initially extend to the possibility of differing publics having always existed in society (Fraser, 1996).

Subaltern counterpublics form sites where groups with mutual experiences of marginalisation can resist, and pursue social justice. As will be further discussed in the following section, several criminologists have utilised this concept to frame justice-seeking practices in digital society (Powell, 2015b; Salter, 2013).

Before turning to digital society, it is worth highlighting some of the ways that marginalised communities have created counter-discourses, which to an extent have functioned to shift the status quo. For example, through scholarship and activism, LGBTIQ communities have posed significant challenges to normative ways of thinking about society. Queer theory, for instance, utilises poststructural techniques to question the role and function of categories, identities, and byproducts of normative power structures, particularly heteropatriarchy (see Butler, 1990, 1993). The process of 'queering' can be utilised to shift conceptualisations of social and political justice. In *Bodies That Matter,* Judith Butler (1993) discusses the significance reclaiming the term 'queer' as identity, while also cautioning against the overreliance on shifting discourses as a source of emancipation:

> [I]t remains politically necessary to lay claim to 'women,' 'queer,' 'gay,' and 'lesbian,' precisely because of the way these terms, as it were, lay their claim on us prior to our full knowing. Laying claim to such terms in reverse will be necessary to refute homophobic deployments of the terms in law, public policy, on the street, in 'private' life. But the necessity to mobilise the necessary error of identity…will always be in tension with the democratic contestation of the term which works against its deployments in racist and misogynist discursive regimes (Butler, 1993: 229).

This excerpt highlights the importance of identity in resistive politics as well as social and political justice. Butler (1993) illustrates the necessity and discursive power of 'laying claim' while noting the tensions within competing and counteracting discourses. As such, participation in queering and queer identity signifies potential sites of subaltern resistance. This perhaps bears similarities to those who use 'survivor' as in identity, as was discussed in the previous chapter.

Queer activist communities also present important ways to reframe justice and respond to violence within communities. For example, *The Revolution Starts at Home* is a handbook that advocates for transforming expectations of justice within communities, particularly concerning intimate partner violence and sexual violence. Vanessa Huang (2011: 62) argues:

> When the only response put before us is to look for 'justice' via the criminal legal system…it's extremely hard to imagine another way. But tapping into our collective courage to dare to dream the world we want to live in is our fundamental task in the work of transformation.

Likewise, in the edited collection *Queering Sexual Violence,* queer activists and victim-survivors comment on how justice occurs through queering. Amita Yalgi Swadhin (2016: 219) states:

> If queer survivors, and particularly those of us committed to radical work for social justice, are more willing to claim survivorship publicly, we can play a key leadership role in shaping the dialogue around healing, prevention and intervention to be more as aligned with an inclusive vision of justice for all. Given that we are already oppressed if we are out as queer, we are incentivised to dismantle oppressive structures and norms of the status quo that our heteronormative counterparts might be hesitant to challenge due to their privileges.

The radical activism that occurs in queer communities has much to teach scholars about how justice can occur in the aftermath of sexual violence. In these spaces, notions of 'healing,' 'dismantling,' 'resisting,' and 'building community' are essential in discussions of justice (see Hammer and Gossett, 2016; Nelson, 2016; Picker, 2016; Swadhin, 2016). As Katherine Scott Nelson 2016: 256) further demonstrates:

> When I think of survival, I think of the survivor communities I became a part of. Peer-led, informal friend networks, fuelled by the rise in online social networking, stepped in where all other safety nets failed…When I think of justice, I think of the whole lifelong process of examining and challenging one's ingrained beliefs and unconscious scripts. I think of uprooting the misogyny, racism and queerphobia that was planted in you long before you knew what was happening…Its ultimate goal will be to transform the broken realities of our world and the systemic oppressions that underpin the violence in all of our lives. My justice is her justice.

Together, these excerpts from queer activist texts are illustrative of the radical conversations about social and political justice that occur within communities of victim-survivors, signifying how alternative publics and discourses can resonate and affect the individual and collective lives of people who have experienced violence. Through queering, it becomes clear that things like 'laying claim' might be conceptualised as justice-seeking (Butler, 1993; Swadhin, 3016). Importantly, Nelson (2016) also highlights the importance of online spaces as sites where community building and justice can occur.

Activism within communities of colour has also sought to reframe justice beyond the state, particularly in contexts where mass incarceration has led to a need to *transform* justice. Transformative justice prioritises community facilitation over the state's intervention (Harris, 2011). Within activist communities, transformative justice allows for challenging norms and typical desired outcomes of justice and focusses on realising community accountability. Angela Harris (2011: 58) suggests that a benefit of transformative justice in communities is that "scholars and advocates cannot rely

uncritically on either state institutions and practices or the traditional practices and institutions of civil society, including the family and 'the community.'" This means that transformative justice advocates typically look to alternative solutions and practices that evolve through collaboration and discussion within communities. Several notable activist organisations in the US have focused on transformative justice in response to sexual violence (Smith, 2010). Andrea Smith (2010: 274–5) argues that transformative justice organisations need be concerned with (1) political activism (2) sharing and critical reflection of practices that do not work (3) developing alternative governing strategies based in nonviolence, and (4) recognising that interpersonal violence stems from structural violence. Transformative justice organisations, therefore, "seek not just to intervene after violence happens, but to create a world in which violence becomes unthinkable" (Smith, 2010: 275). Transformative justice presents alternatives to justice that simultaneously address individual harms, community experiences, and structural violence. This section presented the tangible ways that marginalised communities have produced knowledge about alternatives to the criminal justice system. The significance of this literature is that it highlights how justice can be conceptually transformed to include notions of healing and accountability, and importantly, that justice might be facilitated outside of the state.

Towards rape justice in digital society

Criminologists have begun to theorise how victim-survivors' digital practices are analogous to different justice-seeking behaviours (Fileborn, 2014b, 2017; Powell, 2014, 2015a, 2015b; Salter, 2013; Wood, Rose and Thompson, 2018). There are several ways that this participation has been framed as justice, notably through online counterpublicss, 'digilantism' and revenge, viral justice, online activism, and through the justice needs of victim-survivors being met through disclosures. As noted in Chapter 2, victim-survivors disclose online in myriad ways, and as such, a variety of motivations and justice needs could be relevant to these practices.

The theoretical development of 'online counterpublics' is an important concept when considering justice in digital society. Drawing from Nancy Fraser's (1996) theorising of counterpublics discussed above, Michael Salter (2013) suggested that victim-survivors who disclose online are contributing to a "counter-hegemonic discourse" about experiences of sexual violence. Online disclosures, hashtag activism, and naming perpetrators can produce alternative discourses about sexual violence, which might challenge broader societal perceptions. Salter (2013) contends that online counterpublics are similar to those operating in non-digital contexts; hegemonic discourses are likely to persist, excluding and silencing the voices some victim-survivors who might wish to engage in digital practices. Building upon this, Powell (2015b: 10) asserts that "these counterpublics engagements both by, and on behalf of, victim-survivors of sexual violence represent

more than a resistive politics, but the development of new technosocial practices of informal justice." Powell (2015a, 2015b) contends online counterpublics might extend beyond the discursive, by shaping how digital platforms are used by individuals and communities, which, in turn, broadens the practices that constitute informal justice-seeking. Bryce Renninger (2015) suggests that "networked counterpublics" are influenced by the politics that shape varying digital platforms, suggesting that they are formed through different norms and ways of speaking that exist across platforms. This signifies that online counterpublics are likely to emerge differently in online communities compared with hashtags on Twitter.

Social media activism and ways of politically "speaking out" online have presented opportunities for scholars to consider social justice in digital society. Feminist media scholars have commented on the significance of feminist hashtag activism as a means to challenge rape culture through counterpublics and shifting discourses (see Gleeson and Turner, 2019; Karlsson, 2018; Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016; Mendes, Keller and Ringrose, 2018; Mendes, Ringrose and Keller, 2018; Sills et al., 2016). However, feminist criminologists have noted the implications that these practices pose to the question of informal justice as a response to sexual violence. For example, both Powell (2015a, 2015b) and Fileborn (2014b, 2017) highlight the importance of considering victim-survivors 'justice needs,' discussed earlier in the chapter, within the context of digital practices. Rachel Loney-Howes (2018) notes that victim-survivors' anti-rape blogs can challenge prescriptive rape narratives. As noted in the preceding chapter, rape scripts produce an unspeakability about experiences of sexual violence (Marcus, 1992). Loney-Howes (2018: 33) contends that speaking out online can act to "shift the hegemonic rape script; to construct a new way of speaking and witnessing that goes beyond the frameworks through which rape and trauma are normatively articulated." In this way, victim-survivors' online activism is both therapeutic and political (Loney-Howes, 2018). The political nature of online activism bears implications for justice by increasing victim-survivors' participation in public life (see also Powell and Henry, 2017).

Emerging scholarship about #MeToo has alluded to its potential impacts on legal systems and its implications for justice (Gash and Harding, 2018; Tippettt, 2018; Wexler, Robbennolt and Murphy, 2019). Lesley Wexler et al. (2019: 109) have discussed #MeToo alongside theories of justice discussed earlier in the chapter:

> As [#MeToo] advocates move forward, they would do well to bear in mind the core principles and lessons of both restorative and transitional justice. The insights of restorative justice give us guidance by which society, communities, and those persons directly involved can assess the efforts of individuals and institutions to respond to wrongdoing. Transitional justice provides a useful touchstone by which advocates and scholars can better understand and theorize some of the vexing questions complicating

the #MeToo conversation...But much work remains. Cultural shifts and individual adjustments do not happen overnight, and the changes already wrought by the #MeToo conversation may not yet be deeply embedded. It will likely take a mix of public and private actions, by individuals and collectives, to bridge the gap from a moment and a movement to a transition that is transformative.

Following #MeToo, in a context where digital storytelling about sexual violence is only increasing, it is crucial to theorise the extent to which online activism and speaking out is motivated by victim-survivors' need for justice, and the extent to which these practices can tangibly deliver justice outcomes. Tanya Serisier (2018b: 93–94) suggests that "social media…represents the culmination of the political and cultural potential of speaking out." Indeed, digital society presents a unique context in which representations of sexual violence might be shared and politicised, signalling a potential means to pursue informal justice through storytelling and challenging the (re)production of rape scripts.

Scholars have simultaneously suggested that justice in digital society stems from need to fulfil vengeance, and as a result, might be described as 'digilantism' or a digital version of vigilante justice (see Chang and Poon, 2016; Hai-Jew, 2014; Jane, 2016; Prins, 2011; Salter, 2013; Tuovinen and Röning, 2007; Wehmhoener, 2010). Shalin Hai-Jew (2014) notes that some online cultures encourage acts of revenge, including hacking and sharing of personal information, the distribution of revenge pornography, or the sharing of violent videos. For victim-survivors of sexual violence, this vengeance culture often manifests through online naming and shaming of perpetrators (Powell 2015b; Salter 2013). Some victim-survivors may act out of revenge to address their failed experiences with the justice system, using social media platforms as a space to name their rapists, as exemplified in Chapter 1 (Filipovic, 2012; Ingram, 2017b; Powell, 2015b; Salter, 2013). Salter (2013: 226) discusses the implications and potential consequences that come with naming perpetrators online, commenting that this practice could disrupt or influence formal justice processes. Given research conducted with victim-survivors, albeit in non-digital contexts, has noted that their perceptions of justice often do not include 'vengeance' (see Herman, 2005), perhaps it is overly simplistic to assume that digilantism is predicated by a need for revenge. Indeed, in later chapters, I argue that these practices are often more complicated than revenge narratives.

Victim-survivors use digital platforms for storytelling and to have their experiences heard, which can fulfil a sense of justice. Fileborn (2018: 18) argues that through disclosures, stories can be co-constructed through mutual dialogue and "function as a powerful narrative device." When shared amongst peers, stories can function to "subvert power relations" and reframe collective experiences of violence (Fileborn, 2018: 18). Lena Wånggren (2016) suggests that digital storytelling about experiences of sexual violence can be used as a tool in social justice movements. Given the consistent

limitations of formal criminal justice systems to hear and acknowledge the stories of victim-survivors, there is scope to think about online spaces as contexts where this can occur (Lievore, 2003; Daly and Bouhours, 2010; Clark, 2015). Wånggren (2016: 407) suggests that "through sharing stories and… other online communications, technologies increasingly become central ways for countering… gender-based violence." Digital storytelling allows some victim-survivors to find their voice and have control over how they share their experience, although it is important to also note that this is not without its potential implications or consequences (Fileborn, 2014b; Loney-Howes, 2015, 2018; Moors and Webber, 2013; Powell, 2015b). Storytelling is an interactive process which requires both "willing storytellers and willing and able listeners" (Ross, 2003b: 326). This suggests that for effective storytelling to occur, a victim-survivor needs to find their voice and have an audience for their story. Research emphasises that victim-survivors of sexual violence want to be heard and see this as part of the justice process (Clark and Quadara, 2010; McGlynn, Westmarland and Godden, 2012; Ross, 2003b). Fileborn (2014b, 2017, 2018) suggests that seeking justice online is complicated by whether victim-survivors can be effectively heard, and who sites are set up for. Fileborn (2014b) has questioned the impacts on a victim-survivor if they disclosed online and did not receive any response to their narrative. She notes potential ways that researchers could measure whether a victim-survivors' account is heard, for example, through quantifying likes or comments on stories (Fileborn, 2014b). Moreover, online activist spaces can exclude victim-survivors who do not fit within norms, therefore potentially precluding them from being heard or seeking justice:

> People of colour, LGBTQ+ communities, and those living with disability either believed they were excluded from activist spaces or had direct experience of being excluded from these spaces. While this does not mean that individuals from these groups are unable to disclose as a political act, it may circumscribe opportunities and spaces for doing so or result in disclosure not being heard and valued in the same way when it does occur (Fileborn, 2018: 12).

This suggests that whilst digital society presents many opportunities for storytelling, structural oppressions might influence whether justice occurs by limiting what stories are heard and valued by broader society. The extent to which victim-survivors achieve a sense of justice might depend on who can speak in different digital contexts. Indeed, this commentary has also been evident in critical discussion of #MeToo (see Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019a).

Further research has suggested that online disclosures can result in a "viral justice" (Wood, Rose and Thompson, 2018). Wood, Rose and Thompson (2018) have discussed the implications of a victim-survivor's narrative going viral, commenting that this can potentially spur further harms to victim-survivors in doxxing, trolling, and so on. Sexual violence research consistently indicates that it is important for victim-survivors to have positive experiences when first disclosing experiences of

sexual violence, and to maintain control over their experiences (McGlynn, Westmarland and Godden, 2012; Ross, 2003b; Ullman, 2010). When a disclosure results in negative responses, it likely deters victim-survivors from seeking supports (Ullman, 2010). There is limited research about whether this is different when it comes to online disclosures of sexual violence, although Fileborn (2014b) has noted that negative responses or reactions to disclosures could end up being more detrimental to victim-survivors. Narratives posted online might be misused, misinterpreted, or stored for a purpose beyond the original intention of the victim-survivor (Ross, 2003b; Wood, Rose and Thompson, 2018). Moreover, there is the potential that some accounts are simply lost to the "ether," particularly in contexts such as viral hashtags where many victim-survivors are sharing narratives at once (Fileborn, 2014b). Because there are diverse experiences that victim-survivors have when sharing rape narratives online, there are likely to be situations in which justice may not be met, or indeed, is further complicated by digital society.

It is important to highlight how these discussions and key concepts of justice in digital society overlap, whereby counterpublics, activism, digilantism, storytelling and the shifting of rape scripts are neither mutually exclusive nor necessarily contingent upon one another. There is scope for the connection of these concepts within victim-survivors' digital practices, indicating the complexities in considering informal justice in digital society. Furthermore, while some scholars have theorised how online disclosure may fulfil justice needs of victim-survivors (see Powell 2015a; Fileborn 2014b), empirical research with victim-survivors about how they perceive and understand their digital engagement in relation to justice is limited. Fileborn's (2017) use of survey and focus group methodology to understand the online disclosure of street harassment is the only criminological study to have directly engaged victim-survivors on how justice needs could be met in a digital context. In this article, Fileborn (2017) questions whether online spaces are suitable sites for justice because while they may allow for validation and being heard, it is not guaranteed that online contexts would be safe spaces to disclose violence due to the potential of losing control over one's story, the likelihood of encountering victim blaming attitudes, or technology-facilitated harmful behaviours such as trolling. As such, it is evident that there is much room for building upon these criminological conceptualisations of rape justice in digital society.

Conclusion: prioritising victim-survivor's voices in theory development

The discussion presented throughout this chapter has advocated for centring victim-survivors' voices and narratives in conceptualisations of alternative avenues to justice. While justice systems often deliver negative experiences to victim-survivors who engage with it, alternatives such as restorative, transformative, and transitional justice processes can have profound impacts on the lives of victim-survivors. For example, survivor-activist and sex crimes scholar Alissa R. Ackerman spoke of her

experience participating in restorative justice circles in a Ted Talk about the importance of connection and healing:

> I shared the details of my experience with the men and talked about the insidious impacts of sexual trauma…the men listened intently and with deep respect. I could feel their empathy and compassion. It was after that first session when I heard the words 'I'd really like to give you a hug if that's okay,' and I immediately embraced this man. A man who had committed a violent rape and a woman who had experienced one, embracing. It was a simple gesture that bridged an abyss that only connection can bridge. And it was one of the most powerful moments of my entire life (Ackerman, 2019).

This exemplifies the powerful outcomes that emerge when victim-survivors can speak to particular audiences, along with the importance of community and connection in shaping how some victim-survivors live through and survive sexual violence. Moreover, it highlights the tangible alternative avenues to justice discussed throughout the chapter and the significance of considering the perspectives of victim-survivors when conceptualising what justice can be. Reiterating what was discussed in Chapter 2, prioritising victim-survivors' perspectives serves to amplify their narratives in broader public discourse.

This chapter has also exhibited the potential for rape justice in digital society. To conceptualise this, the discussion established the normative ways in which justice is administered and experienced in Western liberal democracies as a response to (some experiences of) sexual assault, abuse and rape. I noted how procedural justice is often constrained by law and other structural forces that undermine the voices and experiences of victim-survivors. However, by highlighting some of the alternative forms of procedural justice, for instance, restorative and transitional justice, it is clear that there is scope for considering justice beyond the rigid confines of the law (see, for example Davies and True, 2015; Nagy, 2015; Schia and Carvalho, 2015). Furthermore, by considering justice from the perspectives of victim-survivors, it became evident that the traditional justice system is not equipped to respond to their justice needs (Clark 2015; Herman 2005). This reinforced the need to consider an array of justice responses, as well as highlighting the importance of centring victim-survivors' voices and experiences in any understanding of justice. Notably, the concept of "kaleidoscopic justice" suggests that justice can be an on-going and unfixed process that incorporates shifting needs that victim-survivors have throughout their lives in the aftermath of sexual violence (McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018).

Following this, I presented key concepts that theorise justice beyond the criminal justice system, drawing notably on the notions of recognition and difference. Concepts within queer theory and community-led justice initiatives juxtaposed individual experiences alongside powerful structures

and noted disruptive discourses and community practices that attempt to 'queer' justice. The framework discussed in this chapter has suggested discursive tensions, whereby to strive for justice through shifting language and the pursuance of connection and community involves grappling with the notion that it might never be achieved (Ahmed, 2000; Derrida, 1990; Fraser, 1997). Together, these concepts have rejected the notion of 'normative theory,' and instead have sought to present possibilities of how contrasting approaches to justice might work together (Young, 1990: 36). The acknowledgment of interacting oppressions that impact upon people who experience difference indicates that justice needs to be multiple to meet the diverse and varying needs of people in societies, and to challenge the oppressive nature of structures (Young, 1990). The ways that marginalised communities, such as queer communities and communities of colour, have pushed through structural oppression and created subaltern counterpublics are significant examples of how alternative justices might be autonomously and collectively pursued parallel to the confines of the state.

This conceptual framework has sought to connect the procedural failures of criminal justice responses to sexual violence to poststructural and political theories of justice, as well as concepts of informal justice in digital society. In bringing together the key concepts concerning procedural justice failures, centring victim-survivors' perspectives, and theories of difference, queering and recognition, I have argued for the significance of alternative modes of justice beyond the criminal justice system. Moreover, I have discussed how informal justice occurs in digital society through online counterpublics, activism, storytelling, and digilantism, noting that these practices also bear implications and consequences for individuals, broader communities, and discourse (Fileborn, 2014b, 2017; Powell, 2015a, 2015b; Salter, 2013; Sills et al., 2016; Wånggren, 2016). This chapter has shaped the potential for multiple, varying avenues for justice and speaking out in digital society. The following chapter presents a two-stage qualitative approach that addresses the question of how victim-survivors use digital platforms and whether this can be understood as justice from their perspectives.

Helena and Tara
On research participation

I'm really interested in a lot of research that goes on, but this one I thought was particularly interesting because [the online community] is somewhere that's been helpful, and my experience with the Internet has been very mixed, and I think that a lot of rape culture, in particular, is perpetuated on the Internet. And certainly, my perpetrator is still on a social media platform that we used to share together and is very supported by it as well. And it's, I think the Internet's been a big part of my experience… of the whole experience of rape, after rape, and recovery, trying to recover. – **Helena**

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I really liked the idea of talking to somebody about my experience of using the sites, because it's not something that anyone's really asked me about before … I really appreciate having the opportunity to talk about it because it's not something that I generally talk about and although people post on the forum, it doesn't have that kind of meta thing of you know, people post more about the things they've come to discuss than why they use it if you see what I mean, so it felt, I thought I'd be quite interested to take a step back and talk about my experiences of using it. And I think it was just quite exciting to see something where I could actually volunteer to take part, as silly as that might sound. – **Tara**

4

Survivor Voices

Engaging with digital practices in sexual violence research

The preceding chapters of this thesis have outlined salient concepts concerning victim-survivors' online disclosure practices, including the importance of considering the voices and experiences of victim-survivors as experts in their lives and experiences (Herman 2005). These notions underpin the research design and methodology of this research. As noted in Chapter 1, victim-survivors' disclosures in digital society are increasingly common and have become a topic of interest within sexual violence scholarship. However, the preceding interlude presents quotes from Helena and Tara exemplifying the importance of this research beyond the academy, showing complexity about research practice from the perspective of victim-survivor research participants (see also Campbell and Adams, 2009). For instance, Helena noted some of the tensions in turning to social media in the aftermath of sexual violence, highlighting the significant role that the Internet had played in her experience but also in fostering rape culture. Tara noted her enjoyment in being able to take part in research, to have an opportunity to reflect and be heard about her digital practices that had been significant in different stages of her life.

Several qualitative methodological approaches were utilised in this research to understand victim-survivors' digital practices in the aftermath of sexual violence. I present the research design including ontological and epistemological positions, data collection, sampling, and ethical considerations (Crotty, 1998). The research utilised feminist standpoint methodology and qualitative methods to understand how and why victim-survivors disclose their experiences of sexual violence online. The methodology comprised of two stages of data collection, beginning with a content analysis of victim-survivors' narratives posted to an online victim-survivor community on Reddit in 2016. Following this, I conducted 26 qualitative interviews with victim-survivors who had used a variety of digital platforms to disclose sexual violence, including Reddit, Twitter, and Facebook. Interview transcripts were analysed using critical discourse analysis. Before presenting the methodological approach throughout the following sections, it is important to situate the method alongside the central aims and questions of the research. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the research aims are:

1) To emphasise the voices of victim-survivors of sexual violence as an expert source of empirical knowledge

2) To understand the ways that victim-survivors perceive their digital practices and informal justice

3) To explore an under-researched area of feminist and digital criminologies, and by doing so to put forward an original theoretical contribution that assesses digital platforms as an avenue to pursue informal justice

Additionally, to recall the research questions:

1) In what ways, and for what reasons, do victim-survivors use digital platforms to share their experiences of sexual violence?

2) To what extent, and in what ways, can victim-survivor engagement with digital platforms be conceptualised as 'informal justice'?

The first research question focuses on the needs and experiences of victim-survivors of sexual violence, with emphasis on exploring how they understand justice and digital platforms. This question is well suited to a feminist epistemology and standpoint research, as well as the methods of qualitative interviews and the analysis of a victim-survivor community. The second research question, which is more conceptual, is best reflected in the analytical methods of content and discourse analyses, along with qualitative interviews. These methods allowed for the deconstruction and development of new conceptual meanings of justice to occur in conjunction with victim-survivors' perspectives. The following sections discuss each aspect of the research methodology, including sampling and the ethical considerations of conducting online research, especially with 'vulnerable groups'[41] such as victim-survivors of sexual violence.

The research design process

Considering ontology, epistemology, and theoretical perspectives

In developing any research design, it is important to consider and reflect on ontological and epistemological perspectives that guide the process. Michael Crotty (1998) contends that ontology and epistemology should inform theoretical perspectives, methodologies, and research designs. This process is often reciprocal, that is, a research design can also influence the ontology and epistemology of a project (Crotty, 1998). Ontology, or the philosophical study of the nature of reality, can influence upon epistemology, which how knowledge is thought about and produced (Crotty, 1998). To an extent, the research is guided by the ontology of realism, as it suggests that meaningful reality can be *both* socially constructed and 'real' (Crotty, 1998). Feminist scholars who have drawn from

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[41] I use the term 'vulnerable groups' in quotation marks here to reflect on recent commentary by sexual violence scholars that it is perhaps detrimental to both research design and outcome to wholly assume that victim-survivors of sexual violence and other crimes are 'vulnerable.' As McGlynn and Westmarland (2018) note, many of the victim-survivors who take part in research do so as experts, with authority and knowledge of what it is to experience sexual violence.

poststructural theory argue for the importance of acknowledging the reality of women's experiences as existing beyond discourse (see Alcoff, 2018, Alcoff and Gray, 1993), however, that conceding this presents tensions with postmodern thinking. As Maureen Cain (1998: 74) notes:

> The realist position which I and others have developed denies the strong postmodern position that social life derives in its entirety from a play of communications resulting sometimes in temporary sedimentations of meaning. Such a view gives ontological primacy to discourse, it being impossible to 'have' a relationship which is not expressible in, and ultimately constituted by, some discourse or other.

Cain (1998) is a proponent of thinking beyond discourse while acknowledging its importance and suggests that although discourses can give language for violence, particularly those that remain "unthought," this does not presuppose the realities of violence. Indeed, many feminist scholars and activists have contributed to *creating* a language for sexual violence, particularly those "little rapes" that were so normalised as to be "extra-discursive," that is, there was no way to describe harassment as violence before feminists gave language to these experiences (Cain, 1998; see also Kelly, 1988). Thus, the ontological positioning of this research acknowledges the real experiences of victim-survivors while contending with the socially constructed nature of discourse.

The epistemology of social constructivism aligns well with tenets of modern realism, despite scholars often pitting these positions against one another (Crotty, 1998: 63–5). Social constructivism rejects the production of universal knowledge, contending instead that 'truth' and meaning stem from the interaction between subject and object and is resultantly dependent on context (Crotty, 1998). This position informs this research as a qualitative project where meaning emerges from the real experiences of victim-survivors, but where society potentially shapes how sexual violence is framed and spoken about, as noted in Chapter 2. Cain (1998: 89-90) usefully summarises the relationship between reality and knowledge:

> First, reality and knowledge of it are forever separated by the capacities of the knowers, which are limited and species-specific. Secondly, these capacities are culturally specific, depending on available modes of thought and discourse. Thirdly, these capacities are 'historically,' or relationally, specific, depending on the site occupied by the knower in a relational nexus which provides a social vantage point. Professions do this self-consciously; other locations (class, region, gender, age, for example) also provide social vantage points for knowing. Finally, that which is to be known keeps on changing too, especially for the sociologist whose object of study—namely, social relationships—is more mobile and fluid than most. So although relations may be conceived as real (and existing independently of knowledge of them) and as changing, knowledge of relationships is

always produced by someone with a particular set of capacities; these historical and variable capacities shape and constrain the knowledges produced.

Cain (1998) highlights that knowledge is often in flux, despite the reality of experiences that people might share. As this relates to this research, although victim-survivors share a common reality of having experienced sexual violence, the knowledge of this reality is likely to shift depending on context and discourse. Thus, the combination of realism and social constructivism inform this project.

Crotty (1998) further contends that the ontological and epistemological positioning of social research projects should influence the theoretical perspective(s) that inform the methodology and research methods. This research design has drawn primarily from feminisms, particularly poststructural theories pertaining to how sexual violence is discursively shaped, as outlined in Chapter 2. The poststructural theories of justice outlined in Chapter 3 also guide the research design. These theoretical perspectives, research aims, and research questions, together influenced the design of a qualitative research methodology utilising feminist standpoint research.

Methodology: the role of feminist standpoint research

Feminist scholars have considered what factors make research methodologies "feminist" (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Reinharz and Davidman, 1992). Shulamit Reinharz and Lynn Davidman (1992) suggest that common amongst feminist research is the recognition that gender plays a role in the construction and analysis of the phenomenon or group being studied and that understanding women's experiences is crucial to the creation of knowledge (see also Hesse-Biber, 2012: 11). Feminist theory and standpoint methodology stems from constructivist epistemological perspectives that emphasise that knowledge develops through a series of social interactions with various structures (Hesse-Biber, 2012). Indeed, as noted above, Cain (1998) contends that standpoint methodology has allowed feminist researchers to overcome some of the tensions in accessing poststructural theories alongside lived experiences, suggesting that these experiences can be real as discourse shifts around what is and can be 'known' about those experiences. Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray (1993: 261) reflect on the tensions in combining poststructural theory and lived experiences of sexual violence:

> Our motivation to reflect on these issues emerges from our need to reflect on our own practices. We are two women who share three traits: we are survivors, we have been active in the movement of survivors for justice and empowerment, and we also work within (and sometimes against) postmodernist theories. We have also been affected by the distancing and dissonance that institutions enforce between "theory" and "personal life," which splits the individual along parallel paths that can never meet. This…is an attempt to rethink and repair this dissonance and to begin weaving together these paths – and their commitments, interests, and experiences.

Alcoff and Gray (1993) highlight a productive site of tension that arises when utilising the standpoint experiences of women and victim-survivors and theoretical perspectives that dispute universal truth. This research further demonstrates these productive tensions by drawing from the standpoint experiences of victim-survivors, while commenting on the discursive effects that might shape their digital practices and narratives of sexual violence.

Feminist standpoint methodologies lead researchers to centre women's experiences, rather than prioritising another overarching framework such as objectivity (Harding, 2012). This means that knowledge around gendered issues, such as sexual violence, should stem from the perspectives of those who have encountered it through lived experiences. Feminist standpoint research also encourages scholars to understand how their position (generally being one of power) influences the research process (Harding 2012; Hesse-Biber 2012). This means utilising tools such as reflexivity to consider the various implications of researcher subjectivities on both data collection and analysis. For this research, reflexivity was achieved through maintaining research blogs, journals and memos, and through conversations with academic peers throughout the research process. Both stages of the research design utilised qualitative methods informed by standpoint methodology. Feminist standpoint research is well suited to qualitative methods for data collection and analysis because qualitative methods typically gather rich experiential data that captures the voices and perspectives of research participants rather than seeking to quantify aspects of it (Harding, 2012). The first stage of data collection was an inductive content analysis of an online rape victim-survivor community on Reddit. The second stage of data collection was qualitative interviews conducted with 26 victim-survivors who had used digital platforms to discuss experiences of sexual violence online. Interview data was then analysed using critical discourse analysis. These two stages of the research process are discussed below, following a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the combined methodology.

Stage 1: Content analysis of an online victim-survivor community

Online communities as sites of research and analysis

Online communities are established sites of study within Internet research, with methods utilised including digital ethnography, observation, and content analysis. Empirical research into online communities has been extensive, but much of this scholarship is concentrated within health research. In Chapter 2, I outlined research that discussed the value of online communities in the aftermath of sexual violence (Andalibi et al., 2016, 2018; Burrows, 2011), however, these studies provided limited methodological commentary regarding online communities as sites of research within sexual violence scholarship. Much of the methodological approach discussed below developed from other disciplines, which reiterates the need for sexual violence scholars to engage methodologically and conceptually

with online communities. Examples that shaped this research include studies concerning online communities for various cancers, HIV/AIDS, eating disorders, depression, and chronic diseases (see, for example Boero and Pascoe, 2012; Haas et al., 2011; Lepore et al., 2011; McCormack, 2010; Smedberg, 2014; Stommel and Koole, 2010; van Uden-Kraan et al., 2009). From these studies, it is evident that online communities are a suitable site for research, particularly for methods such as content analysis. The limited studies that have examined online communities for the aftermath of sexual violence indicate a need for further research to understand these spaces and their diverse impacts.

The first stage of the research design was the digital content analysis of a publicly accessible online community on Reddit called /r/rapecounseling.[42] Reddit is a popular platform founded in 2005 that allows users[43] to communicate in "threaded conversations" on a variety of topics that are initiated by participants in the community (Choi et al., 2015). While Reddit refers to itself as a network of communities, some have critically discussed the extent to which Reddit is a community (see Summit-Gil, 2017). As noted in Chapter 2, Robards (2018) suggests that rather than a community per se, there is potential for Reddit to be conceptualised as a "neo-tribe," whereby fleeting communities are formed based on shared interests or experiences. Reddit users typically interact via comments on public forums known as 'subreddits' that concern a vast spectrum of topics, although they can also message one another privately. In some public discourses, Reddit has a somewhat negative reputation as being rife with trolling and abuse, but various subreddits are increasingly becoming the topic of scholarly research that highlights the positive aspects of the site (see Robards, 2018). Conversations on subreddits are often public, that is, they are accessible for viewing without a user account, and users can vote or comment on content posted to the site. Reddit is increasingly becoming a site of empirical and conceptual scholarship (see, for example Andalibi et al., 2016, 2018; Manikonda et al., 2018; Massanari, 2017; Nhan, Huey and Broll, 2015; Robards, 2018; van der Nagel and Frith, 2015). Indeed, /r/rapecounseling has been the subject of scholarly research, although within the discipline of computer studies (see Andalibi et al., 2016, 2018). This further suggests the suitability of Reddit as a site of research.

Data collection: Sampling, content selection, and coding

Reddit was chosen as a suitable site for content analysis primarily because it is publicly accessible with public data, it is popular and has a high user base, and its subreddits encompass a broad range of

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[42] Though any English speaking victim-survivor could access/r/rapecounseling, it seemingly originated with users in the United States, and uses the American English spelling of the word 'counselling.' I use /r/rapecounseling verbatim throughout this thesis.
[43] The word 'users' is used to describe people who access Reddit because many do not become 'members' of the site, not do they necessarily identify as 'Redditors.' Users better encapsulates the broad spectrum of people who access the site (see also Robards, 2018).

topics, including several on sexual violence. Reddit users create subreddits and volunteers that frequently access it often moderate them (Choi et al., 2015; Leavitt, 2015). I conducted a digital content analysis of /r/rapecounseling, a community for victim-survivors of sexual violence and abuse, along with their family members, friends, and supporters. /r/rapecounseling is an online community where survivors of sexual violence and abuse share posts about their experiences, ask questions and receive support from a virtual community (Andalibi et al., 2016; O'Neill, 2018). At the time of writing, it had 14,000 subscribers compared to the 4,000 subscribers it had when the research began, indicating significant growth in interest in the subreddit. Using N-Capture, I gathered content that posted over one month in 2016, consisting of 200 original posts, along with the comments interacting with each post. Each post varied in size, with some users posting single words and others posting lengthy entries detailing their experiences of sexual violence and the impacts it continued to bear on their lives.

Posts were coded using qualitative data analysis software N-Vivo 11. An inductive coding approach was used whereby codes were derived directly from the data, rather than coding according to a prescribed framework or by making assumptions about the text (Saldaña, 2013). Reinharz and Davidman (1992) suggest that inductive coding is suitable when undertaking feminist content analysis. To provide as much additional context as possible, each post was categorised according to the available identifiable demographics.[44] These details included the gender of the victim-survivor, gender of the perpetrator, who was posting (a victim-survivor or a secondary survivor such as a family member or partner), where the sexual violence occurred, the type of sexual violence experienced, and the relationship between the victim-survivor and the perpetrator. Memos were written throughout the coding process and a research journal was kept to better utilise reflexivity throughout (Dowling, 2012; O'Reilly, 2005, 2012).

Method and analysis: Content analysis

Content analysis is a useful method to analyse digital data because it requires the in-depth and systematic analysis of content[45] while allowing the researcher to be interpretive and reflexive (Altheide, 1996). Qualitative content analysis, also known as inductive content analysis, allows themes and topics to emerge directly from data being analysed (Zhang and Wildemuth, 2009). The content analysis undertaken involved an inductive approach and was concerned with the discovery of findings, rather than verification of preconceived hypotheses which allowed findings to emerge throughout the

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[44] Because this type of information was only discernible in a post if the victim-survivor self-identified it, these demographic details are neither generalisable nor quantifiable. Posts were often written in first person, much like diary entries, and these types of details were often left unsaid. However, it was useful to gather and collate this information, where possible, to provide additional context to the posts.

[45] 'Content' refers to texts but also "other meaningful matter" (Krippendorff 2004, p.18) or things of cultural significance. This might include (but is certainly not limited to) images, video, maps, signs, symbols, artwork, songs or music (Krippendorff 2012; Reinharz and Davidman 1992).

research process (Altheide 1996). This type of analysis aligns well with the first research question, which focuses on exploring the voices of victim-survivors. Content analysis also allows texts to be read in different ways according to theoretical perspectives and research questions (Krippendorff, 2012; Reinharz and Davidman, 1992).

The content analysis of tweets, social media posts, blog posts or other forms of media, has become an increasingly common method of analysis, including when researching sexual or gender-based violence (see, for example Ahrens 2006; Andalibi et al. 2016; Clark 2016; Dixon 2014; Moors and Webber 2013; Powell 2015b; Salter 2013; Webber 2014; Webber and Moors 2015; Webber and Wilmot 2013). Noted above, I analysed 200 posts that victim-survivors posted to the subreddit /r/rapecounseling. The purpose of this analysis was to explore victim-survivors Reddit narratives in the aftermath of sexual violence and to understand their motivations behind posting. This method reflects the first research question concerned with the ways that victim-survivors participate in digital society.

Ethical considerations of digital research

Online research presents ethical considerations, particularly in spaces where it is difficult to distinguish between public and private content (Eysenbach and Till, 2001; Langer and Beckman, 2005; Markham, 2005). Gathering data from public social media platforms has fuelled substantial debate about obtaining informed consent from otherwise unknowing research participants (Burles and Bally, 2018; Clark et al., 2015; Davies et al., 2016; Sugiura, Wiles and Pope, 2017). Further, this type of data collection raises questions around whether informed consent is necessary, as some consider a public post to social media as analogous to speaking in a public place (Willis, 2019). Others suggest that denouncing ethical responsibilities to gain informed consent is inappropriate, particularly when considering the purpose of the content and the subjective experiences and potential vulnerabilities of participants (Dennen, 2012; Flick, 2016; McKee and Porter, 2009; Quinton and Reynolds, 2018; Wyatt, 2012). Some guidelines have considered whether informed consent ought to be obtained regardless when researching vulnerable populations and sensitive topics (Clark et al., 2015). However, scholars have also noted that obtaining informed consent may have detrimental impacts on the research environment, particularly when it is an interactive setting such as an online community, blog, or other social media where users interact and comment on one another's content (Burles and Bally, 2018). For those who are lurking and considering posting their narratives to a digital space, the known presence of a researcher may hinder their access to digital support (Burles and Bally, 2018; Eysenbach and Till, 2001). Some researchers argue that not announcing one's presence as a researcher in an online setting provides data that more accurately describes and represents the space and is especially useful when exploring sensitive topics (Denzin 1999; Langer and Beckman 2005). However, it is also worth

considering whether "the integrity of the online setting" also extends to the integrity of the content itself (and its creator), which raises valid questions as to whether or not online content, especially that surrounding sensitive topics should be included in research at all (Burles and Bally, 2018: 5).

Despite these ethical dilemmas, scholars continue to establish ethical parameters around the analysis of publicly available social media data and online content. Nathan Bos et al. (2009) contend that in the digital age, research dichotomies like 'public' and 'private,' along with 'anonymous' and 'identified' are imprecise methods of categorising ethical boundaries of investigation. The Internet often blurs public and private spheres, and as such often presents challenges to researchers (Varis, 2014: 9). Dhiraj Murthy (2008: 840) suggests that researchers immersed in virtual field sites are often "invisible." There is often a lack of transparency with research participants that be expected when conducting traditional qualitative research methodologies. Meredith Burles and Jill Bally (2018) note that there is a need for flexibility and reflexivity in these processes, and the gathering of publicly accessible online content is arguably less of an ethical concern than how that data is handled and presented in scholarly research outputs. They suggest that researchers should prioritise the anonymity and privacy of the poster's identities, even when using identifiable content (Burles and Bally, 2018). While it presents ethical concerns for researchers, it is perhaps better to err on the side of caution when presenting online data in research, ensuring that quotes and content are "fabricated" (Markham, 2012) so that data cannot then be linked back to an online identity through search engines or other means (Burles and Bally, 2018). Lisa Sugiura et al. (2017) acknowledge that there has been limited research from the perspectives of web users themselves on the best ethical approach to these issues.

Ethics approval was sought for this stage of the research from RMIT University's College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN), a low-risk ethics committee. Ethics approval was granted in June 2016 to access data from /r/rapecounseling. This ensured accountability through a reporting process that ensured the research was conducted according to the ethical requirements of RMIT University. Scholars have noted that digital research needs to be carried out ethically to ensure integrity in the research process (Burles and Bally, 2018; Clark et al., 2015; Davies et al., 2016; Sugiura, Wiles and Pope, 2017). They refer to strategies such as ensuring that online content and data is de-identified, stored in a secure, password-protected location and not copied to multiple digital locations. In this research, data was stored ethically and confidentiality was maintained by de-identifying Reddit usernames and removing identifiable information from victim-survivors' posts to /r/rapecounseling. Throughout analysis chapters, quotes from Reddit users are denoted by the labels 'anonymous post,' or 'anonymous comment,' followed by a number from 1 to 200 that refers to the chronological sequence of the posts.

Stage 2: Qualitative interviews with victim-survivors

The second stage of this research methodology was qualitative interviews with victim-survivors who had used digital platforms to disclose sexual violence. Interviewing is a method common in social sciences as it allows researchers to collect rich data by gaining direct insights and perspectives from participants (Kvale, 2007). Qualitative interviews were crucial to this research as they offered a means of understanding *why* victim-survivors are using digital platforms to speak out about sexual violence, from their unique perspectives. These interviews were essential and the voices collated from the data provided a unique and original contribution to sexual violence research. Marjorie DeVault and Glenda Gross (2012: 225) highlight that "many researchers have begun to collect data from Internet chatrooms and listserv discussions, but are that data comparable to accounts that might be produced in face-to-face interview?"

Data collection: Qualitative interviews

Interviewing is one of the most common qualitative research methods used by sexual violence researchers (see Westmarland and Bows, 2018). The benefits of qualitative interviews as a method of collecting rich research data are well established (King and Horrocks, 2010; Kvale, 2007). Qualitative research interviews, as distinct from other types of interviews (such as journalistic interviews), are designed to elicit the best research data from participants while allowing researchers to address specific aims and questions (King and Horrocks, 2010: 2). When conducting qualitative interviews, it is important to consider the power dynamics inherent in research, including the power relationship between the researcher and informant, or the politics of interpretation and representation (DeVault and Gross, 2012: 206). These dynamics are important in research conducted with victim-survivors of sexual violence, as is the case with this research. Processes of reflexivity and positioning the researcher in the research can assist in recognising these dynamics and limiting its impact on the research process (Dowling, 2012).

In this research, I conducted in-depth; semi-structured interviews with 26 victim-survivors who had used digital platforms to disclose experiences of sexual violence. To ensure this research was accessible to as many victim-survivors as possible, I provided a variety of interview options; face-to-face, telephone, and skype. Despite the digital nature of the research topic, an online interview option was not offered. DeVault and Gross (2012: 225) describe the difficulties of conducting online interviews, noting that "people's contributions to [a] discussion board – composed on a keyboard, at home, and on a schedule quite different to a face-to-face group discussion – may be quite unlike what they would have said in the moment, face to face." I chose to conduct face-to-face or audio interviews to gather responses that may not have been received through online methods. For example, when recruiting participants for interviews, a potential participant wrote a five-word response in a comment

underneath the research information flyer, rather than participating in an interview. Short responses would not have provided a complex and nuanced range of data that was achieved through interviewing. Furthermore, as will be discussed below, face-to-face and audio interviews create a relationship between researcher and participant, which can result in more ethical research practices with victim-survivors.

Interviews were conducted in a semi-structured, open-ended style, where similar questions and topics were covered throughout, but participants were able to lead the discussion (Reinharz, 1992). This interview structure allowed participants to discuss their experience while enabling the interviewer to minimise potential re-traumatisation (see, for example Ahrens 2006; Campbell et al. 2001; Clark et al. 2010; Curtis-Fawley and Daly 2005; Herman 2005; Jülich and Buttle 2010; Kelly 1987; 1988; McGlynn, Westmarland and Godden, 2012). The interview guide comprised of five sections.[46] The first section of opening questions allowed participants to create a safety plan for the interview and their participation in the research, as well as a way of easing into the interview by discussing their day, hobbies, and the general ways that the participant engaged with online platforms in their lives. The second section included questions about the digital platforms that participants had used to disclose sexual violence and how these practices compared and related to their perceptions of justice. The third section allowed participants to discuss the outcomes of their online disclosure, for themselves, other victim-survivors, and within the broader community. The fourth section provided an opportunity to reflect on how these spaces could improve and other aspects of online spaces that they wanted to discuss. Lastly, at the end of the interview, participants were asked demographic questions, reflective questions about the interview experience, and how they self-identified with their experience of sexual violence[47] (for further studies that have incorporated these techniques, see Campbell and Adams, 2009; Campbell et al., 2009, 2010).

Interviews were conducted between August 1, 2017, and March 31, 2018. A total of 26 interviews were conducted with English-speaking participants living in Australia, the UK, the US, Canada and Japan (see Table 1 for an overview of participant demographics.) Interviews were face-to-face in Melbourne, Australia (n=4) or over telephone or skype (n=22). Interviews varied from 45 minutes to 3 hours in length and were conducted at a range of times that best suited individual participants, many of whom lived in different time zones than the researcher. After data collection, interviews were transcribed and coded using the qualitative data analysis software N-Vivo 11. All participants were given the option to receive and approve a copy of their interview transcript. Two took up this option, and no transcripts were subject to editing following review.

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[46] See Appendix A - Interview Guide
[47] Table 1 shows that participants in this research identified as 'victim,' 'survivor,' 'thriver' or with no particular term.

Table 1 – Participant Demographic Details

Pseudonym	Age range	Sexuality	Gender identity	Location	Self-identity of victim/survivor/other	Platforms used to disclose sexual violence
Allison	35-40-year-old	bisexual	cis woman	Australia	survivor	Twitter
Brett	18-24-year-old	heterosexual	cis man	the US	victim and survivor	Reddit, Discord
Chandler	40-50-year-old	heterosexual	cis man	the US	victim, survivor and thriver (mostly thriver)	Podcast, Website, Facebook, blog, YouTube, Twitter, Email, Pinterest
Coryn	35-40-year-old	queer/polyamorous	cis woman	the US	survivor	Reddit, Facebook, Instagram
Daniel	25-30-year-old	homosexual	cis man	Australia	survivor	Twitter, Medium, Facebook
David	18-24-year-old	heterosexual	cis man	the US	victim and survivor	Reddit, Facebook
Dylan	18-24-year-old	pansexual	genderqueer	Australia	survivor	Facebook
Helena	35-40-year-old	heterosexual	cis woman	the UK	victim	Online communities,[1] Tumblr, unspecified social media platform
Jo	18-24-year-old	queer	non-binary genderqueer	Australia	survivor	Facebook, Instagram
Joseph	45-50-year-old	sexuality not specified	cis man	Australia	survivor	Email, Facebook, Twitter, Blog
Kate	50-55-year-old	heterosexual	cis woman	Australia	survivor (mostly)	Facebook, Reddit, online communities
Kathleen	35-40-year-old	questioning	agender female	Japan	victim (internally) and survivor publicly	Reddit, online communities, tumblr
Lionel	45-50-year-old	heterosexual	cis man	the UK	survivor	Twitter, Facebook, Email, Skype
Mariah	18-24-year-old	heterosexual	cis woman	the US	victim and survivor	Reddit, online counselling
Nicole	30-35-year-old	bisexual	cis woman	the US	no term	Reddit
Olivia	18-24-year-old	bisexual	cis woman	the UK	no term	Reddit, online communities
Patti	18-24-year-old	bisexual	cis woman	Australia	victim	Facebook, online communities, reddit
Sarah	30-35-year-old	heterosexual	cis woman	the US	neither	Online communities
Sophia	18-24-year-old	heterosexual	cis woman	the US	survivor	Reddit, online communities
Sophie	25-30-year-old	heterosexual	cis woman	Australia	no term	Online communities
Supriya	18-24-year-old	bisexual	cis woman	Australia	survivor	Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest
Susie	18-24-year-old	bisexual	cis woman	Australia	victim and survivor	Twitter, Facebook
Tara	35-40-year-old	heterosexual	cis woman	the UK	survivor	Reddit, online communities
Umbrae	30-35-year-old	polyasexual	non-binary	Canada	no term	Facebook, online communities
Xanthea	45-50-year-old	heterosexual	cis woman	the US	thriver	Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Website, Blog, online communities
Zadie	25-30-year-old	lesbian	cis woman	Australia	survivor	Tumblr, Livejournal, online communities

[1] In Table 1, the use of "online communities" refers to specific forum-style web platforms and might include specific sexual violence communities and mental health communities

Sampling, recruitment, and coding considerations

Various recruitment and sampling strategies were employed to engage victim-survivors who had used digital platforms to disclose sexual violence. The research utilised convenience sampling techniques, a method whereby researchers directly target participants that will be able to best provide data to respond to their specific research questions and aims within the research timeframe (Etikan et al., 2016). Snowball sampling was also effective, which occurs when researchers recruit participants through the participants who have already taken part in the research. This method allows sampling to follow a social network, and "is particularly useful when groups are hard to identify or may not volunteer or respond to a notice advertising for participants" (Morse, 2004: 885). Participant recruitment primarily occurred online through disseminating advertising materials such as pamphlets, posts on Twitter and Facebook, and posts to online communities. Drawing from the suggestions of other digital researchers, I created project-specific social media accounts on Reddit, Facebook and Twitter, along with a project website and email, through to recruit participants and provide information about the research (see Fileborn, 2016). Professional networks were also utilised to share recruitment materials. Before recruitment posts were made to online communities, permission was sought from community moderators, after which materials that linked interested individuals to the research website were posted.

Online recruitment was most suitable for the research design, as the study sought participants who use and disclose on digital platforms. Posts made to Twitter and Facebook provided contact details for the research (email and phone), along with links to a project website that contained further information, including a copy of the Participant Information Statement and a research blog. Further, recruitment materials linked potential participants to a Qualtrics form where they could express their interest, which was responded to with an email from the researcher. The online form was a popular way for participants to express interest in the research. Following recruitment and data collection, interview data were transcribed and coded using an inductive coding approach where interviews were firstly coded according to the content of the transcript (Saldaña 2013). Following this, further rounds of coding were informed by the theoretical framework.

Data analysis: Critical discourse analysis

Discourse analysis seeks to analyse meanings embedded in texts that reflect the broader discursive environment where language can act to construct knowledge and power relations (True and Ackerly, 2010: 208–209). It is distinguished from a content analysis as it requires both a deep reading of content but also an extensive knowledge of discursive environments to uncover deeper meanings of the text (True and Ackerly 2010). Indeed, it has become a significant trend in feminist research to pay attention to the structures and organisation of "language, talk and discourse" when analysing interview text

(DeVault and Gross 2012: 219). Discourse analysis allows researchers to consider the text being analysed according to theoretical frameworks that underpin the research.

Critical discourse analysis is an analytical method that allows researchers to further engage with and critically discuss theory alongside participant narratives by examining interview data at multiple levels: textual, discursive, and the social (Fairclough 2003). It adheres to constructivist interpretations of how meaning is created, is often aligned with poststructural theory, and aligns with the epistemology and overarching methodology of this research. However, it is important to note the tension that exists between standpoint research and discursive analysis, as discussed earlier in the chapter. Ralph Sandland (1995) has reflected on the interface of poststructuralism and feminism in legal research and notes that combining of these theoretical perspectives can be appropriate to analyse the patriarchy and oppressive power relations. In this research, conducting a critical discourse analysis ensured that structures and systems of oppression (discussed further in Chapters 2 and 3) were considered in the analysis of interview data. Furthermore, the method enabled reflection on the second research question that queries the extent to which survivor engagement with digital platforms can be conceptualised as 'informal justice.'

There are a few key reasons why critical discourse analysis was chosen to analyse interview data, rather than content analysis as was used in Stage 1 of the research design. Critical discourse analysis was undertaken because content analysis does not allow for further meaning to be derived from texts. As such, while Stage 1 was an inductive approach to analysis and the research questions, the analysis in Stage 2 was more deductive (Kenneth, 2000). Moreover, the interview data did not arise organically; it was methodologically designed to meet research aims and questions. Where the content analysis of Reddit posts allowed for a more grounded analysis and for meaning to emerge directly from victim-survivors content, the interview data required a deeper level of analysis.

Ethical considerations of victim-survivor interviews

Conducting interview-based research with victim-survivors of sexual violence brought significant ethical considerations. Victims-survivors of sexual violence are automatically considered a vulnerable population, according to the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2015). As such, ethics approval was required from RMIT University's Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), which deals with research that is 'more than low-risk.' Ethics approval was granted to conduct interviews in December 2016.

A key ethical concern in the interview process was to ensure that participants were not re-traumatised because of their participation. While the interview did not require victim-survivors to discuss their experience of sexual violence explicitly, it was likely that victim-survivors may choose to disclose their experiences during the interview. Because of this, there was a need to consider the risk

and/or likelihood of re-traumatisation or distress occurring, and to have contingency plans to be able to effectively respond to this and provide the necessary support to participants. Before conducting any interviews, I undertook training with CASA Forum, a Melbourne based sexual assault centre, in how to respond to sexual assault disclosures. Throughout data collection, debriefs were conducted with my primary supervisor, who has extensive professional experience conducting research with victim-survivors. All participants were provided with a copy of a Participant Information and Consent Form (PICF)[48] informing them that they could end their participation in the research at any time. The form included links and phone numbers to relevant sexual violence support services internationally. I made myself available to have ongoing relationships with participants after the interview was completed, and all participants were emailed a week after their interview to follow-up. These ethical processes should be standard in any research project that conducts qualitative interviews with victim-survivors.

Further measures such as safety planning for participants were implemented to ensure that the interview process itself was ethical (Campbell, et al., 2009). This was necessary for this research for two key reasons. Firstly, from a research institution perspective, victim-survivors of sexual violence are a vulnerable community. This heightened ethical considerations about the potential harms of the research for participants. Secondly, due to the global nature of the research most interviewees lived in different cities or countries, so it was important to have a plan to be able to maintain contact with participants after the interview. After obtaining consent, each interview began by establishing a "safety plan" where I asked participants how they wanted the interview to be conducted and what measures could be put in place if they wanted to stop or skip a question (Campbell, et al., 2009). This was particularly important in phone interviews where the interviewee was not visible to me. During the interview, if participants seemed to be experiencing distress, I would stop and check if they were okay and if they wanted to proceed. After the interview, I asked participants how the interview experience had been for them and if there were techniques that might be improved upon, to ensure ongoing reflection on my interview style and practices (Campbell et al., 2010). As mentioned above, I contacted all interviewees a week after the interview to check-in. These measures assisted in ensuring that participants were supported throughout the interview process. Further, these practices allowed interviewees to have some control over what they discussed in the interview (Campbell, et al., 2009).

Strengths and limitations of the research design

The two stages of data collection discussed in this chapter presented several limitations. For example, the content analysis of Reddit is one of several digital platforms that might have been chosen, so this analysis could not fully capture the diverse ways that victim-survivors disclose online. Moreover, the

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[48] See Appendix B – Participant Information and Consent Form

method required victim-survivors to be able to express themselves clearly in English, which limits the types of victim-survivors who were the focus of the analysis. Secondly, this method restricted the analysis to victim-survivors who know how to use technology, have access to the Internet, and are aware of victim-survivor communities on Reddit. Earlier in this chapter, I suggested that Reddit is often perceived as a site of trolling and misogyny (Phillips, 2015). As a result, it might not be an optimal site to research sexual violence disclosures, although victim-survivors who access Reddit have been overlooked within sexual violence scholarship to date. Thirdly, a significant limitation of content analysis is that the method reduces these communities to "cultural artefacts," so to an extent may overlook community dynamics and other findings that could emerge through research methods such as digital ethnography (see Pink et al., 2016). Content analysis in this research is thus limited in capturing the full and complex experiences of victim-survivors in digital society, but is beneficial to capture the unique experiences that they have in the often-overlooked context of Reddit.

Despite these limitations of Stage 1, however, analysing victim-survivors' posts to /r/rapecounseling through content analysis offered strengths to the overall research methodology. The first stage of research occurred in the first eight months of the research and provided context that shaped my understanding how victim-survivors disclosed in community settings and their reasons for doing so. Each post analysed offered further nuanced understanding and representation of how survivors use digital platforms. This contributes to knowledge about victim-survivors' experiences and needs when using these spaces. Furthermore, subreddits are usually publicly accessible, as is /r/rapecounseling, and Reddit users are often anonymous; it is an uncommon practice for people to use their names as usernames. Reddit users have the agency and autonomy to identify themselves within the posts they produce, or they can create anonymous throwaway accounts (Leavitt 2015). Therefore, in this anonymous space, victim-survivors could express themselves and provide stories of their firsthand experiences without fear of the potential consequences of being identified. From a researcher's perspective, this meant gaining access to a data set that allowed the exploration of the nature and content of disclosures, while the victim-survivors who are posting maintained their anonymity. The study of online communities in this research also proved useful in recruiting participants for qualitative interviews. Active users of the community saw the flyers and might have been motivated to participate in an interview because they were favourable towards using digital platforms.

The second stage of data collection presented fewer methodological limitations, as qualitative interviewing is common in feminist research conducted with victim-survivors (Campbell, et al., 2009). However, despite this, the method is often criticised for producing findings and research that lacks academic quality or generalisability (Kvale, 1994, 2006). Because of this, researchers must ensure that interviews are the most appropriate data collection method and that interviewers can generate quality

data through their questions and interview technique (Roulston, 2010: 202). As a research project that centres the standpoint perspectives of victim-survivors, qualitative methods were necessary to capture those perspectives and are a common research technique in sexual violence research (Campbell, et. al., 2009; Campbell and Adams 2009; Westmarland and Bows, 2018). The interviews conducted in this research were integral to respond to the research aims and questions, providing further context and information about victim-survivor experiences than what emerged from the first stage of analysis.

A limitation of critical discourse analysis can be that it allows researchers to be 'self-serving' in their selections of text (Vaara and Tienari, 2010: 248). Indeed, selectivity may be required to conduct discourse analysis because data is analysed according to a predetermined theoretical framework. However, these limitations are less significant if researchers utilise reflexivity throughout the research process, understand the implications of selecting theoretical perspectives, and present this clearly throughout their research. Further, this analytical method is a valuable tool enabling responses to conceptual and theoretical research questions. Therefore, critical discourse analysis allowed for the theoretical concepts discussed in the earlier chapters of this thesis to emerge from the conversations with victim-survivors, enabling deeper critical responses to the research questions.

Conclusion: engaging with victim-survivor narratives in digital society

In this chapter, I presented the methodology of this research, outlining sampling and ethical considerations along with its potential strengths and limitations. This research aims to centre the voices and experiences of victim-survivors whilst making a new contribution to scholarship. It seeks to determine how and why victim-survivors disclose their experiences online and whether these practices can be understood as 'justice.' The methodology discussed throughout this chapter has shown how these aims and questions will be met and responded to using a two-stage approach of content analysis of Reddit and qualitative interviews with 26 victim-survivors who had disclosed online. In totality, this research methodology provided a solid basis to examine the various ways that victim-survivors engage with digital platforms, which will be further discussed in the following findings chapters.

The remainder of the thesis unfolds to critically discuss the two central research questions positioned at the beginning of this chapter. In addressing these questions, several key themes emerge that complicate dominant understandings of victim-survivors' digital practices. Considering how and why victim-survivors use digital platforms, discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, the analysis reveals the importance of community and safety, which influenced where, how, and why victim-survivors spoke out online. For victim-survivors in this research, navigating digital society meant making decisions about safety, as well as engaging in digital practices in ways that decreased potential trauma and fostered healing and connection.

Supriya

On disclosure

I was on this Tumblr thread or whatever talking about survivors and their art. So what happened was I posted a picture, I posted a photo of this artwork I had done, but the artwork contained one of the offenders' names, so I cut out the part that had his name in it. I just cropped it so it didn't have anything identifying anyone. And I'm not a great artist, so it's not going to identify anyone. But then what happened was I came home from hospital and I had the police at my front door. And they were like, "oh we've been informed that you uploaded this picture and it's incriminating one of the defendants and you know he's very upset by it and you have to take it down" and I'm like, it's on a survivor forum, how did he find it? And also, it doesn't, how does he know it's about him, it doesn't…you know. It wasn't a picture of him or anything. I just took out the bit that had his name in it. So yeah. And the police were quite, they were like "don't be a difficult witness. Just take it down." Yeah so that was my first experience of sharing that.

❖

[M]y experience of [digital platforms] has improved for the most part. The consequences have been better. But I guess the reason for [my] Instagram and the Twitter sharing is part of wanting to be a part of a political conversation about it that's very relevant to me, and having experience in it, I don't see a reason not to share that experience. And I guess also I just, I came back to social media, in the end, I wasn't allowed to go on social media. The police strongly recommended that I get rid of all these social media platforms, in part because they didn't want me to share anything and in part because of the abuse I was getting online from people in the community who supported the offenders. So I was off Facebook and things like that for almost two years. And then when I got it back, I was living this life where I'd been in and out of hospital and I'd flunked out of uni and I was very unwell with my PTSD and stuff. And then I got back into Facebook and Instagram and whatever and all the people my age are graduating and you know, sharing their highlights reel of their life and look like they're having a grand time and I sort of thought, like, well if that's all I'm allowed to share online, then I've got nothing like that to say. I gradually realised that there was a way to be honest about what I was experiencing that promoted a good cause and wasn't kind of a "woe is me, feel sorry for me" sort of thing… I think I was also motivated by the fact that discussions around trauma and child abuse and sexual assault and things, particularly recently with #MeToo, have become more public over the years. So because, I can't not, you know, share about my own experience if I see that everybody online is talking about… sexual assault, if people are discussing it,

especially if I think they're wrong, I don't want to miss the opportunity to share the lived knowledge about it.

<div align="center">❖</div>

I guess my main motivation for sharing it anonymously initially was not because I didn't want people to know what had happened to me. It was more that I didn't want people to think that I was some kind of attention seeking malingerer or something. I didn't want people to get fed up and feel that I was like just playing a victim or something. So when I started to attach my own name to it, it was because I felt that I had learned a pretty good way to discuss, and this is based on learning from the experience of other people online, I had learned a way to discuss my own personal experience and put it into a political context in a way that makes it clear that, you know, I feel very compelled to share a personal experience if it's relevant to a conversation that the public is having. Not because I want everyone to feel sorry for me and come and pat me on the head or whatever, that's the last thing I want. But because I have insight and because I know so many other people who are still stuck in hospital, who have the same experiences but who don't have the opportunity to speak about it. – **Supriya**

5
Navigating Digital Divides
Understanding victim-survivors' disclosure practices

There are numerous complexities involved in victim-survivors' navigation of digital media. For example, I was struck by how Chanel Miller (2019) described obsessively reading online comments on news media articles about Brock Turner (discussed in Chapter 2). Despite many comments purporting victim blaming attitudes that positioned her as being at fault, she felt compelled to read them. In doing so, she found herself less able to focus on the supportive statements scattered throughout the comments sections (Miller, 2019). While the impacts of public discourse on victim-survivors of sexual violence were discussed in earlier chapters (see also Royal, 2019a, 2019b), this chapter argues that discourses and cultural events can shape how victim-survivors then engage with and use digital media. In a context where increasingly some narratives of sexual violence 'go viral,' as Miller's did, there is a need to consider how these narratives and public discourses surrounding them in turn impact upon victim-survivors. In the lifetime of this research, several events have occurred that had observable impacts upon how victim-survivors involved in this project navigate and engage with digital society. Notably, when Miller released her Victim Impact Statement on Buzzfeed (see Baker, 2016), victim-survivors flocked to Reddit to discuss their feelings of inspiration, being triggered, and needing support. Additionally, during the days, weeks, and months following October 2017, the #MeToo movement and the abundance of personal narratives of sexual violence posted online elucidated complex responses in the victim-survivors who participated in interviews afterwards. The findings presented in this chapter reveal that the typically innocuous activity of scrolling through one's timeline could be (in some circumstances) fraught for victim-survivors, that just being in digital society required navigation and what Vera-Gray (2018) and Kelly (2017) might describe as "safety work."

A second key finding presented below concerns the various techniques and platforms through which victim-survivors can speak out in digital society. In the preceding interlude, Supriya's reflections suggest that initially, her disclosures included sharing art and seeking therapeutic connections on Tumblr. Later, she used social media such as Instagram and Twitter to share her story, "be part of a political conversation," and connect with other victim-survivors. After experiencing a restriction in her use of digital platforms due to an ongoing criminal investigation, returning to digital society presented new opportunities to discuss her experiences. However, she also speaks of navigating anonymity and the audience of her disclosures, which are further explored throughout the chapter. Victim-survivors desire anonymity for a range of reasons, whether it be to

protect their privacy, or as with Supriya, to avoid being seen as a victim. When she began to speak out in public settings, it was because she had navigated a range of experiences online and made decisions about safe and appropriate ways for her to engage in conversations and she knew precisely what she wanted to say in different contexts.

The next two chapters of this thesis are concerned with deepening scholarly understandings of how and why victim-survivors navigate digital society when disclosing their experiences of sexual violence. In this chapter, I engage with the 'how' by considering the varied ways that victim-survivors in this research used digital platforms. The discussion that follows signals a complex politics of navigating digital society, arguing that disclosure practices exist within a context of broader digital engagement, whereby victim-survivors navigate digital space in different ways depending on whether they desire privacy and anonymity. Individuals who participated in the research had to navigate their identity as a 'victim-survivor' alongside their routine use of digital media, and the extent to which they wanted to be identified as such in the broader contexts of their lives. Alongside this were considerations of safety, illuminating how digital society could be navigated in such a way that victim-survivors were able to acknowledge their experiences while remaining safe in their everyday lives. This navigation process was found to be highly personal and as such, individualised. Although these findings cannot speak to the experience of every victim-survivor who discloses online, the chapter presents an array of practices that exhibit the diverse experiences that they have navigating digital society.

The chapter begins by discussing the factors that shape how victim-survivors navigate digital society. It argues that viral public conversations about sexual violence, such as those that arose throughout #MeToo, affect victim-survivors' digital practices. Following this, the discussion turns to 'public' and 'private' space, where I emphasise that victim-survivors' disclosures are also shaped by the digital contexts in which they are made.[49] Interviewees added further complexity to scholarly understandings of specific practices, particularly the act of 'naming and shaming' perpetrators. In some instances, like Lauren Ingram's (2017b, 2017c), discussed in Chapter 1, naming a perpetrator in digital society occurred after doing what a "good" victim-survivor should do, such as going to the police. Contrastingly, participants in this research raised concerns about the consequences of naming a perpetrator, articulating that these potential consequences influenced how and what they disclosed.

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[49] Though conceptualisation of public and private space have sparked much academic debate and discussion, particularly in digital ethics and digital sociology (see, for example Lupton, 2015; Morey, Bengry-Howell and Griffin, 2011; Sugiura, Wiles and Pope, 2017; Turkle, 2011), throughout this discussion these concepts are fluid and shaped by how victim-survivors' understood them. For instance, a 'public' disclosure might be a post made on a public social media account, or in a context where the victim-survivor disclosed to people they knew in everyday life (for example, through a Facebook post on a private account). By contrast, disclosing in 'private' often meant disclosing in closed or anonymous groups, but also included disclosures in one-on-one settings, like direct messages.

Victim-survivors also navigated whether their disclosures were identifiable or anonymous across public and private digital spaces. The discussion throughout this chapter demonstrates that victim-survivors employ a diverse range of digital practices to disclose sexual violence. This was found to be heavily dependent upon the potential implications and consequences of disclosure, suggesting that victim-survivors have to actively navigate 'digital divides.'

Choosing where to disclose: factors that shape victim-survivors' digital practices

> I don't know what life would be like without online platforms now and I guess it's a reality. It's here, and I'm trying to get better at using them for all the positives and try to put in strategies to distance myself from the negatives. – **Zadie**

This chapter extends scholarly literature surrounding victim-survivors' use of digital platforms by presenting factors that influenced where they would disclose. Much has been written on the potential harms and consequences of disclosing in digital society (see, for example Jane, 2016; Lumsden and Morgan, 2017; Powell, 2015b; Salter, 2013), and this chapter argues that victim-survivors are mostly cognisant of these risks and navigate their disclosures accordingly. As Zadie comments above, victim-survivors can actively implement "strategies" that distance them from the potential negative consequences of disclosure. For example, some victim-survivors prefer disclosing in private spaces such as online communities rather than public settings.

It was common for victim-survivors to use online communities as sites of disclosure, but these communities were varied and formed in diverse ways (Lupton, 2015). For instance, some communities and groups exist within broader social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter. Victim-survivors typically used these social media for purposes beyond disclosure, such as for everyday connections and communication with family and friends. Because of this, these social media were not always 'safe' places to discuss sexual violence, particularly for victim-survivors who had not disclosed their experiences of sexual violence to people in their everyday lives. Despite this, victim-survivors found ways around these potential barriers to disclosure by forming secret groups or communities or making posts with their family members 'hidden' from seeing it. In secret groups on platforms like Facebook, victim-survivors place trust in the community, as the audience might be able to see their profile picture, name, or other aspects of their identity (depending on individual privacy settings and how their profile is set up) (Chaudoir and Quinn, 2010; Hether, Murphy and Valente, 2014; Sillence, 2010). I argue that victim-survivors navigate their social media presence to afford privacy and safety when disclosing sexual violence, at times placing trust in other users to protect their identity. However, online communities also exist in other digital contexts, such as

Reddit, which are often anonymous and do not link members of a community to their 'real' identity. These types of anonymous communities have a greater capacity to provide privacy to victim-survivors who do not want their disclosures linked to their everyday social media accounts and identities.[50]

Reddit, discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4, offers a variety of features that bridge newer social media to longstanding forum-style websites and provides options to be completely anonymous through throwaway accounts (Leavitt, 2015). Robards (2018: 203) has noted that Reddit "reveals to us a complex web of affinities and connections that resonate with a neo-tribal reading of contemporary experiences of belonging." While this suggests that Reddit can be a positive site for connection and disclosure, Reddit also has a negative reputation as a misogynistic space, which made some interview participants wary of disclosing their experiences there:

> Like, I would never ever go into a Reddit board, even if it was like – I mean, I don't know anything about Reddit…I assume Reddit's just like mostly white men, like, trolls, but… even if I – I would never go in there and just make a post straight away. I would lurk for probably like a year to make sure that people are kind of on the same page I'm on and I can trust that it's going to be a positive space. – **Zadie**

Indeed, Zadie's concerns about Reddit are valid. Robards (2018) confirms that Reddit's user base is primarily young men, and Phillips (2015) likewise presents its similarities to misogynist site 4chan, contending that both sites are rife with trolling and other online abuses. Reddit's reputation might be warranted in some contexts, but the platform is potentially misjudged, as the topics covered on the site encompass "the full gamut of human interests, experiences and practices" despite its core user base of young men (Robards, 2018: 202). The subreddit /r/rapecounseling exemplifies the range of topics that can encompass Reddit. The following chapter discusses the significance of Reddit as a site of connection and belonging in greater detail. For now, it is useful to note that some victim-survivors might have pre-existing perceptions of digital platforms which factor into to how they navigate digital society as a whole.

Many victim-survivors in this research had tried out different communities or spaces to disclose sexual violence and had formed opinions about the benefits and pitfalls of different

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[50] Although this is expanded on later in the chapter, it is worth noting that nothing is truly private in digital society, due to the ways the Internet is often used for surveillance and individual data owned by social media companies (see edited collection by Fuchs et al., 2012). While this discussion does not seek to discount the reality of surveillance in digital society, nor the ways that victim-survivors' disclosures may be monitored by companies, governments, and so on. Because this did not emerge in interviews with victim-survivors as a great concern to them, this discussion of surveillance is perhaps the topic of a future project. For the purpose of this discussion, privacy is conceptualised according to who victim-survivors' perceived to be the audience of their disclosures.

platforms. For instance, Tara discussed the differences she experienced between using social media compared to forums:

> I think the thing with social media is it's under your name, and everyone you know is on there, and there's like, you can't compartmentalise in the same way… I've always thought Facebook was a bit like having a dinner party where every single person you know turns up and they're all in the same room and although you can restrict things and whatever… I think what I like about forum style sites is that you can choose to use them just for a specific thing and you can make a separate identity or a separate username, and kind of decide what parts of your life or yourself are going to go on there. – **Tara**

Tara much preferred specific forums created for victim-survivors because they allowed her to compartmentalise her disclosures of sexual violence to specific spaces within digital society. She could discuss her experiences separately to her other social media accounts because disclosing in those identified contexts could mean that she would be perceived differently by people who knew her. This demonstrates the complex nature of online participation and the varying technosocial practices that are fostered across different spaces and locales within digital society (Powell, Stratton and Cameron, 2018). In digital contexts, victim-survivors can explore and develop a multiplicity and fluidity of self, whereby different aspects of their identity might be expressed in different places (Turkle, 1995, 2011: 260). van der Nagel and Frith (2015) further discuss how community sites like Reddit can foster self-discovery and identity formation in ways that add value to individuals' everyday lives.

When high profile stories of rape become a topic in news media, victim-survivors often must (re)navigate their use of digital platforms. For example, this research found that when news stories about rape go viral it can trigger victim-survivors, which impacts whether they perceive digital society as being safe. This was evident on Reddit in the aftermath of Brock Turner's lenient sentencing, particularly when Emily Doe's Victim Impact Statement was shared on Buzzfeed (see Baker, 2016).[51] The virality of this particular experience resulted in several victim-survivors turning to Reddit, for example, one post on /r/rapecounseling said: "Brock Turner's case made me have an emotional breakdown and resurfaced many of the emotions I suppressed. Are any other survivors feeling this way?" (Anonymous post, Reddit (24)). There were several comments on this thread, with one victim-survivor asking whether they should read the statement:

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[51] I refer to Chanel Miller as Emily Doe here and in other places within the following chapters because I am discussing the impacts of her case at a time when she she was still anonymous and she was yet to identify herself. I do not refer to her as Emily Doe to deny her agency or her name.

It's actually the reason I logged on to Reddit just now. I wanted to contact my former group counselling members, but don't want to trigger them if they are doing fine. I figured this subreddit would be a good place to find people ready to talk…[the case] makes me feel like I'm in a vortex of triggering words. I heard all sorts of opinions from people who don't know my story. I haven't felt like I needed my 'group' in years, and now with this plastered everywhere, I am searching for some sort of security blanket… So the questions I have for fellow survivors: Have you read the letter from the survivor? Have you read the letter from the dad? Should I read them? Do I need to be in a safe space? Did it take you time to process? Thanks everyone. – **Anonymous Reddit comment (24)**

Other users of /r/rapecounseling responded by offering suggestions and describing their experiences of reading the Victim Impact Statement. Many commenters said that they felt triggered by the case and how it had been reported in the media (see also Royal, 2019b, 2019c). While this highlights the impacts that viral events can have on some victim-survivors, it also indicates that they have developed strategies to navigate their safety when this occurs. They are also aware of potentially triggering other victim-survivors and typically provide trigger warnings to counteract this. As indicated by the Reddit user above, in digital spaces they could seek out the conversations they wanted to take part in and have them with peers who were "ready to talk." This points to the potentially fleeting membership of these communities (or indeed, 'neo-tribes'), as it suggests that some victim-survivors participate in them in specific moments when situations in their everyday lives have incited the need for connection with others (Hardy, Bennett and Robards, 2018; Robards, 2018).

Viral events can impact victim-survivors to such a degree that they must re-evaluate whether they engage with digital platforms at all. For example, some interview participants stated that in the aftermath of #MeToo the deluge of disclosures of sexual violence had caused them to reconsider their Internet use. Some put safeguards and barriers in place to ensure that the inundation of disclosures to their feeds would affect them less. Allison and Zadie commented:

I did utilise the #MeToo hashtag when it first came out, but I did not go into particular detail about experiences. I think I used the hashtag twice, and once was to remind people to use the hashtag if they were explicitly talking about experiences because a lot of the stuff that people were posting was quite triggering and I just thought it was really important that people use the hashtag if they're talking about that stuff because of the sheer volume of content that was around when it first happened so that people could filter it out. I know people who actually quit social media for a few days when it first

sprang up because it was just too… like, it was just too intense. They couldn't handle the deluge of stuff. – **Allison**

Facebook's getting more and more toxic, I think. Like, especially as a survivor it's horrendous…I think a good example is that whole #MeToo thing, which is beautiful and wonderful in a lot of ways but also it just opens the floodgates for the patriarchy, basically. – **Zadie**

Allison, who primarily used Twitter, highlighted the importance of "tagging" disclosures in the peak of #MeToo and strategised ways that this content could be "filter[ed] out" or muted from her Twitter feed. Allison also said that she was "quick to block" people on Twitter as a way to ensure safety. In moments like #MeToo, victim-survivors must navigate the content that they see on various digital platforms because rape narratives might be hard to avoid. It is unsurprising that victim-survivors would "quit social media for a few days" rather than engage with stories that triggered memories of their own experiences. Zadie's account contrastingly discusses the toxicity of Facebook, particularly it strengthens social structures like patriarchy (see also Megarry, 2014). The #MeToo hashtag was so extensively shared that it brought on the commentary of trolls and uninformed members of the public which could be harmful to victim-survivors. This was what Zadie meant by the "floodgates of patriarchy," particularly when the onus is placed on women and victim-survivors to make disclosures and challenge these comments that perpetuate rape culture. For some victim-survivors, it is likely that reading online comments that espouse vitriolic hate and disbelief of victim-survivors is harmful and indeed, "toxic." Miller (2019) attests to this by discussing the harm it caused her to read the comments sections of media articles about the Stanford case.

This section has demonstrated that external factors influence how victim-survivors navigate digital society and where they choose to disclose sexual violence. In Chapter 2, I established the potential risks of harm that occur when victim-survivors disclose their experiences online. For instance, victim-survivors may be subjected to online misogyny and hate speech (Salter, 2013). Fileborn (2014b) posits that negative reactions of disbelief or having a disclosure not responded to are other potential harms that could come from an online disclosure. In the discussion above I have argued that victim-survivors are aware of potential negative consequences of online disclosures and as a result, they carefully navigate digital society. They take steps to ensure safety and avoid content that they do not want to see. In the examples discussed here, it was evident that victim-survivors navigated digital space because they thought that some online platforms lacked safety, there might be a likelihood of trolls, or the basic features of the platform did not suit their needs. Throughout the remaining chapters, I argue that this could be considered a digital version of "safety work," whereby victim-survivors navigate digital society and plan where to disclose based on the potential consequences of disclosure (Kelly, 2017; Vera-Gray, 2018). The following section examines the

reasons why victim-survivors navigate platforms in these ways, further discussing notions of privacy, identity, and safety.

Understanding how victim-survivors use digital platforms

Platforms used by victim-survivors

A key finding of this research is that victim-survivors' participate in a breadth of technosocial disclosure practices that occur across a variety of platforms. In Chapter 4, Table 1 displayed the assortment of platforms that individual participants had used to disclose sexual violence. Apart from Nicole, Dylan, and Allison, all interview participants had used multiple platforms to discuss their experiences (see Table 1). Moreover, interviews revealed that on any given platform, there are likely to be multiple ways to disclose. For instance, on Twitter, victim-survivors might disclose in a public tweet, by quote-tweeting an article while simultaneously identifying themselves as a victim-survivor, or through direct messages. So, while Allison used one platform, her disclosures were varied and each type of disclosure could have a different purpose. This demonstrates that the motivations leading victim-survivors to disclose are diverse. Moreover, by revealing that victim-survivors often access and disclose to multiple platforms, these research findings illustrate that the content of disclosures is highly dependent on the platform. Indeed, this extends Mendes, Keller and Ringrose's (2018) discussion of "platform vernaculars," which contends that different platforms shape particular forms of speech. I build upon this further in Chapter 6 by arguing that disclosures are shaped not only by the platform but also who is "listening" (Crawford, 2009).

Victim-survivors used social media platforms, notably Facebook and Twitter, in ways that they perceived to be both 'public' and 'private.' For instance, those who did not want to discuss the full details of their experiences in a Facebook post, like Jo and Dylan, preferred to communicate about their experiences through direct messages or in secret groups. While Jo and Dylan did not mind identifying themselves as victim-survivors to their Facebook friends in the context of sharing a media article about sexual violence, their more explicit disclosures or discussions would occur in spaces that they *perceived* to be more private. For example, Jo said:

> I think probably [I disclose on] Facebook more in secret groups, and not really in public except if I'm posting some kind of awareness about survivors of sexual violence or something, I'll maybe disclose as a survivor. But I also think in my circles, or in the group of friends that I have on my Facebook it's probably the majority of us are survivors. So it's not like a huge thing [to disclose]. And then I would disclose more

about the actual experiences I've had in secret groups probably, so where it's not public, where I can kind of manage the people that are going to see it. – **Jo**

This quote highlights how Jo distinguished between 'public' and 'private' spaces and settings when they navigated Facebook. Although they thought it was not a "huge thing" to disclose publicly, regardless they chose to discuss the details of their experiences primarily in private groups where they could "manage" who would see it. This suggests that Jo wanted some control over who knew "more about the actual experiences" and cared less about who knew they were a survivor. Scholars have posited that although victim-survivors might like to have control in their disclosures, there is no guarantee that people in digital society will know or respect these needs (see, for example Fileborn, 2014b; Thompson, Wood and Rose, 2016; Wood, Rose and Thompson, 2018). Fileborn (2014b: 46–7) has discussed the significance of control for victim-survivors who anonymously disclose street harassment to activist website Hollaback!:

> Of issue here is that the Internet is a virtual space that can signify a complete lack of control. That is, once a user has submitted their story and it is posted on the site, there is no control over who is able to access and read their submission — although this is counteracted to an extent by the anonymous nature of the submissions. Women posting on sites such as *Hollaback* have minimal control over the ways in which their experience may be utilised by others on the Internet, or reinterpreted for alternative purposes. For example, submissions can be copied by others and posted to other sites, and Internet content can be picked up on by users and go 'viral.'

This suggests that Jo's method of posting in a secret group on Facebook (where a user is potentially identifiable) has more risk associated with it in comparison to other online communities like Hollaback! where anonymity might "counteract" the potential for an individual to be identified (Fileborn, 2014b). While it might be difficult for victim-survivors to fully control what happens to their disclosures, it seems that when they disclose in secret groups, to an extent they trust that their post will remain confidential (see also Chaudior and Quinn, 2010; Sillence, 2010). The specific ways that victim-survivors navigate digital society and whether they consider factors like privacy and audience is explored further in the following sections and Chapter 6, revealing the complexity and consideration behind these digital practices.

Disclosing in 'private,' conceptualising 'safe spaces'

Scholars have argued that victim-survivors' online disclosure practices have implications, particularly in high profile cases of naming and shaming (Powell, 2015a; Salter, 2013). These studies suggest that the consequences of a victim-survivor disclosing online can be significant, particularly if it impedes

due process for accused perpetrators. However, scholarly exploration of how victim-survivors themselves perceive varying facets of digital society, particularly how they navigate it, has been limited (see, for example Fileborn, 2017; Loney-Howes, 2015, 2017, 2018; Mendes and Ringrose, 2019). Discussion in the preceding section argued that victim-survivors filter out content that they do not want to see, avoid platforms that they believe will be less safe for them to access, or choose particular contexts to provide detailed disclosures. Victim-survivors' perceptions of safety and privacy factored into what they chose to say in their disclosures, signifying that speech is shaped by the context of digital space. Indeed, scholars have posited that online disclosures are complex practices that involve performativity and navigation of identity (Gleeson and Turner, 2019; Mendes and Ringrose, 2019). Here, I argue that space and safety also plays a significant role in these practices.

Mendes, Keller and Ringrose (2018) have suggested that the content of disclosures of sexual violence will differ depending on the space and its "platform vernacular." This refers to the different storytelling and speech practices that emerge from varying platforms (Gibbs et al., 2015; Mendes, Keller, and Ringrose, 2018). Mendes and colleagues (2018) argument that the content of disclosures is linked to the particular platform vernacular of the space is, I argue, further complicated by victim-survivors' notions of and needs for degrees of privacy. For example, Dylan used Facebook to share information and articles about the Stanford case. When doing so, they would also disclose that they had survived sexual assault, but would not "speak publicly on Facebook about, like, what happened." Fileborn and Loney-Howes (2019b: 3) refer to this practice as "marking oneself as a survivor" (see also Gleeson and Turner, 2019). Elsewhere, Loney-Howes (2018) refers to this practice as "coming out" as a victim-survivor online and notes that her participants saw it as an opportunity to engage in activism and challenge normative narratives about what constitutes sexual violence. In this research, I use the term 'identifying' to describe how victim-survivors publicly assume victim-survivor identities and name their experiences without necessarily providing full disclosures.

Several participants noted that they would often identify themselves publicly "as a survivor," as Jo had, but typically clarified that their more detailed disclosures occurred in private contexts, such as direct messages, online communities and secret groups on Facebook. Much like Jo, Dylan would routinely share articles to their Facebook where they would identify themselves as a survivor. However, Dylan did not see this as talking about their experiences of sexual violence 'publicly.' Contrary to the ways that Jo framed their public disclosures, Dylan's identification as a survivor did not amount to a public disclosure of sexual violence. This demonstrates the varying and dynamic ways that individual victim-survivors frame and experience 'privacy.' Identifying as a survivor online resulted in Dylan receiving direct messages from "acquaintances" on Facebook who were "at the point of recognising that they had had a similar experience… and wanted to talk to someone that could understand it." Dylan noted that the conversations they had were positive and that "there's so

much power in being able to recognise and label your experience… it opens the door to processes of dealing with that." This reveals that some victim-survivors identify themselves in public ways that then lead to different forms of disclosure in private. Indeed, I posit that these disclosures potentially feed into and influence one another.

Allison would likewise identify as a victim-survivor on her Twitter account when periodically sharing articles or participating in hashtags like #MeToo but preferred to expand on these disclosures in direct messages with other Twitter users. The following excerpt emphasises the interconnection between people's public and private engagement within platforms:

> I have disclosed things publicly and discussed other things in, you know, DMs [direct messages] that I haven't been kind of willing to discuss publicly yet, and I had a few kind of positive responses. I had responses of people sharing that they'd had similar experiences and had felt about them in similar ways… A significant number of the DMs in response to tweets were from people who maybe don't feel comfortable sharing their experiences but were thanking me for sharing mine. – **Allison**

Together, Jo, Dylan and Allison's experiences are illustrative of victim-survivors' capacities to distinguish between public and private disclosures of sexual violence. While understandings of public and private were subjective and at times differed among interview participants, it is important to present the varying ways that victim-survivors engage and disclose experiences of sexual violence online. Literature about the nature of public, private, and 'professional' use of digital platforms and spaces suggests that social media is used changeably. For example, Lupton (2015: 84) notes that people who navigate their private and professional lives on social media experience a "blurring of boundaries." Powell, Stratton and Cameron (2018: 28) suggest that individuals both deliberately and unknowingly flit between sharing content publicly or to a restricted audience. Privacy is further complicated by the aggregation of big data, online surveillance, and private corporations like Facebook's data policies (Lupton, 2015; Powell, Stratton and Cameron, 2018). Despite the blurriness and complexities of digital society, it is apparent that victim-survivors accessing digital platforms see distinctions between public and private space in their experiences of disclosing online. As I argue at the end of the chapter, these distinctions mean that victim-survivors navigate digital society in particular ways and their practices traverse multiplicitous understandings of privacy and anonymity.

Many victim-survivors in this research, especially those who prioritised safety, anonymity, and privacy, often saw their disclosure practices as distinct and separate from their everyday lives. While many noted the importance of digital society in their lives and most used more than one platform, method, or space to disclose experiences of sexual violence (see Table 1), most interview participants

seemed to distinguish between online and offline life. For instance, Sarah explains why she would not disclose her experiences in more public or identified ways online:

> In real life I don't want that experience to define me. I think it's very brave of those who are able to do it but I personally don't feel any pressure. **Sarah**

Like many other participants in this research, Sarah distinguished between her "real life" and the community settings in which she disclosed. As discussed in Chapter 2, a common thread in contemporary discussions of digital society contends that behaviours are technosocial, and that there are inherent limitations to distinguishing between online and offline (see Brown, 2006; Lupton, 2015; Powell, Stratton and Cameron, 2018). However, participants in this research both on Reddit and in interviews often considered their use of platforms as being different to or distinct from their everyday lives. This resulted in choices to navigate platforms in particular ways to minimise impacts on their 'real lives.' Sarah's comment to this effect signifies that in specific digital contexts, her experience of sexual violence might define her, but that this was relegated to another place distinct from her everyday life. As will be further discussed in Chapter 6, the ways that Sarah compartmentalised her experience indicate that online communities foster the exploration of different identities (Robards, 2018; Turkle, 1995; van der Nagel and Frith, 2015). Moreover, Sarah refers to other victim-survivors who are public with their experiences as "very brave," but that she did not want to have her experience shape what people in her everyday life knew about her. Being public means potentially outing oneself to family members or friends, which was not a safe option for many victim-survivors who participated in this research (see also Alcoff, 2018). These victim-survivors compartmentalised their use of digital platforms and confined these experiences to private and anonymous contexts in digital society, keeping themselves and their identities safe.

When seeking private contexts to share their experiences, interview participants often spoke of needing 'safe spaces.' Xanthea, who ran a private group on Facebook for victim-survivors, commented:

> Really [it's] to give people a space to talk about their day and feel comfortable and not get judged… Or, a place – sometimes I just post, just something positive and fun, you know, and that's going to pop up in someone's feed…yeah, that's why I'm doing all of this, to give support, it is to give survivors a voice and some place that they feel safe to talk about their experiences. – **Xanthea**

This indicates that curating a safe space where victim-survivors could feel supported and able to share their experiences was an important part of how Xanthea engaged with digital platforms. Chandler, who likewise saw his website and blog as a "safe place" for fellow victim-survivors, suggested that it allowed people to connect with "somebody who gets what it is to be a survivor of

abuse." By contrast, other participants wanted to be in spaces that they perceived to be safe but suggested that some platforms did not do enough to prioritise safety. When discussing her brief use of Reddit, Kate said:

> It didn't seem to be moderated you know, very well. Just seemed to be very open slather and, I don't need a padded room, but I do like some clear boundaries about people being safe and there were clearly a lot of people using it who weren't safe, you know, they were really needing help and yet, lots of people being completely ignored, nobody would respond to them. There were other people who, you know, would be horrible in response and I just, I just can't do this, it's just going to make me sick… I can only do so much of it and then I have to have a break and if it's not a safe space to start with then it just eventually becomes a thing of, well, you know, just not going to do this because, you know, I'm not going to help anybody if I'm a mess, so, yeah. – **Kate**

Kate's excerpt highlights some of the issues present when finding 'safe spaces' to disclose sexual violence online. For many participants, Reddit constituted a space that was safe and accessible to share detailed narratives of sexual violence and abuse. Kate instead demonstrates how stories can trigger the audience, as will be discussed further in Chapter 6, and presents a point of view that to ensure safety digital spaces and speech ought to be moderated. This indicates the subjective nature of 'safety;' what might constitute a safe environment for one victim-survivor online could activate triggers for another or prompt extensive emotional labour among the audience. I argue that notions of safety can then supersede the types of speech that victim-survivors make in digital society, navigating these spaces safely is prioritised over having unrestricted speech about experiences of sexual violence.

Some victim-survivors were more likely to find safety in contexts that they perceived to be more private, such as secret Facebook groups than in public contexts like Reddit. Those who found safety in public online spaces like Reddit usually maintained their anonymity, which signals to a relationship between the navigation of privacy and anonymity in digital society. As Zadie said of a large, anonymous public community she was part of, "I've been there for long enough, I kind of know the community and I know the vibe of it, and I know that it's safe." This further indicates that whether victim-survivors use their name and other aspects of their identity when disclosing sexual violence depends on if they perceive the space and audience to be safe. Clark-Parsons (2018: 2125) has instead suggested that in the digital context, the phrase safe space is "overused but undertheorised," and advocates for seeing private Facebook groups as "separatist" and "safe" spaces for feminists to speak about issues pertaining to women. She suggests:

> When it comes to cultivating safety online, activists should… strive for safer spaces, always working from the assumption that no digital space can ever be truly safe for all participants at all times. The comparison implied in the term "safer spaces" between the activist community at hand and the broader public sphere makes visible the relational nature of safe spaces as living concepts that require constant maintenance, rather than closed objects with fixed but unspoken principles (Clark-Parsons, 2018: 2141–2).

Of course, separatist and women-only spaces are a long-existing feature of feminist consciousness-raising since the beginning of the Women's Liberation Movement and were typically spaces for women to politicise their experiences in safety away from men. Megarry (2018) highlights the feminist critique that once-political consciousness-raising spaces have become preoccupied with internally focussed safe spaces, arguing that the rhetoric of safe spaces in digital society is detrimental to feminist organising. Resultantly, Megarry (2018) suggests that preoccupation with safety might have detrimental effects on women attempting to challenge structural and gendered causes of sexual violence, like patriarchy. I contend that it is certainly worth considering the structural implications of victim-survivors' needs for safety in digital society, but, as will be discussed further in Chapter 6, the participants in this research were not activists *per se*, and were not necessarily seeking a political goal in their disclosures. Perhaps when victim-survivors' participation in digital society is less 'safe' and more 'public,' the capacity to challenge rape culture and men's perpetration of violence becomes more pronounced, as does a collective resistive politics, through victim-survivors' public identification with their experience and their 'laying claim' to survival (see also Butler, 1993).

Disclosing in 'public' and naming perpetrators

News media reporting on victim-survivors' digital practices suggests that publicly naming a perpetrator on the Internet is fairly common (Cohen, 2017; Filipovic, 2012; Ingram, 2017b, 2017c; Pryor, 2017). Research literature about this practice has similarly implied that naming perpetrators are increasing (Salter, 2013). In this research, it was uncommon for victim-survivors to name their perpetrators even among those who were 'public' on their social media. Victim-survivors provided several reasons for this, a prominent one being that they felt it would cause more harm than benefit. Indeed, both Loney-Howes (2017) and Powell (2015b: 12) have posited that naming and shaming occurs less frequently compared to other types of disclosures. Supriya, who went through the process of trial and had resultantly chosen not to name her perpetrators online, said:

> I could go on Facebook and name the four of them, but I think I would have the police at my door that afternoon… because the case wasn't successful and they were indicted but not convicted, their records are sealed or whatever because they were underage and so yeah. I don't want to cause more trouble for myself. – **Supriya**

This excerpt indicates that victim-survivors consider the ramifications of outing perpetrators online and are aware that the practice will impact upon their personal lives. Like the Savannah Dietrich case (see Salter, 2013), Supriya's experience also highlights how formal justice processes silence victim-survivors from speaking out. Additionally, participants whose perpetrators were family members, partners, or former partners, noted that the implications of naming them were particularly significant. Victim-survivors in these situations worried that it would not be safe, that they would not be believed, or that disclosing would upset their family members and friends. This highlights how speaking out can be confined to particular types of disclosures within specific contexts, with the onus being on victim-survivors to think through potential consequences and shape their digital practices accordingly.

This research found that naming a perpetrator online is a highly considered practice, where victim-survivors typically think through the potential consequences of these kinds of disclosures. Participants considered the impacts that naming would have on themselves, the perpetrator, other victim-survivors, and potential future victims. For example, Jo, who named another victim-survivor's perpetrator but not their own (a practice that also occurs online), had to consider the impacts on the victim-survivor who allowed for the naming to occur. They said:

> Jo: [Outing perpetrators] happens in these secret groups [on Facebook] a lot. For example, a screen shot of someone's Tinder and being 'I've had this experience with this person, he's a serial rapist,' stuff like that. It also happened on my public Facebook, I outed an abuser... because the survivor asked me to [post it] and then she asked me to delete it later.
>
> …
>
> Interviewer: And is that something that you would ever consider for yourself, or?
>
> J: No… it can be dangerous, if I were to share my experience with someone about someone that we knew, and they were to post it publicly on Facebook, that also could have repercussions for me in terms of my safety, which would be another reason I wouldn't do it without a survivor's consent. – **Jo**

This suggests that naming perpetrators is not only an individual practice but can also occur on a victim-survivor's behalf (or, indeed, without their knowledge or consent), adding complexity to the navigation of digital society and disclosure practices. Wood, Rose, and Thompson (2018) discuss a similar example where Ashlee Savins, a victim-survivor of intimate partner violence, had "survivor selfies" go viral after her friend shared images and a post about the abuse on Facebook. They suggest that "her friend's naming of the perpetrator online opened the door to vigilante sentiment" (Wood, Rose and Thompson, 2018: 10). Their analysis refers to instances when victim-survivors' stories go

viral and create "affective contagion" in online publics, and in this example, the virality of the Facebook post led to increased police response (Wood, Rose and Thompson, 2018). However, as Jo indicates, these types of disclosures are complex and it is difficult to know the extent of potential dangerous outcomes. This factored into their reasons for not naming their perpetrator and was why they would not name another victim-survivor's perpetrator without consent. Although Jo did not receive any contact from lawyers because of their disclosure, they were wary of legal consequences, particularly if these types of disclosures could be considered defamatory and as a result, they did not want to risk naming other perpetrators. This suggests that victim-survivors consider broader understandings of legal systems. As will be discussed in later chapters, this train of thought bears several implications for thinking about justice. Indeed, in an example discussed by Salter (2013), a victim-survivor who named her rapists in a blog had to take down the posts because she was subjected to action from the perpetrators' lawyers. This signals that legal discourses and systems, discussed in greater detail in earlier chapters, can shape victim-survivors' digital practices, leading them to avoid naming their perpetrators.

Several participants were supportive of the idea of naming perpetrators but had not named anyone themselves. For instance, Susie, who had experienced sexual violence from intimate partners, felt conflicted about causing harm to her perpetrators or "ruining their lives," while also wanting to warn their future partners:

> Nothing has hurt me more as part of my experience than when my perpetrators have gone on to abuse their subsequent partners, and they have. That's what makes me sick. And I wish that I could add their names to some kind of universal blacklist that I could circulate to make sure other women are safe… If we existed in a system where things were safer, where women were likely to get justice out of the criminal justice system, if we existed in a system where we didn't need to create our own little black books, where we didn't need to come out and name and shame them, then yeah, I would be like, 'No, naming and shaming is not helpful.' – **Susie**

This conflict that Susie experienced in thinking about naming her perpetrators turned into a criticism of how structures such as the criminal justice system fail to respond to the needs of victim-survivors. The notion of having a "universal blacklist" and "little black books" aligns with feminist organising and activist techniques to inform women of perpetrators. Loney-Howes (2017) and Powell (2015a) have both likened online anti-rape activism to these traditional feminist practices, suggesting that these are digital versions of the blacklist.

It is unclear whether the norms and practices of a digital space impact upon the practice of naming and shaming perpetrators. Both Jo and Susie were members of secret Facebook groups

where perpetrators were routinely outed in diverse ways. However, many other participants said they had not seen it occur very often, or at all. Within the Reddit community analysed in the first stage of this research, there were no instances where victim-survivors named their perpetrators, despite the practice not being explicitly 'banned' or against the community rules. This signals that particular norms exist within that context distinct from those in Jo and Susie's secret Facebook groups. These norms likely vary depending on the collective values of different community's members (see also Hardy, Bennett and Robards, 2018). Scholars have noted that some platforms, like Project Unbreakable on Tumblr, explicitly restrict victim-survivors from naming their perpetrators (Powell, 2015b; Powell, Stratton and Cameron, 2018). Umbrae shed further light on this, suggesting that some online communities might have policies where the naming of perpetrators is not appropriate in the space:

> What I've found is most people are still at that point [where they can't name their perpetrator], and at the most they'll use initials. And some people will try and use names, and then moderators will come down hard on that and be like, 'Oh, we have a policy that we can't do that here.' I don't really ever see it happening. – **Umbrae**

This excerpt demonstrates that some types of disclosures are restricted to an extent by the norms and taboos of digital space. Coryn similarly commented, "there's a big thing in that [online] community about not naming your, you know, attacker, rapist, whatever." She contended that these rules restricted how victim-survivors relate to their experience, commenting that "actually using [a perpetrator's] name is a big step that a lot of people choose to take," particularly in the contexts of therapy and that being restricted online was a limitation of some online communities. Thus, this research confirms that naming a perpetrator is less common in many digital settings when compared to testimonial or support seeking disclosures (see also Powell, 2015b). However, I argue further in Chapter 6, these disclosures are uncommon because they break the boundaries of acceptable speech about sexual violence and they occur in a context where victim-survivors mostly fear for the consequences of such speech.

Of the participants in this research, only Xanthea, Daniel and Lionel had named their own perpetrators in digital society. All were motivated to hold their perpetrator accountable or wanted to prevent future harm. Xanthea, who had experienced sexual violence in her childhood in the context of a cult thought that naming her perpetrators was an important way to assert the truthfulness of her narrative:

> So, a couple of them are dead, but I do post their names and I write about it in my blog... that's important to me to give my story validity so people can see this is real.

> There's kids still there today, um, this isn't, you know – it gives validity and shows people that it is a factual story. – **Xanthea**

Similarly, Lionel commented that speaking out about institutional child sexual abuse online and naming different perpetrators was an effective strategy in comparison to "traditional" methods:

> [W]e were writing letters to bishops, but we were doing it in all the old traditional ways to try and get change, only we're getting nowhere. As soon as we were public and we started using Twitter, and we started realising that there was literally thousands and thousands and thousands of people retweeting our posts, that it was then being mentioned by people, that it was then in the public eye. – **Lionel**

Both Xanthea and Lionel's experiences of outing abuse in digital contexts were motivated by challenging powerful institutions in the aftermath of child sexual abuse and wanting to ensure that it would not happen again. Both acknowledged that they had been speaking out about their experiences for a long time and they did not perceive any risk of harm from their abusers if they disclosed their names. Rather, in these examples, digital media provided new mechanisms to challenge and hold abusive institutions accountable.

The outing of perpetrators is perceived as a common way that victim-survivors disclose online, particularly in news media. This discussion has contrarily revealed that more often than not, victim-survivors disclose in private contexts rather than public ones (particularly before #MeToo), and most participants were wary of the implications and consequences of disclosing their perpetrator's name online. These forms of political expression and speaking out often remain restricted by the potential consequences or the norms of digital space, leaving victim-survivors feeling like they are unable to prevent future harm or abuse. Indeed, some saw this practice as being linked to justice, as will be further examined in Chapters 7 and 8. However, for the most part, this research found that victim-survivors did not want to name their perpetrators online and instead navigated digital society to disclose in other ways.

Navigating digital divides in the aftermath of sexual violence

This chapter demonstrated some of the complexities that underpin how victim-survivors navigate digital platforms to disclose experiences of sexual violence. I have argued that considerations of safety and anonymity shape how victim-survivors use platforms and have indicated that victim-survivors often use multiple platforms to disclose. A key finding of this chapter is how victim-survivors consider 'privacy' and 'identity.' Figure 1, below, is demonstrative of the multiple ways that interview participants disclosed experiences of sexual violence in digital society, highlighting how their digital practices fit within categories of 'public/private' and 'identified/anonymous.' Although

Figure 1 necessarily sorts various digital practices into these categories, I stress that this is illustrative rather than definitive, as various disclosure practices can fluidly move between these 'boxes' depending on victim-survivors' perceptions. Indeed, as I suggested earlier in the chapter, victim-survivors tended to have their own understandings of public and private space that did not necessarily align with literature about digital society. While scholars have discussed what it means to be public and private in online contexts (see Dennen, 2012; Pluretti and Chesebro, 2015; Turkle, 2011), for this analysis, these terms were conceptualised through the voices and experiences of participants.

Public/Identified
- Website/blog content (identified)
- Creating videos and podcasts
- Facebook post on public account with public audience
- Hashtag activism
- Tweet on public account

Private/Identified
- Direct message to another person
- Private Facebook groups
- Facebook post on private account or with restricted audience

Public/Anonymous
- Website/blog content (with pseudonym)
- Tweet with a pseudonym
- Facebook post with pseudonym
- Reddit post/comment
- Public forums (post or comment)
- Yahoo Answers

Private/Anonymous
- Forum chatroom
- Private forum post/comment (log in required)
- Discord (and other anonymous chat apps)

Figure 1: Spectrum of victim-survivors' digital practices

As such, Figure 1 presents a multi-directional *spectrum* of victim-survivors' disclosures, whereby arrows signify how specific practices might fluidly shift across categories or sit between them. This research found that 'public' engagement occurs when victim-survivors disclose in a context where they have not restricted the audience, for example, through a public tweet or Facebook post. Conversely, 'private' engagement refers to when victim-survivors disclose contexts where the audience is restricted or controlled, for example, a private Facebook group, a direct message, or a social media post with a restricted audience. 'Identified' refers to engagement whereby victim-survivors disclose using their everyday identity or a photograph. Finally, 'anonymous' refers to when victim-survivors were known only by a pseudonym, username, or a throwaway account. These findings do not intend to dichotomise how victim-survivors disclose their experiences online, but

rather, it presents a spectrum of digital practices that may blur across public to private, identified to anonymous. Moreover, this representation suggests that there are multiple ways that an individual can navigate singular platforms to best ensure and maintain their safety. Indeed, as was noted earlier, one practice can be a catalyst to another, as a public tweet or post might lead to private direct messages between victim-survivors. This signals towards a potential relationship between disclosure practices and where they sit on the spectrum.

Disclosures within online communities exemplify the ways that digital practices on this spectrum are blurred and potentially in flux. This research found that many victim-survivors prefer to access online communities where they will not be identifiable. In such online communities, Reddit being an example, victim-survivors can choose to be anonymous, and their disclosures are not linked to their everyday identity. These types of communities are often 'public,' with unrestricted audiences (or victim-survivors have limited control over the audience). Therefore, accessing a Reddit community or thread might be considered as both 'public' and 'anonymous' practice, and as Fileborn (2014b) noted above, perhaps anonymity counteracts the risk that victim-survivors' disclosures can be read by anyone. However, when online communities are restricted and accessible by login, they might be considered 'private,' although interview participants were often realistic that these spaces would be easy enough for outsiders to access. Within these private communities, such as After Silence or Pandora's Aquarium, victim-survivors are often anonymous as well (see Figure 1). Other online communities, like private Facebook groups, typically have a restricted audience and a moderator, but to an extent, victim-survivors are identifiable through their Facebook profile.

Importantly, with the combination of anonymity and 'safe spaces' victim-survivors in this study perceived that their audiences in online community contexts were primarily sympathetic listeners who they could trust with their stories. Despite being 'public,' many of the people who used them felt that their disclosures were substantively private and that their identities as victim-survivors would be protected through their anonymity, pseudonyms, or implicit trust of other members of the groups and their moderators (Chaudoir and Quinn, 2010; Hether, Murphy and Valente, 2014; Sillence, 2010). Moreover, this research found that victim-survivors are typically disclosing their experiences on multiple platforms and that the content of their disclosures can vary depending on the platform and whether it affords privacy or anonymity. As such, to an extent, online disclosures of sexual violence are discursively shaped by the platforms and digital practices that facilitate the disclosure. As noted of the #MeToo movement, some victim-survivors chose to share full narratives on Facebook, while others simply tweeted "me too" (see, for example Gleeson and Turner, 2019; Mendes and Ringrose, 2019).

The most significant finding of this chapter is how much victim-survivors prioritise safety when navigating digital society. Here, I argue that the decisions that victim-survivors make when

choosing where to disclose or when to restrict their use of social media are a digital version of "safety work." In the context of public space, Kelly (2017: xi) has referred to safety work as:

> … the thinking processes, decision making and embodied watchfulness that women employ… It is work because it occupies time, requires energy and effort – all of which could be used for more rewarding activities… safety work can become an automatic reflex, especially when in public space alone as a woman: so automatic that we no longer notice the strategies that we use in our attempts to limit or avoid intrusions.

Indeed, it is not too far a leap to see the victim-survivors' safety work in the context of digital society. It is worth considering the potential costs of this kind of safety work as it occurs in online spaces. As Vera-Gray (2018) argues, increasingly women are forced to prioritise safety work over the freedom of being in public space without being subjected to harassment. Likewise, in digital society, victim-survivors prioritise safety over the freedom to speak about their experiences in ways that are too 'risky' and many participants worked to avoid being triggered or triggering others. Safety work, while important for many victim-survivors, to an extent shapes what they say about their experiences of sexual violence and where they say it.

The norms and taboos present in some digital contexts also impacted participants' use of digital platforms, shaping how they navigated digital spaces and what they felt was permissible to disclose. Those who had named perpetrators, like Jo, had experienced cautionary reactions from their audience about the potential legal consequences of being defamatory. Other participants who had not named perpetrators suggested that while they supported the practice in theory, there were too many potential risks or traumas associated with it for them to disclose similarly. This highlights that victim-survivors are less likely to engage with naming and shaming practices compared with other types of disclosure practices *precisely* because they have considered the consequences (see also Powell, 2015b). Moreover, the ways that online spaces are observed and to some extent censored, both by moderators in online communities and by people commenting on more 'public' disclosures, highlights and reinforces the notion that only certain types of disclosures are deemed 'acceptable' in these digital contexts. Increasingly, since #MeToo, these disclosures are more likely to be implicitly believed (see Serisier, 2018b, 2019), but some disclosure practices are deemed 'safer' and therefore more permissible than others. As will be expanded on in Chapter 6, if particular digital practices remain 'taboo' in digital society and shape what can be said about sexual violence, this suggests that despite the semantic thickness of online disclosures and that they will likely be believed (Serisier, 2018b, 2019), this does not mean that they will be *accepted* by the audience.

Conclusion: understanding victim-survivors' digital practices

Navigating digital society in the aftermath of sexual violence involves a complex array of considerations for victim-survivors. The discussion in this chapter has argued that digital practices can vary based on victim-survivors' perceptions of privacy and anonymity in online spaces and communities. As noted by Dylan and Xanthea, being able to provide semblances of 'safe spaces' was a crucial factor in shaping how they each navigated their disclosures. Another significant factor was the potential consequences of disclosures, which many victim-survivors had considered and like Supriya, wanted to "avoid making trouble" for themselves. I have indicated that these findings add complexities to the existing literature about disclosure practices, for example, by challenging the dominant perceptions that victim-survivors commonly name perpetrators, demonstrating instead that needs for safety can eclipse desires to hold abusers to account (Clark-Parsons, 2018; Vera-Gray, 2018). Victim-survivors' propensity for safety work in digital society demonstrates that assumptions about 'vengeance' culture in victim-survivor disclosures require reframing. This is not to disavow scholarship on feminist digilantism and the power of naming and shaming perpetrators of violence within a feminist politic (see Jane, 2016). Indeed, many interview participants, like Jo and Susie, supported the idea of a perpetrator being named if it meant prevention of harm to others. Rather, this discussion presented a counter-narrative by speaking to the difficulties experienced by those who are deciding whether or not they want or are able to 'out' their perpetrator. Emerging scholarship about accusations within the context of #MeToo suggests that public responses to the naming of perpetrators very quickly bring about a backlash or suggestions that these accusations are going "too far" (Fileborn and Phillips, 2019; Hindes and Fileborn, 2019). This prompts further considerations of how victim-survivors' speech and digital behaviours are shaped by the norms of digital space and moderators, by trauma lenses that restrict their speech because it may be triggering for others, by criminal investigations that limit the ways that they use social media, or by other perceived consequences of their disclosures.

Moreover, this chapter raised the significance of navigating identity in digital society, which is further explored throughout Chapter 6. The research found that not only are victim-survivors navigating digital space and safety, they are also determining whether they can publicly identify themselves as victim-survivors. This discussion has emphasised that digital practices occur alongside a series of individual negotiations of personal lives, politics, media, and socio-cultural environments which serve as the backdrop shaping their disclosures. Victim-survivors need to consider who their audience will be along with how 'identifiable' they will be, and in doing so, consider the consequences of "marking" themselves as a victim-survivor (Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019b). As a result, many victim-survivors in this research had chosen to remain anonymous, keeping their identities as victim-survivors separate from their everyday lives. Sarah, for example, did not want to

be defined by her experience of sexual violence. Despite the emergence of #MeToo resulting in a cultural context in which (some) disclosures might be more implicitly believed, especially amongst certain audiences, it is apparent that political norms and media framings of sexual violence continue to shape the ways that victim-survivors speak out and navigate digital society.

Ultimately, this chapter examined how victim-survivors disclose their experiences online, presenting a multifaceted *spectrum* of practices demonstrative of the specific individual and contextual factors that shape them. While this chapter was concerned with the 'how' of victim-survivors' digital practices, the discussion in the following chapter begins to consider the 'why.' Indeed, the ways that victim-survivors engage with digital society, be it privately, anonymously, or otherwise were equally motivated by the intention or purpose behind their disclosure. For instance, victim-survivors who disclosed to find support and advice from their peers were more likely to do so in private or anonymous communities, such as those found on Facebook and Reddit. Contrastingly, those who wanted to engage in a "political conversation," like Supriya, were more likely to disclose publicly. Much like the findings in this chapter, the discussion that follows in Chapter 6 indicate that victim-survivors' motivations for disclosure are varied, and similarly shaped by needs for safety, community, and a place to speak out about trauma.

6

Speaking Out, Speaking In?
Exploring motivations behind victim-survivors' disclosures

> Well, my main premise for using social networking is you know, to connect with people… so definitely to share my creativity… and my story with other survivors. And to connect with them, because I get them, I understand, and I think that there's a lot of people that need support right now. So that's my main motivation. – **Xanthea**

> I can say what I want on Reddit and nobody knows it's me. – **Mariah**

This research found that a desire for connection motivates victim-survivors to form communities online to seek support, advice, and a place to share their stories to particular audiences. Having the option to pursue these types of connections in an anonymous capacity, as Mariah did, signals that platforms like Reddit constitute a 'safe space' for a wider array of victim-survivors' narratives to be heard and responded to. Online communities that afford degrees of anonymity are spaces where victim-survivors have some agency in what they choose to disclose. My analysis of /r/rapecounseling revealed a diverse array of rape narratives, with posts ranging from a single word to thousands of words in length and typically formulated as first-person narratives followed by asking for support or advice. The findings discussed in the chapter present some of the key features of communities and why victim-survivors are motivated to access them. Alongside this are critical reflections from interviews with victim-survivors who use and access communities, including Reddit, indicating that while these spaces can be positive sites of support and storytelling, such support can be prescriptive and unhelpful to some. This research found that victim-survivors had mostly positive experiences in these communities, but a subset of participants identified negative outcomes when they felt that their narratives did not belong. These experiences demonstrate that there are limitations to the ways that victim-survivors can speak in these contexts.

The previous chapter argued that there are numerous complexities evident in victim-survivors' navigation of digital society, particularly in how they prioritise safety. This chapter extends this argument by demonstrating that victim-survivors in this research wanted to 'speak in,' where they would disclose to specific audiences of peers. I illustrate how speaking in occurs when victim-survivors choose to speak to audiences where they have particular expectations of the responses that they will receive. The discussion reveals that audiences can shape the disclosures and experiences that individuals have in digital society. Moreover, I grapple with 'community' at a conceptual level by

considering the multiple, amorphous, and transient ways that victim-survivors construct communities online (see also Turkle, 2011). For example, some victim-survivors, like Xanthea and Joseph, demonstrated how hashtags on Twitter created communities centred around on-going conversations that victim-survivors would use to regularly chat with one another. While online communities certainly presented many positive features for victim-survivors, there were also evident limitations in how victim-survivors could speak within them.

Additionally, this chapter is concerned with the experiences and motivations that victim-survivors had when speaking out 'publicly.' In Chapter 5, I contended that 'public' disclosures require victim-survivors to consider potential consequences and navigate their identity and safety in particular ways that are less applicable to 'private' disclosures. Here, I argue that considering this safety work and identity navigation extends and complicates current literature regarding digital feminist activism. Amongst the research literature, scholarship about digital feminist activism tends to dominate framings of online disclosure practices (see, for example Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016; Loney-Howes, 2015, 2018, 2019; Mendes, Belisário and Ringrose, 2019; Mendes, Ringrose and Keller, 2018, 2019; Mendes and Ringrose, 2019). The digital feminist activist discourse suggests that victim-survivors who engage in hashtag movements such as #MeToo are activists and that their speaking out is political (Loney-Howes, 2019). However, this chapter reveals that interview participants who had spoken out in a public context did not necessarily see themselves as activists or their disclosures as political. Much like the preceding chapter, this raises questions about victim-survivors' identities in digital society and complicates understandings of a feminist politics of speaking out online (Serisier, 2018b). While this research did not specifically recruit 'activists,' it was surprising that many participants who publicly shared their stories through hashtags were reluctant to identify that way in concrete terms. For the subset of interview participants who had disclosed using #MeToo, the hashtag presented an opportunity to raise awareness or present a counter-discourse about who experiences sexual violence. However, most victim-survivors in this research had chosen not to disclose using #MeToo or had removed their disclosure after thinking through the potential implications of identifying themselves with the hashtag. The discussion in this chapter illustrates some of the complex motivations behind 'speaking out' and 'speaking in,' arguing that victim-survivors speech is both enhanced and restricted across public and private contexts within digital society.

'Speaking in': why victim-survivors seek connection in online communities

> So the sense of community is, I guess, what it is for me. You know, the fact that there's a lot of women and we all support each other and believe each other and have shared experiences. – **Allison**

In Chapter 5, I posited that victim-survivors consciously navigate digital society in ways that prioritise their needs for safety, with many preferring to disclose to audiences of peers in the context of communities and groups. These communities are not homogenous, forming in multiplicitous, amorphous ways across public and private spaces within digital society. For example, communities might form based on specific experiences of sexual violence, such as Hollaback! for victim-survivors of street harassment (see Dimond et al., 2013; Fileborn, 2014b). There are notable forum style communities, such as Pandora's Aquarium, which has provided peer support and resources to victim-survivors for decades (Burrows, 2011). Online communities afford different disclosure experiences but are typically sites where victim-survivors can seek support, advice and information, as well as audiences for storytelling, and anonymity. These specific features are discussed throughout this section to further emphasise the various considerations that victim-survivors undertake when navigating where they will disclose online. This discussion also exemplifies some of the common motivations and needs that victim-survivors had when accessing communities. In doing so, it reveals the reasons why victim-survivors disclose in online communities and demonstrates how sexual violence narratives and digital practices can be shaped by these contexts.

Support and isolation: belonging in online communities

Support communities and groups are a long-established aspect of therapy and recovery from sexual violence. Increasingly therapeutic support is available prolifically online and has been documented in scholarly literature, particularly regarding health communities for patients of chronic illnesses (see, for example Haas et al., 2011; Mo and Coulson, 2008, 2014; Turner, Grube and Meyers, 2001). Therapeutic supports and trauma models are key ways that the harms of sexual violence are responded to in Western liberal democracies (Vera-Gray, 2019). As discussed in Chapter 2, sexual violence is often described and understood according to a trauma discourse, whereby the aftermaths of sexual violence, abuse, and assault are responded to within the confines of trauma models (see Gavey and Schmidt, 2011). Some sexual violence support services offer online services such as chat counselling, or encourage victim-survivors to engage with digital resources and support to supplement other therapies (Burrows, 2011; Forgan, 2011). However, even when formal supports and resources are accessed, they may not be sufficient in providing the full support that victim-survivors need. Moreover, for the countless victim-survivors who do not report sexual violence or

access rape crisis services, online communities provide opportunities to get support in the aftermath of sexual violence (Burrows, 2011).

Online communities like those that exist on Reddit can constitute important sites of support for victim-survivors who do not have access to it otherwise. The analysis revealed that some victim-survivors had used Reddit to disclose their experience for the first time because they could not in other settings. Many posts described difficulties in disclosing experiences to family, friends, and partners, indicating isolation in their everyday lives that led them to seek support online. Some posts expressed vulnerability and fear of ramifications in revealing their stories, even when asking for help anonymously. As one user of /r/rapecounseling said:

> I'm really scared to post this, but I really need help. I am so afraid to ask anyone in real life, been so afraid to even voice this. I've been feeling very alone and isolated because of it. – **Anonymous post, Reddit (139)**

This excerpt highlights the trauma experienced by victim-survivors of sexual violence and that online communities potentially provide spaces where isolation can be lessened without the 'risk' of being identified. Rape survivor and philosopher Susan J Brison (2002: 15) comments: "unlike survivors of war or earthquakes, who inhabit a common shattered world, rape victims face the cataclysmic destruction of their world alone, surrounded by people who find it hard to understand what's so distressing." Indeed, victim-survivors posting on /r/rapecounseling often expressed a sense of fear around their families finding out or responses from their perpetrators.

Given the potential psychological and trauma-related impacts that are symptomatic of sexual violence (see, for example Burgess and Holmstrom, 1974; Herman, 1992b), it is unsurprising that some victim-survivors prefer online support from peers. Sophie did not have supports who she could discuss her experiences with outside of therapy. She said that online communities were a place where she felt less isolated:

> I think I feel less alone and more supported and yeah, it's just, like if people say they can relate to what I was experiencing, like what I'm writing about in the post, yeah it just helps me feel less alone. – **Sophie**

Sophie had been using online peer support communities for many years, and although she also had formal therapeutic supports in place, noted that online communities offered something relational and a sense of belonging that her therapists were not able to provide. The isolation that victim-survivors experience might be alleviated in online communities where there are common experiences that bring them together, despite the disparate and disconnected nature of their everyday lives. In this sense, online communities of victim-survivors might be described as 'neo-tribes,' whereby members

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fleetingly or permanently seek identity and belonging based on shared interests or experiences (Bennett, 2007; Hardy, Bennett and Robards, 2018; Robards, 2018).

Online communities are significant sites of support for those who experience isolation because of structural barriers that limit how victim-survivors access services. Participants identified that online support is often more easily accessible than rape crisis services and contributes to victim-survivors feeling less othered and isolated. Moreover, some victim-survivors may not be able to access other types of psychological supports and therapies because of where they live and the financial burden of seeking help (see Jülich et al., 2013). Coryn attests to how this is particularly relevant in the US where there are fewer safety nets for victim-survivors that lack private health insurance:

> [E]specially in America, the mental health world is really hard to access... And so, I think that having online communities is really important, especially for people who can't access good quality care, because it's something, you know? It's better than being alone.
> **– Coryn**

Online communities could be described as providing a stop-gap because they extend support options to victim-survivors who otherwise may not have anywhere else to go. Indeed, as Jülich et al. (2013) have noted, the costs of services place a significant burden on victim-survivors in recovery. Other barriers include victim-survivors' physical location, as well as whether it is safe to identify themselves in their communities. Indeed, these barriers are amplified for victim-survivors in marginalised groups, such as the LGBTIQ community (Fileborn, 2012). Considering this, online communities increase access to support for those who face barriers that preclude them seeking it in more traditional settings.

Interview participants clarified that online communities are important when experiencing significant physical responses to trauma (Herman, 1992b), whereby even vocalising the experience of sexual violence was not an option. As Tara notes:

> The two times that I've sort of disclosed things to people with my actual voice, I actually lost my voice for the next day because talking was so, like, difficult, my body actually had a reaction. **– Tara**

Tara's experience suggests that for some victim-survivors, the long-lasting physiological impacts of trauma make the process of seeking ongoing support profoundly difficult. Scarry (1985: 5) articulated the impossibility of putting a voice to physical pain, suggesting that it "destroys language." While pain might be difficult to speak about, particularly for those experiencing acute trauma and issues with memory, digital society offers a middle ground where victim-survivors can find new ways to speak about their experiences. With a note of unease, Turkle (2011) discusses an abuse survivor who

dissociated both when typing her experiences and after reading unsupportive responses on a confession site.[52] She contends that "technologies… leave us vulnerable in new ways" (Turkle, 2011: 235). Although digital society can provide redress through technosocial practices, some scholars have noted that this ought to be considered with caution. Online communities provide victim-survivors with new opportunities and ways of speaking about their experiences while also bringing unforeseen vulnerabilities. Perhaps this is another factor that contributes to victim-survivors' careful navigation of digital society, shaping where they seek support and from whom.

Though online communities can provide a stop-gap and many participants saw these supports as adding value to their lives, it does not follow that online communities should replace 'professional' therapeutic supports. For example, some interview participants, like Patti, were critical of the support provided in online communities:

> I think it made me go seek professional help because I kept running into dead ends online. I think that when I first started talking about it I was asking a lot more than an untrained person could give me and it took me a while to realise that no matter how many people you ask, if they're not psychologists or they're not psychiatrists… you're not going to get the support you need from them and it's a frustration when people were just like, 'Oh, I'm really sorry that that's happened to you. I wish I could give you a hug.' And while those responses are best intentioned, they don't really do anything to help me and I really just wanted someone to give me strategies to help me deal with it and I never got that from online spaces because they weren't trained people… I don't care if someone's sorry or not because it doesn't change what happened. – **Patti**

Patti's experience indicates that although online communities can greatly benefit some victim-survivors, these spaces do not provide a 'catch-all' solution that can meet every person's needs. This critique presents a limitation of community settings, whereby the traumatic experiences bringing people together perhaps create normative responses to disclosures. Similar critiques have been made of therapeutic discourses and trauma models that prioritise particular interventions in the aftermath of sexual violence at the expense of understanding the structural causes and harms of sexual violence (Bumiller, 2008; Gavey and Schmidt, 2011; Vera-Gray, 2019; Wasco, 2003). Patti wanted a professional therapeutic response and found that the supportive language of online communities and groups did not do enough. This indicates that online peer communities can have the impact of holding people in their experiences of trauma without the professional support that may be needed to move forward. Although Patti's assessment of typical community responses to disclosures is

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[52] As noted in Chapter 2, confession sites and 'communities' are distinguishable from spaces specifically for people who have experienced sexual violence. While some people might disclose sexual violence in the context of confession sites, these spaces are attract a range of confessions concerning a variety of topics (see Turkle 2011).

accurate, my analysis of /r/rapecounseling revealed that commenters routinely recommend that their peers seek out therapy or counselling. Increasingly, rape crisis services are acknowledging the potential benefits of such groups, which suggests that digital options are appropriate to use in addition to face-to-face counselling and other therapeutic supports (Burrows, 2011). Most participants in this research seemed to appreciate the types of supports they received online, and Patti's sentiments represented a minority view.

Research suggests that victim-survivors' first experiences of disclosing sexual violence are important and can influence whether they make additional disclosures, seek professional help, or report to an authority (Ahrens et al., 2007; Chaudoir and Quinn, 2010; Clark and Quadara, 2010; Pluretti and Chesebro, 2015; Ullman, 1996, 2010). When recipients of disclosures respond with disbelief, it can further enhance victim-survivors' trauma and lead to self-blame. As one member of /r/rapecounseling said: "how the fuck am I supposed to trust people and be open… how am I supposed to try to get over it and be open if my openness does nothing but hurt me?" (Anonymous post, Reddit (172)). Although it does not specify who they had disclosed to, this victim-survivors' distress was heightened by the hurt they had experienced when disclosing in the past. Indeed, the responses that victim-survivors received in their everyday lives often led them to online communities for further support. As another Reddit user stated:

> I've literally never opened up this fully about it, not even my fiancé as I said, to anyone since it started 22 years ago. I told him one night, some basics. He [started] to cry, and it was the first time I'd ever seen him cry like that. It made me feel awful, I felt mad at him, that he thought he had any right to cry about it, after all it didn't happen to him. Then I felt guilty for that feeling, and awful I'd even feel such a selfish thing. It was a mess, emotionally, so I've never brought it up again. – **Anonymous post, Reddit (199)**

This victim-survivors' disclosure to a loved one caused them to stop discussing their experiences at all, although they eventually turned to Reddit to "open up" about it. This finding echoes Ullman's (1996, 2010) research, which contended that negative disclosure experience can have lasting impacts for victim-survivors.

Victim-survivors also access online communities specifically to connect with other people who have experienced sexual violence. This is common in many types of online communities, where "venting" particular experiences shared by group members facilitates a sense of belonging (Turkle, 2011: 232). People who use therapeutic online communities see great value in providing support, as well as seeking it (see also Bar-Lev, 2008; Winefield, 2006). This was evident in the engagement that victim-survivors had with each post on Reddit, most of which would have a few responses by other

members of the community. As Kate and Patti noted in the previous chapter, sometimes the support provided in these communities does not fulfil the needs of all victim-survivors, but mostly victim-survivors experienced development and change in how they accessed different communities over time. As Coryn said:

> I don't post very much. Every once in a while, I do, if I see something that is particularly relevant to my experience and sort of, if they're looking for something that I particularly have knowledge in, but um, for the most part I act as more of a helper on Reddit and not much of a sharer [laughs] …It still feels good, I feel like I'm helping other people be heard and I feel like, um, I don't know, like, if I'm able to help them then that means I really have done the work that I feel like I've done to help myself heal. Kind of self-validating, I guess. – **Coryn**

While seeking support was a significant factor leading many victim-survivors to access online platforms in the first instance, the act of giving support to others often kept them returning to these spaces. In online communities for breast cancer patients, Winefield (2006) refers to members who frequently respond to posts as "emotion workers." While it was not conceptually developed in Winefield's (2006) empirical research, the phrase is reminiscent of Arlie Hochschild's (1979) "emotion work," whereby individuals, typically women, are socialised to undertake unpaid work to process and manage their internal emotions for the sake of those around them. Indeed, the actions of Coryn and others who consider themselves "helpers" in online communities might be more akin to Hochschild's (1979) "feeling rules," whereby emotions are managed through social interaction and people are more likely to bond if they fulfil the emotions expected of them in specific contexts. If victim-survivors post to a community of peers, they expect that the community will respond. Turkle (2011: 235) claims that "people say they are satisfied if they get their feelings out, but they still imagine an ideal narrative: they are telling their stories to people who care." Many victim-survivors who participated in interviews indicated that they wanted to help and support others and the giving that occurs in these spaces is a fundamental aspect of these communities. Whether engagement with these communities is fleeting or continuous, these spaces foster victim-survivors' commitment to supporting one another through the aftermath of sexual violence.

Information and advice: online communities, trust, and the labelling of experience

Victim-survivors also use online communities as resources where they can gather information about how to navigate the aftermath of sexual violence (Andalibi et al., 2016; Morrow, 2006). Analysis of /r/rapecounseling revealed that the topics that victim-survivors seek advice about are extensive and varied. Topics include whether victim-survivors should report to the police, how to negotiate therapy, what to do in relationships, and other day-to-day activities. Many victim-survivors who

posted to Reddit sought advice about practical things that they could do in the aftermath of sexual violence. For example, several posts sought advice about legal processes, how to report, or how to write a Victim Impact Statement:

> Is it too late for me to report this to the police? – **Anonymous post, Reddit (21)**

> I know nothing about law or courts. I have never been in any sort of legal issues. How can I prepare? Any advice would help. – **Anonymous post, Reddit (114)**

> What type of questions will be asked? And why does the fact that he has been charged not mean he's guilty? I find it all so confusing!... I have requested to have screens up so I won't be able to see him in the court room which is a small positive but still, I am so anxious about what's to come. So any advice/experiences no matter how small will be much appreciated, thank you! – **Anonymous post, Reddit (67)**

These excerpts highlight that victim-survivors sought advice about how to navigate the criminal justice system. The posts here demonstrate a lack of knowledge or hesitancy towards legal processes. However, rather than searching for information in places where they could find context-specific information about particular jurisdictions, these victim-survivors sought the advice online based on the experiences of their peers, many of whom are likely to live in different states or countries. Whether victim-survivors gain useful advice about specific justice systems in these online communities is unclear. However, they are likely to receive advice about the *experience* and perceptions of reporting rather than specific information. Although it is also unclear whether victim-survivors follow the advice they receive (see also Morrow, 2006), it seems that they place trust in the community enough to ask questions rather than finding the information elsewhere. In several online community studies about cancer or pregnancy, scholars have noted how members trust the information provided by peers (Hether et al., 2014; Sillence, 2010; Sillence et al., 2006). This indicates that this phenomenon is not unique to sexual violence communities and signals to broader trends of seeking advice in digital society.

Victim-survivors also sought advice about how to live through psychological and trauma-related impacts of sexual violence. Many posts on Reddit requested specific strategies to overcome aspects of their trauma:

> Does anyone have any advice for how to be less nervous all the time?… also does anyone have any advice for feeling less scared or angry when I see him? – **Anonymous post, Reddit (42)**

:(How long is this supposed to take so I'm not bothered by it anymore? – **Anonymous post, Reddit (195)**

I guess what I'm looking for here is advice on dealing with the rage. – **Anonymous post, Reddit (86)**

While these victim-survivors were clearly seeking support from /r/rapecounseling, these posts also sought specific answers to help them cope with the emotional and psychological impacts of sexual violence, as Patti describes above. While these strategies are undoubtedly important for many people who experience sexual violence, there is a hopeful yet desperate tone among some of these posts that somehow, someone in the community will be able to respond with something to 'fix' the problem. Moreover, these questions are arguably loaded with "trauma talk," whereby victim-survivors feel responsible for 'dealing with' the emotional and psychological impacts of sexual violence in permissible ways (see Marecek, 1999). Jane Ussher (2011) argues that society pathologises victim-survivors in the aftermath of sexual violence:

> One conclusion to be drawn… is that sexual abuse and violence drives women mad – literally – leading to major depression, PTSD, BPD, or schizophrenia. However, this is a problematic conclusion, as it medicalises women's misery and again positions the problem within the women… Diagnoses are assumed to reflect an underlying pathology, or women's greater vulnerability in the face of stress, rather than simply being descriptors applied to women's lived experience of violence, their coping strategies in the face of an untenable situation, or the adoption of a culturally constructed script for 'sexual violence survivor' that women are taught to follow.

While this is not to discount the real lived impacts of sexual violence and its traumas (see also Alcoff, 2018; Alcoff and Gray, 1993), there is perhaps some merit to the 'script' of surviving sexual violence that provides permissible ways to talk about the traumas of these experiences (see also Marcus, 1992). Trauma-related scripts position lived experiences of violence as something to work through. It is okay for victim-survivors to have trauma responses to their experiences, but only if they are being 'fixed.' According to this script, victim-survivors must acknowledge that their experience is traumatic and that they want to pursue recovery. Resultantly, the advice that they seek in online communities has to fit within the bounds and norms of trauma talk.

These online community settings are often therapeutic (the title /r/rapecounseling being indicative of this), and many victim-survivors who posted to the forum had sought professional help through therapy in their everyday lives. This was another significant topic that people were seeking advice about:

I am not sure I like [my therapist] and I don't really trust her yet. She keeps trying to talk about what happened that night, but I don't want to and I am having troubling remembering … Is it okay if I don't know how I feel and thus don't want to talk about it? – **Anonymous post, Reddit (196)**

Anybody else feel more shame since getting therapy? – **Anonymous post, Reddit (125)**

For these victim-survivors, the difficulties experienced in therapy led them to seek advice about how to navigate these relationships. Other posts sought advice about specific types of therapies to ascertain 'what worked' best, which reiterates the notion that victim-survivors are pathologised to find solutions for their emotional responses to sexual violence. These types of questions also reaffirm the degree of trust afforded to peers in online communities, compared with the lack of trust given to therapists and counsellors (Hether, Murphy and Valente, 2014; Sillence, 2010; Sillence et al., 2006). Moreover, these excerpts indicate that victim-survivors' needs are not always met by therapy or the justice system, which are two of the primary avenues that respond to sexual violence.

Several victim-survivors accessing online communities sought advice about what 'counted' as sexual violence, as they were uncertain whether their experiences qualified. Tara had noticed this about Reddit and it was a reason why she preferred to access other spaces:

[On Reddit] it's just person after person going 'was this abuse?' or 'was this assault?'… they're stuck in a place that I'm not actually currently in and I don't find it very helpful. – **Tara**

Tara's reflection here indicates that the norms of online communities can vary; she had found that other communities provided space to talk about a variety of topics, whereas Reddit posts often fit within a genre of 'what is rape?' posts (see also Serisier, 2018b). Victim-survivors who already identify as victim-survivors and label their experiences as violence are likely in a very different place in their recovery and want other things from online communities. This reifies arguments raised in Chapter 5, that online communities are unlikely to suit all needs and some victim-survivors will navigate digital society to find spaces that best fit what they are looking for. While Tara did not find Reddit "helpful," she acknowledged that people who were in a different place to her would probably find it useful for advice about what constituted sexual violence.

On Reddit, victim-survivors who asked whether their experiences counted as sexual violence commonly described their experiences according to societal myths about rape. These types of posts could exhibit self-blaming attitudes or belief in rape myths:

Can I really call myself a rape victim if I didn't do EVERYTHING possible to prevent him from having sex with me? – **Anonymous post, Reddit (46)**

He is my husband, I've had sex with him thousands of times, I just can't seem to see how that was rape. – **Anonymous post, Reddit (131)**

As Tara noted above, these types of posts are one of the most common ways that victim-survivors seek advice on Reddit to the extent that they are a "genre" (see also Serisier, 2018b). Through this genre, community spaces become sites of both storytelling and gatekeeping, whereby victim-survivors provide details about their experience and seek confirmation from peers about whether or not it constituted sexual violence. Although if someone freely comes to a subreddit like /r/rapecounseling and ask about a particular experience, it is likely that they already understand the possibility that they are describing sexual violence and asking about it serves as a confirmation. However, some posts note that they had been redirected to /r/rapecounseling from elsewhere, typically beginning with "I was sent here from [subreddit]" (Anonymous post, Reddit (168)) indicating that other Reddit users read experiences and categorise them as sexual violence. Those who comment on posts position themselves with authority to name what 'counts' as sexual violence. To an extent, online communities outline a particular socially constructed knowledge about what constitutes sexual violence, whereby peers have the discursive power to label particular experiences as rape and sexual assault (Muehlenhard and Kimes, 1999; Peterson and Muehlenhard, 2004).

In some instances, people described their experience in a post while stipulating that they had not been raped, or that it was not criminal. For example, one post detailed an experience ending with "I wasn't raped, I am 100% sure of that, but it was an experience that changed my perspective." A comment on the post disagreed, stating, "honestly, it does sound like you were raped. Absence of a no doesn't mean a yes- you pushed him off and instead of taking a hint, he got back on top of you. I'm so sorry that this happened to you…" (Anonymous post, Reddit (191); Anonymous comment, Reddit (191)). Considering this exchange, it is worth recalling Gavey's (1999: 57) questions about the definitional problems inherent to victimisation:

> When a woman says she wasn't raped but describes an experience of forced, unwanted sexual intercourse, what are we to think? Was she "really" raped, despite disowning that label for her experience? Or does her refusal of the label suggest that her interpretation of the experience as other than rape makes it so? And what does it say about our culture(s) that there can be so much ambiguity over the differential diagnosis of rape versus sex? How should we conceptualise and judge the myriad coercive sexual acts that lie somewhere between rape and consensual sex? Finally, is being the object of violence or coercion always the same thing being the victim of such violence or coercion?

Gavey (1999) raises salient points about the potential limitations evident to how online communities define and label what constitutes sexual violence. While some of those who come to

/r/rapecounseling might suspect that what they have experienced is not 'typical' sex but are confused as to what else it might be, these communities are quick to provide a label. These labels have specific connotations and power: when someone comments that an experience was rape, the person who provided their experience must face the implications and consequences of framing their experience in this new way. The languages of these communities are potentially shaped by a victimisation framework, alongside "trauma talk," whereby recovery is the desirable outcome of acknowledging and labelling an experience as 'rape' (Gavey, 1999; see also Marecek, 1999).

Some of the Reddit posts discussed throughout this chapter have exemplified a degree of self-blame, such as the post that read "I didn't do EVERYTHING possible to prevent him" (Anonymous post, Reddit (46)). This is demonstrative of the ways that rape culture, victim blaming, and entrenched social narratives about sexual violence, discussed in Chapter 2, impact upon how victim-survivors frame their narratives. Many posts on Reddit contained typical rape myths, whereby victim-survivors present their narrative in accordance with common societal misunderstandings about sexual violence (Estrich, 1987). One person wondered if they had experienced 'real' sexual assault because their perpetrator was someone who they had initially wanted to have sex with:

> I'm really struggling because I don't know if what he did was … really sexual assault. I feel like it was my fault because I was the one who was TRYING to get him into bed. And I didn't do anything. And I didn't tell him not to have sex with me when I was asleep until it happened twice. – **Anonymous post, Reddit (139)**

This post shows that rape culture and myths influence how people speak about their experiences in several ways. This person is not sure that their experience is "really sexual assault," blames themselves for initially wanting to "get him into bed" and that they did not "do anything" to stop it. Moreover, they imply that because they did not say no to sex while they were asleep it was their fault, despite that being a consent-negating circumstance. Numerous posts on Reddit exemplified a limited understanding of consent, which highlights the dominance of rape myths over objective information and definitions of what constitutes sexual violence.

Rape myths can also shape *who* can identify their experiences as being sexual violence or claim the status of victimhood. In another example on Reddit, a man discussed struggling to name his experience as rape because a woman perpetrated it:

> I don't feel like I can call it sexual assault even though the hotline and my fiancé say it was. I know men can be raped by women and I know it's never the victim's fault, but I can't get myself to recognise that is true for me as well… I still feel like it's my fault. – **Anonymous post, Reddit (163)**

This excerpt reiterates the dominance of particular scripts that shape who can identify as a victim, and who is typically framed as the perpetrator. While this post highlights that the victim-survivor "knows" that men can be raped by women, he still felt that it was his fault. This signals to the power of these scripts, and perhaps the particular self-blame and shame that men experience in the aftermath of sexual violence (Javaid, 2015a; see also Scarce, 1997). Users of /r/rapecounseling would often comment on posts that espoused rape myths in a way that challenged them while providing support and information. These kinds of resistance were exemplified through providing information about consent and consent-negating circumstances, or by discussing issues like victim blaming, shaping a supportive environment where victim-survivors could acknowledge that sexual violence is "never the victim's fault." The ways that victim-survivors use online communities to share information and seek advice is significant because it acknowledges that victim-survivors see one another as experts in how to navigate the aftermath of sexual violence. Rather than approaching professional services and resources (or at times, additional to them) victim-survivors instead turn to one another for support and advice. That the audience within these communities is largely victim-survivors is another contributing feature of why these communities are trusted sites for disclosures.

Navigating potential audiences and sites of storytelling

Some victim-survivors are motivated to disclose in online communities because they facilitate storytelling. For example, Pandora's Aquarium has specific areas where users can share their story; victim-survivors can access this thread only when they have become a member and made several posts to other parts of the community. On other platforms such as Reddit, long-form narratives are usually combined with calls for support or advice from the community. On Reddit, it is less common to see a post where the sole purpose is for storytelling. Victim-survivors participate in digital storytelling in various ways. I demonstrated in Chapter 5 that these practices exist as a spectrum, where some victim-survivors choose to share stories in public platforms and others use private communities where they are anonymous. For some, their online disclosure is the first time they have spoken about their experience to anyone. In these instances, digital storytelling is a way to vent and process what happened (see also Turkle, 2011). The following excerpts indicate that this could also provide a sense of relief and safety:

> Mariah: So, I posted my own thing first. I hadn't really, I guess, told anyone really what happened, like the full story, and I just felt like I really wanted to get that off my chest so that's why I posted.
>
> Interviewer: And what did you want from doing that? Or what did you think you'd get out of that?

M: I guess some relief in a sense…it's just something very negative that I bottled up for such a long period of time, that it just felt so good to be able to just write it all out. – **Mariah**

I think online platforms are a place to try to try things out. Because like, and the thing about Reddit is you can make an account and post something and never use that account again.…you can still delete your posts or edit your posts, so you can try stuff out. Like, you can post something online and then at first, I think I posted stuff and then would sort of freak out and delete it, and then after a while I would be able to leave it up for a bit, but it was trying out what it was like to have somebody else know this, and then from there I did go into therapy, and I eventually started to talk to people in my life, but, I don't think I could have done that first. – **Tara**

These excerpts demonstrate that online platforms provide victim-survivors options to change their mind, remove posts, or edit them. Digital spaces, particularly anonymous and private communities, are environments where disclosures do not have the same risks of consequences attached as public disclosures could have. Tara's example indicates that disclosing online gave her some control in how she shared her story. Fileborn (2014b) suggests that having control over how experiences are shared is important for victim-survivors who disclose online.

This research found that audiences are a significant factor that shape victim-survivors' disclosures of sexual violence in digital society. Dylan, who was reluctant to share their story online publicly, said, "I feel like there are a lot of people on my Facebook friend list that don't deserve to hear what happened to me." Rather than sharing specific details of their story to their friend list, Dylan's disclosures had been in private conversations with other victim-survivors, sparked by broader conversations that were happening on Facebook after Emily Doe's Victim Impact Statement went viral on Buzzfeed (see Baker, 2016). Indeed, having an audience of peers is significant for victim-survivors, as they can narrate their experiences and share stories amongst a group that has a greater capacity to understand the impacts of sexual violence. Scarry (1985: 4) notes that it is equally difficult to speak about pain as it is to hear about it:

So, for the person in pain, so incontestably and unnegotiably present is it that 'having pain' may come to be thought of as the most vibrant example of what it is to 'have certainty,' while for the other person it is so elusive that 'hearing about pain' may exist as the primary model of what it is 'to have doubt.' Thus pain comes unsharably into our midst as at once that which cannot be denied and that which cannot be confirmed.

This suggests that there is an impossibility in speaking about pain such as sexual violence, and an equal inverse impossibility of being adequately heard (see also Henry, 2010). When audiences are

unable to process another's pain, it can result in that experience remaining unconfirmed by those listening. In spaces of victim-survivors, however, there is perhaps a greater capacity for the audience to "have certainty" that the pains of sexual violence are real (Scarry, 1985: 4).

When victim-survivors shared their stories on Reddit, at times they would preface their posts with apologies, warnings and expressions of gratitude. I posit that this acknowledges the time and work that peers in the community spend reading and responding to online disclosures. These types of prefaces emphasise the importance of these communities to their users, who treat each other with mutual support and consideration. The following excerpts illustrate how victim-survivors would often thank the community for reading what they had posted, or apologise if they felt the disclosure was too lengthy or triggering for the reader:

> I'm sorry this was such a long post, but I really wanted to type this out. It's been 10 years since I was raped, but I finally feel strong enough to put it into words. Baby steps. – **Anonymous post, Reddit (148)**

> It took me a while to write this but I finally did. I don't know if anyone will read this but I'm just proud I was capable of talking about it, through writing at least. – **Anonymous post, Reddit (161)**

For these victim-survivors, it is not only the story that the /r/rapecounseling hears but also, the community validates the *act* of storytelling. As seen above, some victim-survivors would apologise for the length of their story. However, it seems that the acknowledgement of length does not negate victim-survivors' needs to share their experiences. Healicon (2016) suggested that the urge to speak about experiences of sexual violence can be "compulsive." Many posts described the difficulties inherent to digital storytelling but, importantly, acknowledged that the community itself gave them the courage to speak:

> I've been reading this sub[reddit] for a while, but I'm finally getting up the courage to try to talk about what happened to me and try to make sense of it. I'm sorry this is likely to be a long post. – **Anonymous post, Reddit (63)**

This victim-survivor has provided insights into the experience of their passive use of /r/rapecounseling, which eventually led them to "make sense of" their own experience and disclose it in a post. While this type of digital practice is commonly referred to as lurking, Kate Crawford (2009) suggests that the metaphor of "listening" presents an important distinction. She suggests that listening is "a necessary corollary to having a 'voice.' If we reconceptualise lurking as listening, it reframes a set of behaviours once seen as vacant and empty into receptive and reciprocal practices" (Crawford, 2009: 527). This is exemplified in the ways that victim-survivors seek out audiences of

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peers, read each other's narratives, and provide a space where stories can be spoken. When reading these stories, rather than lurking, victim-survivors may be gaining the courage to share their stories. Alternatively, they might be reading the posts to find a mutual experience or something that relates to them. Comments on posts often reflect the mutuality of sexual violence, that is, users will reply relating the post to their own experience and will then offer support or advice (Morrow, 2006).

Some victim-survivors access online communities primarily to assume the role of listener, and regularly participate as audience members to other people's digital storytelling by reading their posts, even if they typically did not engage with or comment on them. In interviews it became clear that some victim-survivors continued to read other disclosures of sexual violence because they were looking for a specific narrative that mirrored their own experience of sexual violence:

> I'm still kind of stuck on finding my experience, like there's a forum for specific situations. I can't remember the name of it but I look and see…who else is there and who's had a similar experience. – **Sarah**

> I can't find my story anywhere, and I've talked to a couple of other survivors and their stories are not told anywhere, people who've been raped in the context of long-term relationships. – **Kathleen**

Sarah and Kathleen had both been accessing online communities for a number of years and had not found what they were looking for when reading other stories. This indicates that while these communities provide support and decrease isolation felt by some victim-survivors, those who have experienced something outside of normative experiences of sexual violence are 'othered' and fixate on finding narratives that resemble theirs.

This research found that collective storytelling was significant in influencing victim-survivors to disclose in community settings. For instance, one Reddit post explicitly addressed the impact of victim-survivors' storytelling, stating, "because of you I have strength… I see these people that are coming out with their stories and feel like I should do the same. Thank you, survivors. You are an inspiration" (Anonymous post, Reddit (72)). Storytelling on /r/rapecounseling and in other contexts in digital society presents alternative ways for victim-survivors to provide testimony of their experience (Henry, 2010; Ross, 2003b). While these sites are informal rather than tribunal settings, it is evident that online communities offer significant support and perhaps even justice outcomes for victim-survivors. This is because the audience is comprised of supportive peers with similar feelings and experiences, rather than a broader public. This notion is examined further in Chapter 8, where I argue that storytelling practices allow victim-survivors to be recognised and heard.

Speaking with anonymity in digital society

Anonymity is a significant factor contributing to many victim-survivors' use of online communities. Spaces like /r/rapecounseling and Pandora's Aquarium allow victim-survivors to find connections without forcing them to be open about their name or identity. Anonymity and privacy are important for victim-survivors who for whatever reason, feel they cannot discuss their experiences of trauma publicly or to a professional service. Online communities may also be the only spaces where those who are socially isolated or still experiencing an abusive relationship feel supported. One post to Reddit said, "I have never told this to anyone so I decided I'll post it here in Reddit cause I'm anonymous here and felt like getting it off my chest" (Anonymous post, Reddit (150)). For this victim-survivor, anonymity was a key attraction of the subreddit, providing them with the security they needed to share their story. However, what remained unclear from the analysis of Reddit is *why* anonymity was so important to victim-survivors. Interviews clarified that anonymous spaces are important because victim-survivors share and acknowledge mutual experiences, without the stress of it defining them in everyday life. Zadie commented on the significance of anonymity and community:

> [In] anonymous spaces it's just so much – there's so much freedom and support out there and if you can find the right communities – like, that's the key, I think, is finding the right communities and communities that you know are going to have the right attitude. I find that incredibly supportive and knowing that – because if you get an anonymous community – especially an anonymous community of women – and you say, you know, 'I've had this happen to me,' so many other people will say, 'Yep, me too, me too' … but, yeah, there's massive barriers for me in terms of people that I know knowing about what happened to me. – **Zadie**

Zadie reflects here about anonymity providing the right contextual foundation for victim-survivors to come together and discuss experiences of victimisation without being held back by feelings of shame or self-doubt about the experience. Likewise, Alcoff (2018: 145) argues that:

> Speaking publicly as a survivor is still a risky proposition. One risks professional credibility, relationship strain, and social disapproval, not to mention micro-aggressions from idiots who are ignorant about the nature of rape. One also risks infecting oneself with the sort of 'stain' that tracks you for life. Just as I will always remember the kid who threw up all over his desk in the fourth grade, we remember who tells us they were raped… speaking 'as' almost always incurs negative effects.

As I argued in Chapter 5, many victim-survivors in this research had carefully considered the risks and potential consequences of disclosing online and navigated digital society in ways that felt 'safe.' This chapter extends this argument by illustrating how anonymity offered safety to victim-survivors.

Anonymity can allow victim-survivors to be 'free' with their stories in a way that is not possible in their everyday lives. As Zadie suggest above, she was not comfortable with people close to her knowing about her experiences. She continued by saying:

> Well, the main reason is that my rapist was a family member and my parents don't know about it and my whole family doesn't know about it and I don't want them to know, for lots of different reasons. It was a long time ago and he's dead now and it would be pretty distressing… So if I put it on my public accounts then they would find out. – **Zadie**

Many interview participants who accessed anonymous spaces in the aftermath of sexual violence shared this sentiment. Anonymity allowed them to talk about their experiences but in a space separate from their day to day lives, where such conversations would have significant complications and may bring additional traumas. This indicates that anonymous online disclosures allow victim-survivors to disconnect their identity as a 'victim-survivor' from other facets of their lives. For many reasons but most notably for safety, this was a preferable way for participants to disclose experiences of sexual violence and abuse.

The politics of 'speaking in'

Thus far, the discussion in this chapter has outlined the reasons why some victim-survivors prefer to 'speak in' rather than 'speak out' in digital society. I have argued that online communities are important sites for victim-survivors' to seek support, information and advice. Moreover, through the anonymity these communities often provide, they become sites where victim-survivors can anonymously disclose their experiences amongst audiences who will hopefully understand and recognise their stories. While these factors are significant and undoubtedly facilitate the speech of many victim-survivors who otherwise might not be able to 'speak out,' there are potential implications that arise from 'speaking in.' For instance, Turkle (2011: 230) suggests that it is a "fantasy" to assume "someone is listening." While participants in this research mostly had positive experiences with peer responses to their disclosures, it was unanimously important that they receive a response. Victim-survivors provide one another support precisely because they know how upsetting it would be if a disclosure did not receive any response. Fileborn (2014) discusses the potential consequences when victim-survivors disclose and the outcomes do not resonate with them or they are not effectively heard. I do not contend that online communities are perfect settings where every victim-survivor is heard or receives the response they want. As noted above, Patti did not feel supported by the responses she received, and did not care that others were "sorry" because it did not "change what happened." While she noted some of the benefits of online spaces, she was also critical of the overall impact (or lack thereof) they had in her life. This highlights that 'speaking in' digital

contexts is not necessarily a positive experience for all victim-survivors, and therefore might not be a universally appropriate option.

Furthermore, the 'trauma talk' that dominates in online communities can shape and restrict how victim-survivors speak in them. I argue that these discourses produce permissible ways of framing sexual violence, establishing parameters that allow victim-survivors to label their experiences and identify with survival and victimisation. While this might be an empowering experience for some, for those who do not label their experiences as assault or rape, this too might bear implications whereby individuals who previously had not navigated a 'victim' identity might then do so because of their disclosure (see also Gavey, 1999). Disclosures in digital society can, therefore, transform how victim-survivors relate to their experiences, shifting a potentially unclear experience into something definitively 'rape' or 'sexual assault.' As was noted in Chapter 2, the trauma discourse shapes societal and individual responses in the aftermath of sexual violence and the permissible ways that they can speak about it and identify with their experience. Vera-Gray and Fileborn (2018) posit that the hegemony of trauma discourses can restrict who can claim the identity of victim-survivor. I demonstrated how this was evident in online communities where victim-survivors commonly turned to Reddit to make sense of their experiences and to find out if they 'counted' as sexual violence. While these questions of "was it rape?" were tied up in (often internalised) victim blaming and dismissive rape culture, they were also framed as being less traumatic than scripted experiences such as stranger rape. Similarly, while online communities can be a context where rape culture is contested, particularly through comments on posts, it is also likely that victim blaming and rape myths can be reproduced in these community settings. Although comments on posts often resisted victim blaming, they typically did not offer reasons why rape culture ought to be resisted. I argue that this leads to oversight of how sexual violence is socially constructed and contained in the ways that society defines and responds to it. In short, online communities are impacted by the various discourses that shape understandings of sexual violence, but little can be done to unpack this in the context of individual disclosures and supportive responses to them. As a result, particular scripts are potentially (re)produced in these environments and not necessarily critically engaged with.

The ways that victim-survivors seek out audiences of peers also presents potential implications of 'speaking in.' Peer audiences provide a space for disclosures to be listened to and "confirmed" by those who have the capacity to hear the pain of sexual violence (Scarry, 1985). However, experiential knowledge can produce contexts where narratives are considered "differently the same" (Mazanderani, Locock and Powell, 2012). This might mean that although pain can be spoken, it might always be rendered as other; despite similarities in experiences, individuals are likely to see their circumstances as different *enough*, highlighting a tension inherent to seeking support from peers. This tension is further pronounced for those who seek and give advice in community settings,

particularly if victim-survivors place trust in their digital peers and *not* in those who might have more intimate or 'professional' knowledge of the topic. Although as Morrow (2006) notes, it is difficult to know how often people who seek advice in online communities actually follow it. More often than not, these sites are places to share narratives, "vent" and seek support (Turkle, 2011). But this too might impact upon those "listening" or performing "emotion work" (Crawford, 2009; Winefield, 2006). For example, Turkle (2011: 240) notes the impacts of reading online confessions:

> I grant that confessional sites leave some people feeling better for "venting" and knowing that, in their misery, they are not alone. But here is how they leave me: I am anxious about my inability to help. I feel connected to these people and their stories, but I realise that to keep reading, I must inure myself to what is before my eyes. Certain kinds of confessions (and, unfortunately, some of the most brutal ones) start to read like formulaic writing in well-known genres. When this happens, I start to tune out and then feel terribly upset.

Here, Turkle (2011) presents important reflections and questions about the impacts of being a listener to painful narratives. Many victim-survivors, like Coryn, liked to provide support in online communities and considered it an important part of their participation. However, it is also worth returning to Kate, who in Chapter 5 said, "I can only do so much of it and then I have to have a break and if it's not a safe space to start… you know, I'm not going to help anybody if I'm a mess." This suggests that although victim-survivors want to be part of "communities of care" (Mendes and Ringrose, 2019), doing this care work can have unintended impacts and consequences that further shape how victim-survivors navigate digital society.

Experiences of 'speaking out' about sexual violence online before and after #MeToo

Is it always 'activism'?

Victim-survivors' use of digital platforms exists as a spectrum of practices that can be private or public, identified, or anonymous, as discussed in Chapter 5. The remaining dialogue of this chapter examines how victim-survivors disclosed sexual violence in public and identified contexts. As seen in Figure 1, this kind of engagement occurs when a person has attached their name or identity to their disclosure of sexual violence. It can include posts on personal Facebook pages or Twitter accounts, content posted to websites, the creation of videos or blogs, and so on. When asked why they chose to disclose in these ways, some interview participants said that they saw themselves as 'advocates' for survival from sexual violence and abuse. This advocacy occurred through creating and sharing

content about their own experiences of sexual violence and its aftermath, as well as sharing information and articles, social media engagement and moderating online groups. Some victim-survivors, such as Xanthea and Chandler, were passionate about creating content to support other victim-survivors and encouraging healing journeys and recovery. Their advocacy sought to raise awareness about the impacts of sexual violence and abuse experienced in childhood in particular.

Participants who created this kind of content invested their time and energy into websites, blogs, and videos about experiences of surviving sexual violence, and were driven by a passion to lessen the impacts of trauma for others. These participants were similar in their motivations to Coryn, Kate, and others who provided anonymous support in online communities. However, participants like Xanthea and Chandler were motivated to connect with as many victim-survivors as possible by sharing stories and information *publicly*. Their desire to share their experiences publicly centred around a discourse of healing and recovery from trauma, and in many ways seems reminiscent of the mental health recovery model (Leamy et al., 2011). This discourse suggests that people experiencing the impacts of trauma and other mental health issues should engage with a recovery 'journey.' This journey is usually highly personal but requires individuals to shift attitudes and behaviours, to be hopeful and contributory in life (Leamy et al., 2011). The notion of recovery has become a common feature in broader mental health policies in Western liberal democracies. Within sexual violence discourses, trauma models of sexual violence also typically include notions of recovery (Bryant-Davis, 2011; Herman, 1992b; Herman and Schatzow, 1987).

Other ways of publicly speaking out include naming oneself as a victim-survivor without providing the full details of their experiences (see also Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019b). For example, some participants, particularly those who were interviewed before #MeToo, spoke about how they would identify themselves as having experienced sexual violence when sharing articles on their social media accounts. Several participants noted that although they were unlikely to share full disclosures or details of their experiences of sexual violence on their identified Facebook account, they were willing to share a prominent media article or use a hashtag whilst specifying that they had experienced sexual violence. For instance, Coryn noted why she thought it was important to share information about sexual violence:

> I share articles written about, you know, sexual assault with like statistics, and places that people can go to for help. I mostly try to make myself a safe space if any of my friends need one and I try to, um, kind of, I don't know, open the eyes of people who don't understand it. – **Coryn**

Coryn describes her public discussion on issues relating to sexual violence as primarily to engage other victim-survivors and offer them information and safety. Simultaneously, she hoped to

influence a broader public that she perceived lacked awareness of the prevalence and impacts of sexual violence. These types of digital practices that aim to impact societal perspectives of sexual violence signal a blurring of advocacy and digital activism. Digital activism can include practices like sharing articles, online petitions and retweeting or re-blogging political content. For instance, Murthy (2018) describes the sharing of articles as "mediating access" to content among one's social network. In instances where victim-survivors of sexual violence are identifying themselves when sharing an article, their disclosure becomes part of a mediated narrative. They are not necessarily providing the details of their own experience, but rather someone else's, and their disclosure contributes to commentary surrounding it.

Scholars have questioned the efficacy of sharing articles and content relating to social issues, referring to it as potentially 'slacktivism' or 'clicktivism,' while also observing the importance of digital media for raising awareness and sharing ideas globally (Powell and Henry, 2017; Schumann, 2015). However, individuals who identify themselves while sharing an article on their Facebook page might not necessarily be aiming to participate in activism at all. Victim-survivors' engagement with online conversations and sexual violence discourses can be fluid, shifting and under continuing development as their feelings and knowledge change over time. Indeed, their digital practices may not fit the moulds and language that scholars use to describe online engagement. For instance, Dylan, who periodically shared articles about sexual violence and was particularly affected by the prolific media attention surrounding the Brock Turner case, said:

> I don't know that I would consider [my digital practices] either of those things [advocacy or activism]. I don't think that it's like deliberate enough for me to consider it as either. But I definitely can't see any reason that I would not do at least what I've been doing. – **Dylan**

How victim-survivors understand and discuss their engagement with online spaces as individuals is likely to differ to how scholars describe and examine this engagement collectively. Literature outlined in Chapter 2 maintained that when people engage with prominent hashtags such as #BeenRapedNeverReported or #IStandWithJada, they were participating in activism (Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016; Mendes, Keller and Ringrose, 2018; Powell, 2015a, 2015b). However, following interviews with victim-survivors, it became apparent that participants did not necessarily see their use of hashtags or sharing of articles as a contribution to activism, advocacy, or even a broader conversation about sexual violence. Similarly, the assertions by Chandler, Coryn and Xanthea, who identified as 'advocates' rather than 'activists,' suggests that some victim-survivors are reluctant to frame their personal experiences politically (see also Loney-Howes, 2017, 2019; Serisier, 2018b). Rather, victim-survivors seemed to mostly feel that their digital practices were to help themselves or peers, regardless of whether their disclosures were private or public. As Jo suggests:

Interviewer: … if you're sharing more publicly how does that impact you?

Jo: I guess it is still good, but in a different way. Just kind of feels like I'm doing something, some form of activism, and sharing my experiences, and hopefully people who have had experiences like that, or couldn't name something that happened to them, or something, that they can then access that, and it could help someone else. – **Jo**

This excerpt suggests that the victim-survivors' understandings of activism in online contexts can vary and might differ depending on the audience of the disclosure. Jo indicated that from their point of view, "some form of activism" could occur when speaking out resulted in empowering their peers. The implications of this in relation to #MeToo and hashtag activism are further discussed in the following section, extending the literature and demonstrating a need to acknowledge the multiplicity of victim-survivors' digital practices that become apparent when taking their perspectives into account.

Speaking out about sexual violence, both online and in other everyday contexts often remains imbued with stigma and shame for victim-survivors (Alcoff, 2018; Serisier, 2007, 2018b). As was noted earlier, many victim-survivors navigated digital society and their identities in the aftermath of sexual violence within anonymous online communities because they were concerned about the consequences of speaking publicly. In Chapter 5, I argued that victim-survivors who disclose publicly have likely considered the potential risks and responses to their disclosure. By their very nature, these public disclosures might produce a political resistance to rape culture and dominant narratives about sexual violence, regardless of whether they intended to do so (Powell, Stratton and Cameron, 2018; Powell and Henry, 2017). Serisier (2018b) contends that online disclosures can gain a "semantic thickness," which suggests that they have collective power and effect that transforms disclosures beyond their individual parts. As Jo aptly puts it, this does seem to be "some form of activism," whereby the personal and the political are blurred to the extent that it is unclear whether these disclosures are always intended to be part of a broader anti-rape movement (Loney-Howes, 2019). Indeed, perhaps speaking out in digital society produces something blurred and in between the personal and the political.

Victim-survivors who participated in interviews during the period before #MeToo emerged in October 2017 were using hashtags for a variety of purposes and in a range of ways. For example, Xanthea, Joseph and Chandler took part in public chats on Twitter that were facilitated by hashtags. In these conversations, several victim-survivors would tweet at the same time using a hashtag so that others could follow the conversation and join in. Murthy (2018: 148) suggests that "the importance of hashtag-based communities like this is that they repurpose Twitter in innovative ways to create new… communities." This highlights the ways that hashtags, much like online communities, can facilitate connection and support. However, because these communities are also public and on a

different platform, their purpose extends beyond this and the speech they produce about sexual violence might be shaped or restricted in different ways as a result. Perhaps this is where a further examination of the impact of different "platform vernaculars" is needed (Mendes, Keller and Ringrose, 2018).

On some platforms like Instagram, Twitter and Tumblr, hashtags can also be used to tag and categorise content, without participating in a broader public conversation. Xanthea, who saw herself as an advocate for recovery and healing from child sexual abuse that occurred in the context of a cult, had created a specific hashtag on Twitter to share and collate her content in one place for other victim-survivors of this kind of violence. Coryn, who likewise saw herself as an 'advocate,' liked to use hashtags when posting selfies on Instagram:

> Coryn: … when I post a selfie, I post #feministselfie you know, just kind of, girl power and healing and survival power kind of things.
>
> Interviewer: And what kind of response do you feel that you get from that kind of post?
>
> C: Really good, I keep my Instagram relatively tightly wound… I haven't made a whole lot of personal connections on Instagram but I feel like I'm being heard so it's kind of therapeutic for me, even if it's not making a big impact. **Coryn**

This exemplifies of how hashtags were used in a relatively private context to label posts and images as relevant to broader political issues such as feminism in the restricted context of one's personal network. In this context, private hashtags are less 'impactful' in broader discourse as they do not appear within the stream of conversation surrounding the hashtag topic (Murthy, 2018: 4). This shows that victim-survivors are not necessarily using hashtags to participate in a bigger social movement on public platforms, demonstrating multifaceted approaches to digital practices that are typically framed as feminist activism. As such, victim-survivors' contribution to broader discourses of sexual violence, feminism and mental illness, are not inevitably or invariably motivated by a political desire to participate in activism or social justice movements. Rather, these disclosures might be motivated by myriad factors discussed earlier in the chapter, such as wanting to help and support other victim-survivors, to share content and resources for healing and empowerment, or to identify themselves within a broader mediated narrative of experiences of sexual violence. This suggests that victim-survivors' public disclosures are more complex than the available scholarly framings. Perhaps motivations for speaking out ought to be considered as multiplicitous, with digital activism existing *within* a bevy of public disclosure practices, rather than constituting the primary framing for victim-survivors' public disclosures.

The politics of 'speaking out' in the post-#MeToo age

Hashtag activism is one of several ways that victim-survivors use and engage with digital platforms. Victim-survivors' participation in digital activism was not the central focus of this research, as this topic has been explored elsewhere (see Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016; Loney-Howes, 2015, 2017, 2018, 2019). However, as the central research questions examine how and why victim-survivors use online platforms, it is unsurprising that a subset of participants had disclosed through these 'movements.'[53] Moreover, the development of #MeToo was unprecedented and shaped what participants discussed in its aftermath. As noted in Chapter 2, while many hashtags of a similar nature have surged and dissipated over Twitter in recent years, none have had comparable lasting impacts on public discourse as #MeToo (Bogen, Bleiweiss and Orchowski, 2019; Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016; Mendes, Ringrose and Keller, 2018; Powell, 2015a; Powell and Henry, 2017; Rentschler, 2015).

Although limited emerging research has discussed victim-survivors' experiences using #MeToo, Mendes and Ringrose's (2019) survey explored the experiences of 117 victim-survivors who disclosed using the hashtag. Their findings suggest that many victim-survivors participated in #MeToo because they were at "breaking point" and it fostered moments of realisation that they could speak out and contribute their story (Mendes and Ringrose, 2019). Some victim-survivors were motivated to generate "communities of care" through their participation in online counterpublicss (Mendes and Ringrose, 2019). While the researchers note that disclosing could be difficult and an "affective" process, their findings emphasise positive aspects for victim-survivors who said '#MeToo' (Mendes and Ringrose, 2019). These sentiments were mirrored by a few interview participants in this research. For instance, David said he was motivated to use #MeToo to raise awareness about different types of experiences of sexual violence:

> I posted just on Facebook, and I kept it vague because I just didn't want to deal with the specifics of anything. But I said something along the lines of, #MeToo, and that it can happen to guys, but yes, it was uncommon, but people should still be aware that it does happen to men as well. People were actually pretty supportive. That got a decent amount of likes and a couple just generic comments, but nice comments…like whatever general supportive comments that people would say to any kind of #MeToo post. – **David**

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[53] Some have questioned the extent to which a hashtag can effectively constitute a social justice movement. For example, Megarry (2017b, 2018) suggests that hashtags like #BeenRapedNeverReported and #MeToo are not comparable to the organising and activism that occurred throughout the Women's Liberation Movement.

David's experience exemplifies "shifting the rape script" by challenging the normative assumptions of what constitutes an experience of sexual violence (Loney-Howes, 2018; Marcus, 1992). Asserting that "it can happen to guys" indicates that David wanted to partake in the #MeToo movement to broaden his Facebook friends' perceptions about who can experience sexual violence. David notes the positive responses he received, suggesting that he was believed and supported in his disclosure. As Serisier (2018b) argued, perhaps the sheer volume of disclosures during the #MeToo movement created a "semantic thickness," and with it, a space for victim-survivors whose experiences might otherwise be silenced. Similarly, Brett commented that "I think during the, all the #MeToo stuff was just all over Reddit, and um, I think I just kind of realised what happened to me then, if that makes sense." This suggests that online hashtag movements, especially ones as prolific as #MeToo, might allow for some people to realise and name their experiences as sexual violence. This highlights how hegemonic rape narratives are challenged through individuals publicly identifying themselves as victim-survivors.

David's desire to be "vague" reflects the broader nature of #MeToo, whereby victim-survivors were encouraged to say 'me too' rather than to necessarily provide their complete narratives of sexual violence (see also Gleeson and Turner, 2019). Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 5, the public and identifiable nature of a Facebook post might impact the amount of detail that victim-survivors are willing to disclose. Although individuals might be willing to identify themselves, this does not extend to providing a full narrative of their experiences. As noted earlier in the chapter, these longer disclosures might instead be made in private community settings amongst audiences of peers. Indeed, David had also used various digital platforms, including Reddit, to discuss his experience in detail with peers in private and anonymous settings. Some of these digital spaces were aimed at specifically engaging men who had experienced sexual violence, as many of the bigger online communities and hashtag 'movements' are oriented towards women's experiences and feminist activism focused on violence against women, which potentially excludes or deters male victim-survivors from speaking. In these private contexts, rather than his #MeToo Facebook post, David was able to share his story with peers. As I argued earlier, it is not only the "platform vernacular" but also the nature of the platform that influences victim-survivors' digital narratives (Mendes, Keller and Ringrose, 2018). Furthermore, David's acknowledgment that his experience was "uncommon" reflects on the limited attention given to male victim-survivors within sexual violence discourses. His assertion that male rape is uncommon arguably repeats normative scripts about sexual violence that, perhaps unintentionally, acts to reify the myth that men and boys cannot be victims of rape (Javaid, 2015a).

What has remained largely unexplored in scholarship about digital feminist activism are the reasons why victim-survivors choose *not* to participate, from their perspectives. This research extends this literature, highlighting the experiences of those who feel alienated by digital activism and chose

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to disclose online in other ways. While Mendes and Ringrose's (2019: 45) findings emphasised the ways that some victim-survivors carefully considered their disclosures and spent time "curating" their contribution to #MeToo, this research provides insight into why some victim-survivors do not want to engage with #MeToo at all. Zadie, for instance, said:

> I've been an activist in this space for a long time. I'm really tired. I'm really tired of doing men's work for them. But, you know, what I love about that idea and [the #MeToo] movement is how healing is has obviously been for women. I think that's amazing. So, you know, I'm on board for that. I'm on board for that but certainly for me it's not the kind of activism that I find healing. But I do see it as part of a bigger movement that's happening at the moment which is really exciting and I think is going to – I think I actually do feel for the first time in a very long time that we're seeing an actual shift – an actual substantial shift to women being believed and maybe getting closer to getting some justice but certainly not all the way there… I don't want to owe anyone my trauma, so I don't feel that I have to share. – **Zadie**

This excerpt highlights several key tensions that victim-survivors in this research experienced when faced with #MeToo; an environment where online disclosures became normalised and heightened in the months after the hashtag emerged. On one hand, Zadie was able to reflect on the potentially transformative impacts of the movement and how victim-survivors were being believed, as was also evident in Mendes and Ringrose's (2019) data. However, Zadie also touches on the fatigue she experienced when the hashtag emerged, commenting that she did not feel she should have to use her trauma as part of a political message or to "do men's work for them." While Mendes and Ringrose (2019: 48) highlight that victim-survivors in their study were prompted by a desire to "build a structural analysis of sexual violence," Zadie instead points out how the onus to do this work is placed on victim-survivors, and indeed, that this kind of analysis is not necessarily new.

Another participant, Supriya, was concerned about how #MeToo actively pressured victim-survivors to speak out, stating, "I don't think that any survivor should feel pressured or should feel as though they have a responsibility to advertise their trauma in order to bring attention to something." As discussed in Chapter 5, some victim-survivors had to filter out the hashtag or stay away from social media to avoid being triggered by other people's disclosures. #MeToo restricted some victim-survivors' participation in digital society, rather than empowering them to speak. Victim-survivors who typically 'spoke in' rather than 'out' through private and anonymous digital practices were frustrated by the way that #MeToo linked different types of sexual violence and assault. Umbrae commented:

I got really confused between are we talking about sexual assault, are we talking about sexual harassment? The lines just got way too blurry for me…and I couldn't tell what people are saying their experiences were because they weren't actually using words at all, it's just like a hashtag. So to me there's kind of no benefit to that, and it's like what new problems are we creating when somebody is just saying, 'Oh, I was sexually harassed,' and somebody else takes that and says, 'Oh yeah, me too, I was in this terrible abusive relationship where I was raped once a week for nine years.' Those are not equivalent and I don't think that we can pretend that they are, or even omit the fact that they're not equivalent. – **Umbrae**

This quote presents a key limitation and critique of #MeToo that emerged in this research. Sexual violence scholars, notably Kelly (1987, 1988), have theorised that sexual violence is a continuum of experiences ranging from harassment to rape. Arguably, #MeToo should have created space for increased public discussion of sexual violence that exists within "grey areas" (Gunnarsson, 2018; Hindes and Fileborn, 2019; Karlsson, 2018). Although some of this discourse was resisted as "going too far," it is evident that #MeToo has not gone far enough in challenging dominant narratives of sexual violence, nor has it effectively created new language to describe and understand experiences of sexual violence (see also Alcoff, 2018; Fileborn and Phillips, 2019; Gunnarsson, 2018). Umbrae's quote above highlights that rather than adding nuance or complexity to understandings of sexual violence or allowing continuum-based understandings to permeate public discourse, #MeToo has instead resulted in some victim-survivors reiterating particular hierarchies whereby experiences of sexual violence are "not equivalent." Indeed, in the broader public, the "grey area" experiences documented through #MeToo have been the most likely to receive backlash (Fileborn and Phillips, 2019; Hindes and Fileborn, 2019). This suggests that challenges lie ahead in broadening and complicating dominant understandings of sexual violence.

Several participants held critical perspectives of #MeToo. Like Umbrae, Helena thought that participating in #MeToo was "just words" that did not translate into action. Tara thought that #MeToo insinuated that this was the first time that victim-survivors had ever spoken up or shared their stories about sexual violence. She wondered if the general public would actually be willing and able to hear stories of intense and graphic trauma, including from those people who could not speak out using the hashtag. She, like others, felt that it would not be 'safe' for her to use the hashtag, or that it would be a re-traumatising experience. This reiterates argument made in Chapter 5, that victim-survivors who prioritise their safety are then left to feel excluded or silenced by the norms of digital society.

Beyond feeling 'silenced' or 'unsafe,' some victim-survivors also perceived risks of being sought out by perpetrators after publicly disclosing through a hashtag. Susie had initially posted on Twitter in the "heat of the #MeToo movement," but later took it down. She said:

> So… while I really want to share my experiences and I'm a very open person, and I want to break down the stigma, I'm also intensely frightened of being sought out by another perpetrator…I sort of disclosed temporarily in the heat of the #MeToo moment and then I was actually like, first of all (a) I don't want to trigger any of my followers who have had these kind of experiences, and (b) this is public and I don't want potential perps slipping into my DMs, this is just not a situation I want to deal with. – **Susie**

This further demonstrates how victim-survivors navigate their safety, manage potential risks, and attempt to control their experiences online. #MeToo means that victim-survivors could connect with one another, but that they also might be targeted by trolls or "potential perps" seeking to groom or harm them further. This then potentially places the onus on victim-survivors to navigate safety and the responses to their public disclosures.

There is no doubt that #MeToo and its implications for victim-survivors and broader society will undergo substantial research and critical discussion (see Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019a). Although these dialogues are important, this research has demonstrated that these 'public' modes of disclosure are only one practice that victim-survivors utilise to speak about their experiences in digital society. While it is clear that the hashtag has had impacts that are positive for victim-survivors, it is also important that this movement is critiqued, especially when that critique comes from the voices of those who continue to have their narratives silenced by the norms and expectations of digital activism. Moreover, in developing a discourse about victim-survivors' disclosure practices in digital society, I argue that there needs to be due consideration of the myriad ways that victim-survivors share their stories and that it is equally important to understand the reasons why they choose not to share them.

Conclusion: Speaking out, speaking in and implications for justice

Responding to 'why' victim-survivors engage with digital platforms to disclose their experiences of sexual violence, this chapter has discussed the multifaceted processes of 'speaking out' and 'speaking in.' The research found that while most victim-survivors felt positive about their engagement in digital society, particularly in the context of online communities, these platforms do not constitute a 'catch-all' solution in fulfilling the varied needs of victim-survivors. This was particularly evident when victim-survivors had specific needs from the community beyond seeking support, advice, or a

place to be heard. For example, Kathleen and Sarah both regularly read rape narratives in online community settings to try and find stories that resembled their own experiences. I argue that online communities cannot always provide the right kinds of recognition or support to all victim-survivors because they are formed around specific discourses, and their function is (often) to provide validation and support, or a place to vent. Perhaps due to this, victim-survivors' experiences in online communities were not unanimously positive; for Patti and Coryn, online communities did not provide helpful responses, leading them to seek therapeutic supports in their everyday lives and rely less on digital spaces. However, a key finding demonstrated throughout this chapter is the ways that online communities foster a connection with peers who have the capacity to recognise and understand experiences of sexual violence. This led many victim-survivors to continue accessing communities and reflect positively about them during interviews. Moreover, this discussion indicates that victim-survivors form communities in diverse and amorphous ways and these varying settings foster particular kinds of speech about sexual violence that are distinguishable from public disclosures.

The discussion presented in this chapter was also variously concerned with how participants in the research thought about their identity, both as victim-survivors and as 'activists.' Powell (2015b: 12) asserted that it is restrictive to reduce victim-survivors' disclosures of sexual violence solely to digital activism, and this chapter has extended that argument. I argued that the dominant framing that presents online disclosures as 'activism' does not acknowledge the diverse ways that digital disclosures occur or the varying motivations behind these actions, as discussed in Chapter 5. Furthermore, the emphasis on activism potentially oversimplifies the ways that victim-survivors themselves engage with and understand their use of digital media, and indeed, their self-hood. For victim-survivors who use digital society to engage in a dialogue of 'trauma talk' and recovery, social movements like #MeToo presented a challenging and at times triggering set of discourses that dissuaded many from speaking out in that context. Moreover, some participants, like Xanthea, Chandler and Coryn, remained reluctant to call themselves activists, and again, saw their awareness raising and advocacy through a trauma lens, whereby they were primarily motivated to provide support to peers. The trauma discourse combined with dominant narratives about what constitutes 'real' sexual violence shape how people identify with experiences of sexual violence. These discourses shape the speakability and permissibility of online disclosures in certain contexts. The genre of 'was it rape?' posts on Reddit demonstrate the willingness of communities to provide definitive labels for these experiences that can (re)produce some discourses whilst resisting others. In these settings, trauma discourses are reinforced, and while cultural myths and victim blaming narratives are produced in posts, they are typically challenged through users' comments and interactions with disclosures. I argue that this demonstrates a vexed politics of 'speaking out' and 'speaking in' that

arises when understandings of sexual violence remain so dominantly shaped by particular scripts and myths. In these environments, victim-survivors are left with the responsibility to reframe and challenge dominant scripts by providing peer supports, reading and commenting on each other's stories, forming communities, and engaging in public advocacy and activism. Meanwhile, despite increased belief in victim-survivors' narratives, societal conversations about sexual violence continue to provide a backlash against narratives that do not align with the dominant understandings about sexual violence (Fileborn and Phillips, 2019; Serisier, 2018b).

As these chapters have considered the 'how' and 'why' of victim-survivors' digital disclosures of sexual violence, the remaining dialogue of this thesis concerns the concept of justice. Kathleen's perspective, detailed in the next interlude, presents a hope that online disclosures would "lead to a fairer society." I argue that this signals a potential shift towards more kaleidoscopic understandings of justice, whereby scholarly conceptualisations of alternative avenues to justice are more able to resonate with people who have experienced sexual violence. Extending this analysis, the discussion in Chapter 8 reveals a theoretical possibility of justice occurring in digital society by emphasising its multiplicity.

Kathleen

On justice

I guess in some sense I have a desire or a hope that in the future, that if these voices are there, preserved digitally, that it will lead to a fairer society. In a way that if you look at the words of [pause] other people who've experienced incredible injustices, or acts of violence, you know, if you look at Native American art that was made during the Native American genocide or if you look at Primo Levi, or Holocaust survivor artwork and storytelling is also like a really important part of that … stories of the people that were there… are really important and they're kind of preserved, and there's a hope that they will prevent future atrocities. And I feel that there needs to be a chorus of voices for that to happen, and that's why it's important to try and participate in research like this, and to put things online. So, I don't think it's something that will happen in my lifetime, I think there's a lot of things to do with gender equality and misogyny and transmisogyny and LGBTQ rights and things like that, that are not going to happen in my lifetime, but things have got better, rape was legal within marriage for the first ten years of my life, in the UK. It's not now. But I feel that maybe these questions are so uncomfortable and so difficult and so, there's so much unquantifiability around ideas of trauma, pain, emotional experience, aftermath, whether or not somebody immediately knows and accepts what happened to them was rape or whether or not it takes them years as it did for me to be able to call it that, there are specific issues around this particular crime of all other crimes that make it very difficult to redress a lot of these injustices, and maybe there will be, but I do think the situation can massively improve, you know and if survivor spaces are really important, if for no other reason than they can be used to help collect information about just how traumatising the criminal justice system is for survivors. Because that really can be redressed and is one of the things that needs to be redressed, sooner rather than later. There are policies and practical guidelines that can be put into place very quickly that are not being put into place, so there's things like that that are kind of achievable goals. But in terms of my hope, my story, my voice, I don't know, it's just adding to a chorus... It's all I can do, I can't call him out on Facebook, and why would I want to? Why would I want to tell everybody [that I know]? – **Kathleen**

7

"I Don't Know…What *is* Justice?"
Victim-survivor perspectives on digital engagement as informal justice

Kathleen's views on survival and justice in the aftermath of sexual violence were simultaneously gloomy and hopeful; her way of speaking similarly blunt and poignant. In addition to her reflections on justice, highlighted in the preceding interlude, she discussed the importance of victim-survivors speaking in digital society:

> I think that writing things down for posterity has value in and of itself, because you don't know who it will help in the future… I want it to be some kind of digital archive, so that in ten years, fifteen years' time, it doesn't matter, if it only helps one person, that's enough. If it only starts one conversation, that's enough. Because like you don't know what impact these things are going to have. – **Kathleen**

This quote echoes some of the points emphasised in Chapters 5 and 6 about the importance of storytelling as a means of connection amongst victim-survivors. Kathleen wanted to make a digital zine of rape narratives with the thought that eventually in the future "digital archaeologists" could uncover them, giving voice to previously unheard accounts of sexual violence. In Chapter 8, I will engage with this idea further, considering this "chorus of voices" within a collective politics of victim-survivors' digital practices. In this chapter, I argue that while Kathleen's perspective on justice by no means signals a dominant position found amongst all interview participants, her words represent a potential shift towards seeing victim-survivors' online disclosures as a means to seek justice. Indeed, as will be discussed throughout the following sections, many victim-survivors who participated in this research were reluctant to conceive of their digital practices as justice-seeking behaviours. This chapter both complicates and extends the literature about justice from victim-survivors' perspectives (see, for example Herman 2005; Jülich 2006; McGlynn 2011; McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland 2017; McGlynn, Westmarland and Godden 2012; McGlynn and Westmarland 2018) and alternative avenues to informal justice in digital society (see Fileborn 2014b, 2017; Powell 2015a, 2015b; Salter 2013; Wood, Rose and Thompson 2018).

The discussion that follows in this chapter demonstrates that victim-survivors' perspectives of justice were varied and had the capacity to shift. Susie's exasperated question "I don't know… what *is* justice?" epitomises the complexities and tensions in theorising justice from victim-survivors'

perspectives. Justice can be many things and as McGlynn and Westmarland (2018: 1) remark, it is "constantly refracted through new experiences or understandings." When asked what justice meant for them, several participants referred to procedural and criminal justice processes. Some referred to a sense of broader societal change and social justice (a point that will be further discussed in Chapter 8). Some saw justice as "consequences" or "knowing that it won't happen again" echoing the findings of earlier studies (McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017). Lastly, some thought of justice as being restorative and were supportive of alternative avenues beyond the criminal justice system. While victim-survivors can have diverse perspectives and multiple views on what justice could be, overall most participants were reluctant to perceive their digital practices as constituting justice-seeking behaviours. I argue that a tension exists between scholarly understandings of informal justice and victim-survivors' perceptions of their digital practices.

Although these parallels were not always explicit, victim-survivors described their digital practices in ways that both aligned with and challenged criminological literature concerning informal justice. In Chapter 3, I outlined literature that framed revenge as a factor influencing victim-survivors to name perpetrators online, a practice which has been understood as informal justice (Powell, 2015a; Salter, 2013). This research found that victim-survivors perceived justice occurring in online spaces through these notions of revenge and digilantism, despite the small number of participants that actually felt any semblance of vengeance themselves. Moreover, in Chapter 5, I noted that naming perpetrators were a *less common* digital practice amongst victim-survivors who disclose online. Following this, the discussion focuses on victim-survivors' hesitation to describe other disclosure practices as an avenue to seek justice (see also Fileborn, 2017). Dominant understandings of procedural justice influenced whether victim-survivors could see justice occurring online, meaning that there was often a gap between how they perceived justice and their digital practices. In saying that, participants reflected that digital society presented opportunities for storytelling that accommodated their needs better than formal avenues for reporting such as the justice system. Thus, digital society presented an alternative and often positive site to discuss sexual violence when compared with reporting to formal mechanisms, which restrict how victim-survivors can talk about their experiences in more obvious ways.

What is justice to victim-survivors?

The very existence of the criminal justice system impacts how victim-survivors perceive and understand the possibility of 'justice.' Justice is a concept culturally ingrained in society through institutions and participants in this research typically understood it according to what they knew about the justice system and its processes. For instance, when asked what justice meant to him personally, David suggested:

Probably the, like if a person was caught and punished, and the victim, some steps were taken to make sure, to protect the victim from future victimisation, like if it was a guardian or something… [the victim would be] placed in a different home or something like that. – **David**

In this statement, David indicates that his understanding of justice was entwined with features of the justice system, such as punishing offenders and protecting victims from continued harm. Jo similarly reflected that "the justice system is to seek revenge, which is the whole model that it's based on, and punishment." This demonstrates, as Loney-Howes (2017: 281) has argued, that the justice system is a "yardstick against which justice [is] judged." Likewise, a victim-survivor in Clark's (2015: 19) research said that "it's very hard to think outside the system when the system's what you've got." Comparably, participants in this research exemplified that the dominant discourses of the justice system and rape law were prominent in their understandings of justice. Despite this, it was also evident that victim-survivors could have a more "kaleidoscopic" view (McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018), whereby their justice needs centre around wanting consequences and accountability for perpetrators, as well as the need to share their story and be believed (see also Herman 2005; Jülich 2006; Daly 2004, 2017).

Several participants in this research spoke about justice as 'consequences' for perpetrators. Some did not specify what this entailed specifically but suggested that consequences needed to ensure that the perpetrator did not re-offend. Literature concerning victim-survivors' perspectives of justice recurrently refers to 'accountability' from perpetrators as being an essential outcome of a justice-seeking process (Herman, 2005; Julich, 2006; Daly, 2017; Fileborn, 2017). In these studies, consequences referred to a broad range of outcomes including punitive measures and offender accountability (McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017). Daly (2015; 2017) contends that justice responses, whether formal or informal, are highly dependent on the context of the experience of sexual violence that a victim-survivor has had. Some participants in this research thought that the consequences could include incarceration or punishment, at least in part. Lionel, who had experienced sexual violence in childhood in the context of a religious institution, thought that justice was "bringing pressure to bear on the relevant people," commenting further that:

When you talk about justice it's not only about getting justice for what's happened to you… as in putting people in prison. Justice is more than that. Justice is also about stopping further abuse. That's a very key thing to it. And to stop sexual abuse, especially when it's of a sadistical [sic] nature and it's by people that are using the Bible to justify it… you find that actually the church has got a longstanding, a long historical problem with effectively terror through abuse and abuse of power, and this abuse of power is

what we're just trying to chip away at slowly, so that people in the world can live happy, fulfilling lives. – **Lionel**

Lionel was able to distinguish between how he envisaged justice for himself as an individual, which he referred to as "putting people in prison," compared to justice that could occur through shifting power dynamics and cultures around institutional sexual violence. He also signals to a collective aspect of justice, whereby speaking out about child sexual abuse seeks to prevent harm from happening to others. Several of the victim-survivors in this research saw justice occurring in diverse ways in society. While some understandings were clearly influenced by criminal justice processes, others refer to less definitive features like history, power, and structural inequalities. This further exemplifies, as other scholars have attested, that individuals understand terms like 'consequences' and 'accountability' in diverse ways and a range of outcomes might fulfil these justice needs (Daly, 2015, 2017; Daly and Wade, 2017; McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018).

Sexual violence, sexual assault, rape, and abuse have been prominent political and feminist issues since the Women's Liberation Movement. It is unsurprising, then, that some victim-survivors in this research envisaged justice as occurring through gender equality. As Susie suggested:

Justice for me would be to strip them of all of the privilege that they have as a man, that's what justice would be. If they have to balance it out and give up their extra job opportunities, give up the way that they can get away with these crimes, give up the extra power they have in a relationship until we're all on an equal playing field, that's when I'll feel like we have justice. But in the meantime, please, just stop doing it to other women. – **Susie**

Together, Lionel and Susie's perspectives prioritised that perpetrators should not be able to re-offend, while simultaneously acknowledging the need for changes to structural inequalities that can lead to sexual violence victimisation (Clark and Quadara, 2010). Indeed, while they wanted direct consequences for individual perpetrators, their desires extended beyond this to the role that broader societal structures, such as religion and patriarchy, have in facilitating sexual violence. This indicates that victim-survivors can have multiple views and needs of justice that coexist and overlap. This supports the notion that justice is kaleidoscopic and changes over time, whilst extending it to argue that victim-survivors can *simultaneously* hold these different views of justice.

Society often perceives that victim-survivors are vengeful when seeking formal justice. Research has consistently refuted this, highlighting that victim-survivors justice needs and motives are typically more nuanced and based around other justice needs (Herman 2005). Some participants

felt desires for revenge but simultaneously acknowledged that they did not want to act on it. As Kathleen said

> I mean, if you're a survivor, and that's what you wish, if you want your rapist dead or whatever, you're perfectly entitled to those feelings. It doesn't mean those things should happen though, does it? – **Kathleen**

This quote demonstrates that although victim-survivors may experience feelings of anger or vengeance in the aftermath of sexual violence, despite this, their justice needs could be diverse and complicated. Moreover, given Kathleen's interlude at the outset of the chapter, the anger that she expresses here does not reflect her thoughtful and nuanced perspective of justice. Victim-survivors' emotional responses to sexual violence are often tied up in particular framings, as Herman (2005: 576) argues, "the righteous anger of women, which violates social norms of compliant femininity, is particularly threatening" (see also Miller, 1976). However, Kathleen's views emphasise that the societal assumption that anger equates to revenge is a reductive one that fails to encapsulate the variegated understandings that victim-survivors can have of justice. There is a possibility that social norms lead victim-survivors to mute their anger or desires for revenge, particularly given that they are deemed vengeful if they pursue justice at all (see also Herman 2005). It is worth questioning whether the acceptable parameters and boundaries of justice mean that victim-survivors manage and restrict these desires, reshaping their justice needs as more 'reasonable' outcomes.

Kathleen had shifting perspectives on what justice meant and how sexual violence should be responded to, exemplifying the "kaleidoscopic" nature of justice from the victim-survivor's perspective (McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018). She freely articulated anger about her experience of sexual violence and her perpetrator. However, she simultaneously held the view that her digital narratives contributed to a sense of justice that was alternative, transitional, and transformative. Her varying perspectives indicate that justice might be continually (re)defined; that it could mean different things in different contexts (a notion discussed in Chapter 8). In some moments she felt anger and in others reflected on her perpetrator with compassion. The idea that she was "contributing to a chorus" of victim-survivor narratives resonates strongly with transitional and transformative justice discourses (see also Gready and Robins, 2014; Hackett and Rolston, 2009; Stepakoff et al., 2014). Contrastingly, she commented that justice itself did not exist:

> As far as I know, he has had a good, easy life, since he raped me. And my life has been worse every day since he did that. You know, there is no way to bring about justice, there's no such thing as justice. Like I don't think that sending somebody to prison, I'm not saying we shouldn't, but how can you work out what's fair, like it just doesn't work. – **Kathleen**

Kathleen's account is illustrative of the complexities of justice for any individual who has experienced rape. Kathleen felt anger, despair, and a desire for vengeance; simultaneously reflecting poignantly on the role of storytelling and commenting that "there's no such thing as justice." I contend that this further affirms feminist scholarship that has argued that victim-survivors perceive justice in myriad ways (Fileborn and Vera-Gray, 2017; McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018).

Many victim-survivors in this research said that they did not want their perpetrators punished or sent to prison. Rather, they thought that justice meant ensuring that perpetrators are 'helped':

> I don't really want… justice like revenge – but I'd like the person who hurt me to have help, I'd like something for them so that they don't hurt anyone else. And they're never going to seek anything out to say 'how do I stop transgressing other people's boundaries'? – **Helena**

> I don't even know if I believe in gaol, I don't know if that's an idea that I support. I just want them to feel bad for what they've done, and I want them to get support, I want them to do rehabilitation programs, and I want them to never do it again…I don't want to punish them until they feel the pain that I feel. – **Susie**

These excerpts indicate that victim-survivors are often less interested in punishment compared to other justice outcomes (Herman, 2005), and could be indicative of a critique of the state's reliance on carceral politics as a response to rape (see Bernstein, 2010, 2012; Blagg and Anthony, 2019; Bumiller, 2008; Phillips and Chagnon, 2018). Interestingly, victim-survivors often framed alternatives to punishment in therapeutic terms, by suggesting that perpetrators receive support, therapy, or rehabilitation. This suggests that trauma models exist as a dominant 'alternative' to justice in the aftermath of sexual violence, influencing how victim-survivors see a perpetrator's 'recovery' as well as their own (see also Gavey and Schmidt, 2011; Vera-Gray, 2019). Here, victim-survivors distinguish therapeutic outcomes as distinct from punitive measures, but it is worth noting that criminal justice responses often utilise 'therapy' and 'rehabilitation' in punitive ways, particularly in response to sex offenders (see, for example Edwards and Hensley, 2001; McAlinden, 2008; Pratt, 1999; Shajnfeld and Kreuger, 2006). Therefore, it is questionable whether trauma models present actual alternatives that challenge or seek to transform punitive and carceral 'justice,' as they can be emblematic of another mechanism that fails to address structural causes of sexual violence. However, overall, many victim-survivors in this research had a critical view of punishment which led them to look beyond typical criminal justice outcomes when conceptualising justice.

Restorative justice discussed further in Chapter 3, is a model for justice that centres the healing of victims, perpetrators, and the community. Kate, Patti, and Daniel each spoke specifically about

restorative justice during interviews, and the concept elucidated mixed responses. While she liked the concept, in theory, Patti was frustrated by restorative processes because she felt that her university's implementation of them in response to campus sexual violence did not do enough to help or support her. Conversely, Daniel said:

> A lot of people talk restorative justice when it comes to incidents of abuse, which is a really great concept, reconciliation and stuff like that. Or just you know, enabling more positive participation of the abuse victim in the rehabilitation of that person. And for a long time, in my more friendly moments I was like what about alcohol therapy for that person? – **Daniel**

Like Helena and Susie's quotes above, Daniel felt that restorative approaches allowed for therapeutic outcomes to occur through the justice process, and consequently it was a type of justice that he turned to in his "friendly moments." Interestingly both Patti and Daniel, who understood restorative justice principles and processes and were supportive of it as an idea, did not see it as applicable or preferable for their personal situations (see also Jülich, 2006). It highlights that, as several scholars have already noted, restorative justice is unlikely to meet the needs or expectations of all victim-survivors, and that a wider suite of justice responses to sexual violence are likely needed (Daly, 2015, 2017; McGlynn et al., 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018).

Kate was "strongly in favour of restorative justice" and saw these mechanisms as ways for victim-survivors to experience less trauma when interacting with support services. She also reflected on the limitations of introducing restorative processes online, which she perceived as spaces where people sought revenge:

> Perhaps if someone refuses restorative justice then maybe the criminal justice system might be the way to go. I don't know. I don't know what, I don't have the answers, but I am sure as hell convinced that a system that primarily re-traumatises survivors is not a good thing, so in answer… to your question I don't really see that being likely to happen in online, that restorative justice or any justice is likely to happen in most online spaces because I think most people are far too driven by want of vengeance. You know? And that's a very understandable thing but it just feeds the whole monster in my view, so, and it's not that I, you know, I'm some kind of saint and I don't feel vengeful or angry. I do feel like that at times but I also know that it just, what it does is just, you know, makes more anger and vengeance go around and so I work very actively on that within myself until I find some other way to approach it. – **Kate**

Kate's perspective of what justice meant favoured restorative approaches, which she thought were more likely to occur through face-to-face facilitation than in online spaces. While this perspective is

reasonable, as typically restorative justice processes occur within and alongside the justice system (see, for example Daly, 2006, 2012; Daly and Wade, 2017; Koss, 2014; Lopez and Koss, 2017), it seems that Kate was also influenced by her perception that online spaces fostered vengeance in ways that face-to-face interactions did not. Kate's quote accentuates two of tensions that shaped victim-survivors' perceptions of justice in digital society. Firstly, that victim-survivors' online disclosures are often perceived and framed as being motivated by a need for revenge, which she saw as limiting the extent to which "any justice" could be achieved. Secondly, like many victim-survivors in this research, Kate did not view digital practices as justice-seeking behaviour. Both of these issues are examined in the following sections to argue that although victim-survivors could have variegated perspectives of justice, this did not necessarily resonate with how they understood their digital practices.

Revenge, justice, and naming perpetrators: moving beyond the assumptions of vengeful victims and online vigilante justice

In Chapter 5, I discussed naming perpetrators online as a way that victim-survivors used digital platforms 'publicly.' I argued that victim-survivors were cognisant of various risks associated with naming perpetrators, and although it was something that several supported in theory, the complexities and realities of navigating the consequences meant that it was fairly uncommon. Here, I explore whether victim-survivors perceive outing perpetrators as a justice-seeking practice. In the literature, Salter (2013) indicates that victim-survivors are seeking revenge or participating in digilantism when they name perpetrators. Powell (2015b: 12) conversely suggests that vigilantism is not suitable to fully describe or adequately capture the nature of online disclosures. Loney-Howes (2017) links the outing of perpetrators to the feminist blacklists on toilet doors in the 1990s. Although I have demonstrated that most victim-survivors interviewed in this research were neither particularly vengeful nor did many of them out their perpetrators, the concept of revenge was often discussed in relation to these practices. While they perceived that revenge and shaming were relevant to naming perpetrators, it was also apparent that underneath this, it was more important that there were consequences or that they would not re-offend. Revenge and anger were feelings experienced by some participants in this research, however, the ways that victim-survivors discussed revenge suggests that their visions of justice were often community-minded rather than self-motivated.

Several scholars have cautioned that naming perpetrators may impede formal justice processes (Salter, 2013; Milivojevic and McGovern, 2014). Victim-survivors in Loney-Howes' (2017) doctoral study echoed these reservations, specifying that they preferred to use pseudonyms to name perpetrators in their blog posts in case they wanted to pursue criminal justice in the future. However,

victim-survivors who have been ordered not to identify their perpetrators by the criminal justice system, as was the case for Supriya, the idea of naming perpetrators was appealing:

> I think when the survivor can share, can out their abuser online and name them, I think that's a big step towards justice… It can humiliate the person and sometimes these offenders, at least the ones I've known, are so kind of smug and so relaxed about the whole thing that it's very hard to humiliate them. And you know, I'm not, I don't want to humiliate them for my own sick satisfaction or something, but I think if you share about, if you name them online and that embarrasses them or that means that, you know, they lose their place in the… swimming squad, I think that's fantastic because… I think that makes it harder for them to re-offend, 'cause [sic] it makes people aware of them and it shames them. I would 100% share the names of my offenders if they hadn't been minors. – **Supriya**

While Supriya felt unable to act because the court had sealed the records of her perpetrators and restricted the ways that she could speak out about her experiences, she was not necessarily motivated by revenge in her desire to name them. Rather, her motives were centred around consequences for perpetrators and minimising the potential for reoffending and future harm. This demonstrates, firstly, that the notion that victim-survivors out perpetrators online for revenge oversimplifies the complex ways that they navigate and understand these practices. Secondly, I contend that even when referring to individual circumstances and wanting their perpetrator to feel shame or guilt, victim-survivors are often most concerned with a community-oriented outcome (see also Daly, 2017). However, Supriya's focus on 'shame' as an outcome of outing perpetrators requires further critique. Indeed, as Powell (2015a) has suggested, naming perpetrators can lead to a backlash against victim-survivors, community support for offending behaviours, and veneration rather than shame for accused perpetrators (see also Fileborn and Phillips, 2019). As noted in Chapters 5 and 6, victim-survivors are aware of these types of consequences and for the most part and decide not to name their perpetrators in public or identifiable ways.

In Chapter 5, Susie referred to naming perpetrators in secret Facebook groups as keeping "little black books." These records of perpetrators were kept to protect women from future harm and violence. This function within some groups suggests that victim-survivors are taking matters into their own hands. However, the fact that these groups are often private is significant when considering whether these practices are actually motivated by revenge. Likewise, Jo, who was part of Facebook groups where naming perpetrators was relatively common, suggested this occurred because there were no adequate alternatives to seek justice:

> I think it's a good way to get a form of 'justice,' when there is no recourse for the actual institutional justice system, because a lot of the time they don't take emotional abuse seriously, and if it's physical abuse and it doesn't have evidence then they're not going to take it seriously. And a lot of the time they're not going to take sexual abuse seriously. So I think that [naming perpetrators] is another really good function of both public and private Facebook groups. – **Jo**

Here, Jo demonstrates that formal processes are limited in responding to victim-survivors and online spaces are a site for another "form of justice." They contend that online spaces could be a "recourse" to the justice system because they do not require the same forms of evidence to take abuse "seriously." It is worth noting that in some contexts, there are alternatives where victim-survivors can report their experiences or pursue alternative criminal justice options. One example of this, discussed in Chapter 2, is the anonymous sexual assault reporting app developed by a rape crisis centre in Victoria, Australia, where victim-survivors can report their experiences that are then deidentified and passed on to the police (see Powell, 2015a). However, in the absence of consistently available alternative justice options where victim-survivors can report their experiences, Facebook groups can serve to operate as a place where another "form of justice" can be pursued.

Neither Susie or Jo referred to 'revenge' as being a primary function of these private groups. Indeed, if these groups possess aspects of 'vigilantism,' this has emerged directly from the failures of the criminal justice system to take experiences of abuse seriously. As Powell (2015a: 7) has suggested, there are significant risks and implications if these private disclosures are screenshotted or if another member of the group then decides to take "justice into their own hands," as happened in the Steubenville rape case. It should be noted then, that regardless of the intentions or feeling of a victim-survivor when naming a perpetrator online, there might be consequences if a narrative is further shared, both with or without consent (see also Haire, Newman and Fileborn, 2019; Thompson, Wood and Rose, 2016; Wood, Rose and Thompson, 2018). A victim-survivor's online disclosure initially shared for individual healing can thus be repurposed to fit the dominant discourse (and indeed, myth) about "vengeful victims" wanting to ruin perpetrators lives (Herman 2005).

Naming perpetrators as healing from trauma: conceptualising justice beyond digilantism

While naming perpetrators is often considered as a form of online vigilantism or 'digilantism,' in this section I argue that these practices can be therapeutic, leading to healing, recovery, and empowerment. Daniel, for example, named one of his perpetrators in a public letter posted to his Facebook in the wake of the #MeToo movement. He described this as being "borne of rage and frustration, self-hatred, years of trauma and substance abuse and all this, like everything that

happened." Unsurprisingly, for Daniel, this process was more complex than seeking revenge or pursuing digilantism. For some victim-survivors, naming perpetrators is about letting go of their experience or attempting to heal. Daniel said:

> I couldn't walk around with that inside me anymore… I find it interesting that you said that people don't often name their abusers [online], and for me what that says, as someone who has obviously experienced varying degrees of abuse, it sounds like they want to…keep it to themselves to heal. But the thing I find about that is that if you're not remembering that people are doing this to you, the real-life people have done this, and have made you this way, and have contributed to this trauma you're experiencing, it's almost like you really do make a monster out of them. And monsters aren't real. They're not real, they are in your head, and that you know, I don't want to take away from [people who don't name perpetrators] experience obviously, but I found I needed to say "you're a fucking scumbag, you're a rat" [to my perpetrator]. – **Daniel**

Despite Daniel needing to express anger towards his perpetrator, it was apparent that he had named them primarily to heal. His account demonstrates that humanising his perpetrator by naming them publicly assisted him in moving forward from trauma. In the aftermath of sexual violence, victim-survivors grapple with discursive frames defining their experiences and how they respond to them. According to therapeutic and psychological discourses, naming abuse and abusers in the context of therapy is as a way to move forward from trauma (Harrell, 2011; Rose, 1999). Therefore, it is possible that victim-survivors who name their perpetrators in digital society are motivated by an array of factors, and that these practices are not categorically centred on vengeance. I argue that emotional responses to experiencing sexual violence do not necessarily relate to nor represent victim-survivors' perspectives of justice. To this effect, Daniel said "we can feel two things at once," suggesting that victim-survivors' experiences of trauma and justice can be in flux, a source of uncertainty, or kaleidoscopic (McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018).

After Daniel named one of his perpetrators online, he then received negative responses and backlash from his Facebook friends. Discussed above concerning Supriya's understandings of shame, Powell (2015a: 13) argues that when perpetrators are named online, "it does not follow that they are shamed; with many in social media communities instead rallying their support for those accused and engaging in victim blaming and direct harassment of victim-survivors." Daniel experienced this when his post was reported for violating community standards and he was banned from using Facebook for 30 days. Despite the vitriol that Daniel received after sharing his stories of sexual violence, he was still able to reflect on the positive outcomes of the experience:

> It's all there, it's all how I feel and it's all what I've tried to do and none of it is bullshit. It's all real, and being validated, and people are saying well done. And I had a fucking cry, you know, I was like oh my god I am healing now, I could feel the wounds of the past start to go we can start to you know, I've been walking home with staples where I needed stitches, and I'd finally got them stitched up in that moment [of sharing online].
>
> – **Daniel**

Daniel's experiences exemplify some of the different reactions that victim-survivors receive when disclosing publicly online. Although Daniel had spoken out and received backlash that restricted his use of social media, he continued to see his disclosures as healing and empowering practices. Of course, this does not reflect the experiences of all victim-survivors who experience a backlash to their disclosures. As I argued in Chapter 6, victim-survivors who name their perpetrators are aware of the risks of receiving backlash after these types of disclosures, which often factors into their decisions to *not* do so. In Chapter 1, I presented an Australian example where Ingram (2017a) named her perpetrator on Twitter and described the backlash and abuse she received as re-traumatising (see also Ingram 2017b, 2017c). She said that "despite the personal cost, I would do it again, and so will other women until the police start taking our concerns seriously" (Ingram 2017b: n.p.). These examples reiterate that victim-survivors' motivations to speak out publicly often outweigh the consequences and backlash that they receive.

While some victim-survivors in this research, notably Kate and Jo, described justice according to a revenge narrative, this research largely found that vengeance is not a key motivator in victim-survivors' disclosure practices. I argue that the assumption that revenge plays a significant role in online naming and shaming oversimplifies the complexities of these digital practices. I have demonstrated that there are instances where victim-survivors name perpetrators to 'heal,' to prevent future perpetration, or challenge a justice system that did not take them seriously. As such, justice needs beyond vengeance, such as community safety, healing, and storytelling, are prioritised and met through the practice of naming perpetrators. These factors challenge the dominant narrative that 'revenge' or 'digilantism' are what lead victim-survivors to disclose online. Indeed, the perception that revenge plays a prominent role in the experiences of victim-survivors only serves to reinforce the myth that they are vengeful (Herman 2005).

"It was a very passive kind of storytelling": Comparing procedural justice with online disclosures

Victim-survivors who participated in interviews were reluctant to describe their online disclosures as justice-seeking, particularly when they occurred in the context of private communities. To explore

whether myriad digital practices, discussed in Chapter 5 and 6, could provide an alternative and informal sense of justice victim-survivors in this research compared digital storytelling with formal avenues of reporting. While many victim-survivors did not categorically see digital practices as constituting justice, they were able to make comparisons between the justice system and how justice needs could be met through digital storytelling. The following analysis outlines the perspectives of interview participants who had direct experience with formal reporting, followed by a discussion of those who had chosen not to report. This demonstrates some of the key limitations of formal avenues to reporting from those who had experienced it, along with those who thought these processes were inaccessible compared to avenues in digital society.

"It's very clinical": Perspectives of victim-survivors who chose to report

As discussed in Chapter 3, feminist scholars have long pointed to the inadequacies of the criminal justice system and the police in responding to victims of rape and sexual assault (Clark 2010, 2015; Temkin and Krahé 2008). Victim-survivors are routinely disbelieved, blamed or re-traumatised in the process of reporting (Clark 2010, 2015). Further, due to high attrition rates, reported cases of sexual violence rarely go to trial or result in the conviction of perpetrators (Daly and Bouhours, 2010). In this research, several victim-survivors had reported to police or another authority, such as their college or university administration, with 6 of the 26 victim-survivors interviewed having reported. Patti and Sophia had reported to their universities about their experiences, and four – Jo, Daniel, Helena and Supriya – had reported to the criminal justice system.

Sophia decided to make a Title IX report after she had been accessing Reddit for a few months. Title IX is a federal statute in the United States that prohibits sex-based discrimination at educational institutions that receive federal funding (Koss, Wilgus and Williamson, 2014; Richards, 2016). Under this statute, victim-survivors can report through internal processes at colleges and universities. Before deciding to report through the Title IX office at her perpetrator's college, Sophia had disclosed to Reddit:

> I was in that forum and I was like, 'Okay, I feel more empowered to actually share this story with someone who should know, administrative personnel,' because a lot of the Reddit community talk about… reporting or not reporting. At the end of the day it's someone's [personal] decision. And the people who did report, it was very helpful to read their reasons why and also their reasons why some did take up criminal charges and some didn't. And for me I felt, 'Okay, I think I concluded from everyone sharing their stories what I want to do, what path is good for me.' – **Sophia**

This excerpt illustrates that seeking advice in online communities can shape victim-survivors' justice responses in their everyday lives. In Sophia's experience, this was 'empowering,' as it encouraged her

to speak out to people who she felt needed to know. She chose not to pursue criminal charges because she "wanted it to be done with" and thought that pursuing criminal justice would be a more involved process than reporting through Title IX.

Reporting through the justice system was a disappointing experience for all participants who had gone down that path. As Helena recalled, "the police force said to me 'well I hope you've learnt from that' and, 'what did you expect?'" which reveals victim blaming attitudes that often deter victim-survivors from reporting (see also Taylor et al., 2012). Similarly, Daniel reflected that he did not have a full understanding of what reporting to police would be like and found that he was not able to continue with the process. He later received a letter from the police stating that without his 'cooperation' they would not pursue his report further. Unsurprisingly, this interaction impacted how Daniel felt about reporting:

> I read that and I actually called the cop back and I was like I am so outraged that you would send me this letter... I actually said 'I'm so sorry it's such an inconvenience for you to not investigate my hostage rape'… You want to get sensitivity training done, you're being that much of a prick. – **Daniel**

Heydon and Powell (2018: 633) contend that "the rewards for reporting with respect to a just outcome are small, given the personal investment and potential negative psychological costs that the process requires from victim-survivors." Daniel and Helena's experiences confirm this, exemplifying negative interactions where victim-survivors are blamed, responsibilised, and treated without sensitivity when reporting to police. As Chapter 3 discussed, there are substantial limitations of procedural justice that deter victim-survivors from seeking support and justice. These limitations can deter victim-survivors from reporting but also influence them to find alternative avenues in digital society.

Negative experiences with the justice system were frequently discussed on Reddit, where victim-survivors often asked for advice about whether they should report. In these community settings peers are honest about their experiences, but often encourage victim-survivors to make their own decisions. After detailing their negative experience with police, one Reddit user said:

> All that to say, I still think you should report it. It's just going to be a really shitty experience. Definitely tell close friends that you are doing this, and maybe bring one with you when you go in. It's going to be VERY draining and it will retraumatise you all over again. You NEED to get your support team assembled before you do this. It's not going to be easy. But, as a survivor, you have the right to make that decision for yourself. If you do decide to report, I would just hate for your experience to be as bad as

mine. Because I was not prepared for what was going to happen. I hope this has been helpful. – **Anonymous comment, Reddit (21)**

While participation in online communities might encourage and empower individuals to make their own decisions, as it did for Sophia, in some instances asking for advice about reporting could further deter victim-survivors from pursuing criminal justice. The documenting of negative experiences with police on Reddit presents honest accounts about what these experiences are often like for victim-survivors, setting expectations for those who are considering reporting. As argued in Chapter 6, online communities will typically provide support whether an individual chooses to report or not. However, it is also worth reiterating the implications of seeking and giving advice in these community settings, particularly given that victim-survivors will likely have different experiences of and options for criminal justice depending on the country and jurisdiction that they live in. Although online communities can provide victim-survivors with realistic expectations of what reporting is like, to an extent they reinforce that these experiences will be negative. Although many victim-survivors do have negative experiences with the justice system, I argue that how reporting is framed in online communities could impact upon how victim-survivors perceive criminal justice processes.

Furthermore, victim-survivors in this study demonstrated how the formalities of reporting were challenging and limited how they could express themselves. Participants who had reported emphasised that the process restricted their voice due to the value placed on evidence and fact. For example, Supriya recalled her experience of reporting:

> Giving the statements to the police was this excruciating process of, you know like if you use one verb and then 20 minutes later you use a different verb to refer to the, to a part of the assault, then defence attorney will jump down your throat and rip you up about it for 30 minutes. So yeah it's very different [to sharing online]. It's more emotive as well. Like, I found the hardest thing about… doing the statement with the police was just that I was expected to recount this very long story with absolutely no emotion or without sharing my reactions to what was happening. It was very passive kind of storytelling. It was very weird… And it was hard to remember, and it was hard to repeat it that way, which of course [the police] pick apart. – **Supriya**

This excerpt echoes what feminist literature has argued for decades about victim-survivors' experiences with the criminal justice system. The process of reporting to police requires that victim-survivors be methodical and precise when detailing their experiences (Kelly, 2001; Muldoon, Taylor and Norma, 2016). If an investigation then goes on to trial, victim-survivors must go through a lengthy process that takes years, where, as Supriya reflected, each word of the testimony is scrutinised. Indeed, Chanel Miller (2019) had to read an abridged version of her Victim Impact

Statement in court, because it was 'too long' for her allocated time to speak (see also Baker, 2016). In the context of formal justice systems, victim-survivors have extraordinarily little choice in how they speak about their experiences.

When participants who had reported compared those experiences with their online disclosures, they unanimously said that digital storytelling allowed them more flexibility, time, and autonomy to share their stories. Supriya said that online spaces allowed her to be "creative," by sharing art and connecting with victim-survivors' poetry about their experiences. Likewise, Sophia thought that writing for Reddit was easier than preparing her Title IX report because she did not have to "scrutinise every single sentence." She suggested that it felt "invading" to use her Reddit posts as part of her report and she instead decided to "be very factual and take out the feelings of the administrative process." Sophia's experience illustrates that victim-survivors might feel compelled to revise their narratives to be less emotive and to better fit within their perceptions of reporting processes. I argue that this further exemplifies that institutions with the greatest responsibilities in responding to perpetrator's actions are not equipped to hear the emotional impacts of sexual violence, nor do they take them seriously.

Supriya contrastingly indicated that sharing her story in online communities meant that she did not have to provide as many details as her report to the police, because "it's a supportive community… other survivors can fill in the blanks." The criminal justice system had required her to be very detailed and explicit about her experiences, whereas online communities of peers would understand her regardless of how she chose to tell the story and did not need the full details to provide their support. This observation emphasises the importance of audiences that are receptive to digital narratives, further discussed in Chapter 6. Supriya discussed how audiences varied when disclosing within private victim-survivor communities and sharing her story more 'publicly' in digital society:

> I have never shared anything particularly graphic. Like, I'm happy to say that I'm a survivor of gang rape and a survivor of domestic violence and homelessness and child abuse, but I think that's plenty graphic. I don't think that I need to describe it to people because the last thing I want to do is trigger someone who's trying to find solace in that space. And I don't want to trigger myself. But sometimes if you are sharing such an experience in a broader digital context, outside a survivor forum or something, people cannot fill in the blanks. And so they ask you 'oh, so what happened? What did you do? Describe it to me scene by scene.' They just can't fathom it, they can't picture it, or they're so morbidly curious they just want you to explain every instance. – **Supriya**

This excerpt reinforces that the responses of different audiences have a role in shaping victim-survivors' experiences of disclosing in digital society. The shared experience of sexual violence that brings victim-survivors together in community settings produces a less pressured environment where they do not need to explain or justify themselves. When victim-survivors write narratives that espouse internalised blame, such as a Reddit post that said, "I shouldn't have been wearing something so revealing," commenters will respond with counter-narratives that allow for a reframing of the experience (Anonymous post, Reddit, 51). For example, one comment to this post said "it doesn't matter how you were dressed, it doesn't matter if you were high, what matters is that someone touched you and put themselves inside you without your consent. That is extremely wrong and illegal" (Anonymous comment, Reddit, 51). While in more 'public' settings, this kind of disclosure could receive questions or critique that reinforce rape culture, victim-survivor communities instead provide support and challenge self-blame. This signifies that digital society provides a space for victim-survivors to share as much as they want about their experience and responses from the audience allow for a reshaping of dominant discourses about sexual violence. These types of disclosure experiences contrast significantly to reporting within criminal justice settings, which tend to reinforce victim blaming rather than challenge it.

Formal reporting mechanisms often require victim-survivors to be in 'clinical' environments and to speak about their experiences in ways that do not feel comfortable. As Jo said:

> Sharing your experience with the police, I guess it's very intense because you've got to talk in detail about what happened to you. It's very clinical, you have to explain things and explain yourself. Whereas I feel like in secret groups [online] you're not asked to do that, and there's a lot more common understanding, and they're coming from a very similar place to where you are. And also, just the setting is very different. Online you can be in bed, super comfortable, whereas if you're at a police station you're automatically in a heightened awareness state because you're in a place that you're not comfortable, and that it's made to make you feel unsafe. – **Jo**

For Jo, space and place were significant factors when they compared their experiences being online to their experience reporting to police. As I argued in Chapter 5, space and safety were crucial factors for victim-survivors when navigating digital society and many had found communities that they perceived to be safe to disclose in. I noted that it is questionable whether digital spaces are actually safe, or whether safety ought to be the desired outcome of feminist online communities (see also Megarry, 2018). However, this research found that victim-survivors were able to find semblances of safety disclosing sexual violence online that were not possible in institutional settings such as the criminal justice system. This demonstrates that digital society fosters positive storytelling experiences when compared with formal reporting. As such, the informal justice that might occur through online

disclosures can produce safety, connection, and autonomy in the ways that they speak out about sexual violence.

"Nobody's going to question small details": Perspectives of victim-survivors who chose not to report

While the previous section revealed how victim-survivors compared experiences of reporting to online disclosures and contended that digital society provides outcomes that reporting processes cannot, this section highlights the experiences of victim-survivors who chose not to report. Reporting sexual violence formally is a process that excludes many victim-survivors, as noted above. The process requires victim-survivors to share their experiences in specific ways that emphasise evidence, details, and facts. Reporting in criminal justice contexts often requires speaking about the experience aloud. Contrastingly, Patti highlighted the significance of typing her narrative rather than vocalising it:

> I guess when you're talking online, you can still be emotional but getting stuff out, but when I was talking face-to-face – I'd try and do it and freeze up and then I'd get too emotional and I couldn't continue. I was like that when I was typing it out as well, but because I guess typing is different to speaking and you can type it, take a break, come back and finish what you were typing. That process in itself was huge for me. – **Patti**

Although it is worth noting that digital storytelling does not necessarily have to include writing and can encapsulate a variety of practices that incorporate videos and images, the process of writing experiences of sexual violence was an essential element for some participants. For Mariah and many others, Reddit had been the first place they had spoken about their experiences to another person. This signals that writing down experiences can be an important first step in facilitating disclosures. Moreover, as Jo's quote articulated earlier, victim-survivors have more control over their location when writing their narratives to post them online. Participants preferred to partake in disclosure practices when they were at home or using their personal device. This demonstrates that digital storytelling can afford victim-survivors with a sense of control over when, how, and where they craft their disclosures.

Speaking about experiences of sexual violence can be similarly daunting in other face-to-face contexts. Sarah, who did not report her experiences to the police, said "I just don't think I would be able to sit there in front of a stranger and report and go through all the details. I just don't think I'd be capable of doing that." She also felt that providing the full details to her therapist was "too difficult," and explained, "I couldn't tell the whole story. I don't like the idea of someone I know in person having that picture or whatever my experience in their head. I didn't have to deal with that if I wrote it online." Digital spaces can, therefore, provide varied options where victim-survivors can

speak about their experience of sexual violence without people in their everyday lives knowing the details. This reiterates arguments made in Chapter 5 and 6, that victim-survivors appreciate being able to identify as having experienced sexual violence anonymously and privately, in contexts that are contained and within their control. While it is worth questioning whether victim-survivors can have complete control of their narratives in digital society, as Fileborn (2014b) argues, it is likely that anonymity "counteracts" these risks.

Digital storytelling allows for some victim-survivors to speak about experiences that would otherwise remain unspeakable (Loney-Howes, 2015). Reflecting on her experience of sharing her full narrative in an online community, Sarah said, "for me, it really was a cathartic experience…since I [shared my story] I visited the forums a lot less. Maybe that's because, I don't know, some part of me recovered from doing that." Although she was not able to speak about it in face-to-face contexts, digital society provided a space for storytelling and recovery. This further demonstrates that these contexts provide avenues for an otherwise excluded group of people to speak out and be heard while prioritising their safety. Given that formal reporting options often feel unsafe for victim-survivors and that safety was such a significant priority for many participants in this research, I argue that pursuing safety in digital society might fit within conceptualisations of justice from the victim-survivor's perspective. Safety discussing their experiences in online community settings is something they are not necessarily afforded in everyday life, nor through institutions that would otherwise be tasked with administering justice.

I asserted earlier in the chapter that although victim-survivors' digital practices are typically misperceived as being motivated by vengeance, in reality, they provide opportunities for connection and healing. Joseph, who did not want to report through the criminal justice system, saw that digital storytelling was an alternative way to process his anger:

> I use having a say as, I suppose it's instead of trying to get revenge. When I published my website a great deal of anger left me and so I realised the connection and just continued to do that. And I have made the decision that I'm just going to tell my truth as much as I can rather than pursue any kind of punishment or revenge. And I think that I'm making a more effective contribution by doing that because, you know, going down a legal pathway in some ways involves keeping it within the court system and not being so public about it. And I don't want to do that. It's like, to me I consider that a good way to ruin my life is to spend years pursuing, pursuing revenge in the court system. I am much happier with the effect on my, on my life and my healing by just releasing, like just saying, hey [this is] what happened to me. – **Joseph**

This excerpt demonstrates victim-survivors' capacity to view their digital practices as alternatives to formal justice-seeking practices like "the court system." Joseph saw his participation in digital society as a means to heal and let go of anger, and in contrast, saw the courts as a place where he would "ruin [his] life" trying to pursue formal justice. He further commented, "just seeing how people who are taking legal action, seeing how they're going about their lives and what kind of a life experience they're having… it's just not what I want to have." This also suggests that victim-survivors share their experiences of formal justice processes amongst themselves, which reiterates that they often shape their perceptions of justice systems based upon the experiences of their peers. Moreover, Joseph's experiences highlight that the outcomes that might occur through disclosing in digital society might present a "more effective contribution" where he could be more "public" about his experience of child sexual abuse, rather than being silenced by the judicial process, as Supriya had been. In child sexual abuse cases legal processes often silence victim-survivors, as court documents might be sealed and settlements can occur before cases go to trial that requires the signing of confidentiality agreements (Herman 2005).

The dominant view of participants in this research was that reporting their experiences and going through a criminal justice process would be negative. For instance, David said, "I never reported what happened to me, but a lot of people have said, or there's a common belief at least that the police don't take people seriously." Likewise, Mariah suggested that "in the court of law they don't believe anything to be true." Some participants thought that their story would not be believed due to lack of 'evidence,' which illustrates the dominance of legal discourses which dictate that sexual violence must fit within particular framings. For example, Kathleen said:

> I couldn't have gone to the police, I didn't have a mark on my body, and we were in a consensual sexual relationship, we were living together. Nobody would have believed me… and the conviction rates are awful, and I wouldn't go through the trauma of a trial or anything like that anyway. – **Kathleen**

When Kathleen disclosed her experiences to a friend, she was asked why she did not go to the police. This exemplifies that when victim-survivors choose to speak out, societal responses often demand that they turn to the justice system. However, as Daly (2015) has also argued, these typical responses of calling the police are often inappropriate for most victim-survivors of sexual violence. The negative perceptions that victim-survivors had of criminal justice seemed to affirm in them the idea that digital storytelling was comparatively less traumatising and provided the outcomes that victim-survivors wanted and needed from sharing their stories. As Mariah said, "on Reddit, I can type my story exactly how it happens. Nobody's going to question small details of my story or question my story at all… the people on Reddit believe exactly what I'm saying to be true." This quote illustrates that digital storytelling, especially within the context of online communities, is a practice where

victim-survivors are likely to experience a 'positive' response. Susie expanded on this, saying that "to have a receptive audience to those stories is great because it just makes you feel like you're being listened to… other people respect them as being as important as you think that they are, and it does make me feel like, it's almost like you can let it go once you share these things." As I expand on further in the following chapter, the collective recognition and witnessing that occurs in digital society presents an alternative way of understanding informal justice and is particularly important given that so many victim-survivors have such negative perceptions of the criminal justice system.

Although I have demonstrated the significance of digital storytelling as an alternative to reporting, it is worth noting that victim-survivors were not unanimously supportive of this practice. Much like the critiques of #MeToo discussed in Chapter 6, where victim-survivors suggested that they did not owe their trauma to the movement, some participants thought that they should not have to share their experiences in any context. For example, Umbrae said, "I really object to the idea that the main way to move forward is to tell your story, and I'm sure that works for many people but I'm still pretty dead set on there has to be an alternative." Similarly, Olivia commented, "I didn't particularly need my story heard more than I needed to have… I needed to know for sure, to be answered by more than one person, that it was assault so that I could allow myself to be angry with him rather than myself." This reiterates that avenues to move forward in the aftermath of sexual violence are likely to be diverse. As demonstrated in Chapter 5 and 6, there are myriad ways to disclose sexual violence in digital society that occur without providing a full recount of one's experiences.

Kaleidoscopic justice in digital society?: victim-survivors' perceptions of informal justice-seeking practices

Thus far, this chapter has indicated that although victim-survivors can envisage positive justice-related outcomes from their disclosures, there was a degree of hesitancy to label digital practices as 'justice-seeking' behaviours. As Kate said, "I don't really see … that restorative justice or any justice is likely to happen in most online spaces because I think most people are far too driven by want of vengeance." Victim-survivors' perceptions were mostly driven by recognisable procedures of justice-seeking, such as reporting and the concept of 'revenge,' than by the outcomes that disclosure brought to their lives. I argue that this illustrates a tension in theorising informal justice from the victim-survivors' perspective. Although participants were able to perceive justice in diverse and simultaneously occurring ways that exemplified aspects of kaleidoscopic justice, they mostly did not consider how their disclosure practices fit within this. This presents a 'gap' between scholarly conceptualisations of informal justice and victim-survivors' perceptions. Despite describing their

experiences online as affording outcomes that were comparably better than the criminal justice system, many participants did not view these storytelling practices themselves as a justice mechanism. Indeed, as I have demonstrated above, when discussing online justice in specific terms, victim-survivors primarily spoke about the naming of perpetrators. Most victim-survivors referred to informal justice needs already discussed by Fileborn (2014, 2017) and Powell (2015a, 2015b) including having a voice, being heard and validated, having control over where a disclosure occurs and its content, feeling safe, and being believed. However, when asked if they felt that this was like justice or an alternative to justice, participants were hesitant to agree.

Several factors might contribute to this hesitancy, the first being the dominating power of procedural justice that presents normative understandings of how justice can occur in the aftermath of sexual violence (see Clark, 2010, 2015; Loney-Howes, 2017). Some participants contended that justice might occur through speaking out in public forums because it could spark further conversations about the failures of the criminal justice system. For instance, Supriya said, "I wouldn't say that the online spaces have provided justice exactly, except that by sharing about the woeful inadequacy of the criminal justice system I've been able to draw attention to it." However, Supriya also thought that digital storytelling provided autonomy and control in how she shared her story compared to her experiences within the criminal justice system. This indicates that her experiences in victim-survivor groups align with how scholars have contended that informal justice occurs online (Fileborn 2014, 2017; Powell 2015a, 2015b). However, from Supriya's point of view, this did not "provide justice exactly." Likewise, Jo commented that naming perpetrators could provide a "sense of justice." For both participants, experiences within the justice system had shaped how they felt about justice such that their online disclosure practices were not quite the same. Like Loney-Howes (2017), I argue that the dominant discourse and power of the justice system limits how victim-survivors can perceive their digital practices as constituting justice-seeking behaviours.

A second factor contributing to participants' hesitancy to refer to digital practices as justice could be that victim-survivors lack confidence in the concept of justice itself and the institutions that are meant to administer it. As a result, I contend that perhaps victim-survivors do not want to align their disclosure practices with justice mechanisms because these systems often fail them or are a source of further trauma and injustice. Jülich's (2006) research examining the justice needs of adult victim-survivors of child sexual abuse noted a paradox where participants, who had mostly described justice in a way that mirrored restorative justice processes, were decisive in *not* wanting to participate in restorative programs available in New Zealand. She argued that victim-survivors are impacted by their lack of faith in the justice system and its processes (Jülich, 2006). I likewise contend that victim-survivors in this research were hesitant to refer to their online behaviours as justice because it conflates their autonomous acts of storytelling with a system that routinely fails them and their peers.

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Digital storytelling allows victim-survivors to overcome the limitations of procedural justice. Whether in private or public contexts, these digital narratives can see victim-survivors regain their voice and identity. That victim-survivors disclose in different and often multiple ways, discussed further in Chapter 5, signals that informal justice practices in digital society are fluid and potentially refract over time, much like kaleidoscopic justice. Miller's (2019) decision to anonymously release her Victim Impact Statement through digital media, to then later demand that the world 'know her name' and reclaim control over her story exemplifies that victim-survivors can have complex and changing relationships to their experiences and how they want to share them. It also challenges the notion that victim-survivors are forever reduced to their identity as a victim throughout their lives (see Alcoff, 2018). Indeed, as Sarah noted earlier in the chapter, once she had disclosed her experience privately online, she was able to step away from it, use forums less, and felt like her experience no longer "defined" her. Thus, while digital storytelling is a potential alternative to overcome limitations of procedural justice, it is also evident that these practices can empower victim-survivors to shift how they identify with their experiences, allowing them to navigate their everyday lives differently.

Participants in this research typically thought that justice included the prevention of offending or future harm. As discussed in Chapter 5, some victim-survivors thought that naming perpetrators were justified if it meant preventing future perpetration. For example, Susie said, "nothing has hurt me more as part of my experience than when my perpetrators have gone on to abuse their subsequent partners." She was supportive of collective digital practices such as women's spaces and digital blacklists where victim-survivors acted to prevent sexual violence. Although this is discussed further in the following chapter, it is worth highlighting how victim-survivors saw these more 'collective' practices as justice-seeking because they could prevent future perpetration. As Daly (2017) has argued, victim-survivors often expand their conceptualisations of justice to include others. By contrast, disclosures are arguably more personal digital practices, with outcomes that are perceived to be individual (and mostly therapeutic) rather than collective. I contend that this influences how victim-survivors perceive these practices, where they are conceptualised as being about their individual recovery rather than justice-seeking. However, at Kathleen noted at the outset of the chapter, there is considerable potential to see online disclosures in collective terms, as a "chorus" of voices speaking out against sexual violence.

Ultimately, I argue that there is much potential to conceive of kaleidoscopic justice in digital society. This chapter has demonstrated that victim-survivors have multiple, simultaneous, and varying perceptions of justice. Many thought it was procedural, about accountability and consequences, based upon notions of revenge, while others perceived that it could be restorative, therapeutic, or provide a sense of social equality. Indeed, some participants noted the difficulties in knowing what justice is, or whether it tangibly existed. Together, these conceptualisations suggest

both the multiplicity of justice, discussed in greater detail in the following chapter, alongside its kaleidoscopic qualities (McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018). While McGlynn and Westmarland (2018: 18) have noted that kaleidoscopic justice extends beyond the individual to include "broader notions of social justice," it seems that victim-survivors were restricted when it came to conceptualising how justice occurs in digital society. I do not suggest that this means victim-survivors' perceptions have no role in theorising how informal justice occurs through their digital practices. Indeed, participants in this research were able to clearly articulate the transformative impacts of digital practices in their lives and spoke about these outcomes in kaleidoscopic terms. However, they were limited by seeing justice as the justice system (Clark 2010, 2015). As such, perhaps greater discursive power ought to be placed on reframing justice, such that victim-survivors might consider the empowering and transformative outcomes of their disclosures as forming part of a suite of potential justice responses in the aftermath of sexual violence.

Conclusion: "I don't know…what *is* justice?"

When centring the voices, experiences, and perspectives of victim-survivors of sexual violence, multiple positions and understandings are revealed about justice. This chapter has confirmed that justice can be kaleidoscopic and that victim-survivors have shifting views and justice needs over time (McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018). The discussion examined whether victim-survivors perceived their digital practices, outlined further in Chapters 5 and 6, as alternative and informal avenues to justice. The research revealed the mixed perceptions of victim-survivors, for the most part, the quotes exhibited here challenge the emerging literature that suggests that these disclosures constitute justice-seeking (see, for example Fileborn, 2014b; Powell, 2015b; Salter, 2013). I argued that this presents a 'gap' between scholarly literature about informal justice and victim-survivors' perceptions of their disclosure practices. I argued victim-survivors' perceptions of justice were impacted by the dominant structure of the justice system, rather than something that could be informal or in digital society. This is not to suggest that informal justice cannot occur online, as will be discussed further in the following chapter. Rather, the discussion argued that the homogenising power of the justice system permeates into broader discourse, shaping dominant responses to sexual violence. I argued that as a result, victim-survivors are reluctant to frame their positive experiences of disclosure in digital society within a framework of justice.

By contrast, victim-survivors perceived that digital society provided better contexts to share stories about sexual violence than (currently available) formal mechanisms for reporting and seeking justice. As such, the discussion in this chapter demonstrated that digital spaces can foster alternative reporting and storytelling, however, victim-survivors were more likely to frame these spaces as sites of healing and recovery than justice, *per se*. Also noted in Chapter 6, the discussion above further

emphasised that trauma and legal discourses impact on how victim-survivors perceive their individual responses to sexual violence in digital society. Trauma discourses have the impact of creating highly individual and therapeutic responses to sexual violence, such that Daniel referred his speaking out and naming of a perpetrator as 'healing' as opposed to framing it as a political action or a justice response. To an extent, victim-survivors' focus on healing is important in complicating how justice is theorised in digital society, particularly in a context where victim-survivors' practices are reduced to digilantism. These healing discourses might be more empowering for individuals to connect with, given that dominant frameworks for justice-seeking were viewed so negatively amongst interview participants. Thus, while this discussion suggests a potential tension between digital platforms as sites of healing versus justice, the following chapter advocates for the inclusion of these understandings of 'healing' within discourses of justice in the context of digital society.

In responding to the second central research question posed in Chapter 4, the discussion in this chapter has raised further questions for scholars to consider. For example, it is worth questioning how scholarly understandings of informal justice in digital society can reconcile with victim-survivors' perceptions of their digital practices. Although some victim-survivors conceded that some aspects of digital society provided a 'sense' of justice, it was apparent that many did not associate their online behaviours with their understandings of justice. Therefore, a problem raised throughout this chapter is that the scholarly "broadening out" of what justice is (Daly, 2015) has failed to reverberate beyond the theoretical and into the lives of victim-survivors, particularly when applied to digital society. This research found that theorising alternative avenues towards justice from the perspectives of victim-survivors is limited, to an extent, by the dominant frameworks of justice that shape their perceptions. Perhaps this could be addressed in future research with alternative methodologies that seek to resolve these 'gaps' between victim-survivors' perspectives and scholarly theorising. In the meantime, the following chapter further examines the potential for informal justice in digital society.

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The Multiplicity of Informal Justice

Victim-survivors of sexual violence rarely achieve justice through procedural and formal processes such as the criminal justice system. Indeed, the participants of this research who had engaged with criminal justice were highly critical of the processes involved, as argued in Chapter 7. This chapter ultimately advocates for looking beyond formal processes and carceral politics when considering potential avenues to justice in the aftermath of sexual violence. The discussion below examines whether an alternative justice occurs in digital society, rather than recreating semblances of 'justice systems' within digital space. Outlined further in Chapter 3, the concept of justice is theorised in numerous ways, from Rawlsian liberal philosophy of 'justice as fairness' to the poststructural and political theories of justice by Jacques Derrida (1992), Nancy Fraser (2008b), Iris Marion Young (1990), and their critics. These theories were brought together with conceptualisations of justice from the victim-survivors perspective (Herman 2005; Jülich 2006) to suggest that meanings of justice are varied and layered. I argued there that justice is something experienced by subject(s), while also being abstract. Therefore, the discussion and theory-building that occurs in this chapter emerge from a framework that acknowledges the multiplicity of justice, both its abstract impossibility and its simultaneous tangibility in the lives of victim-survivors and the broader community. I argue that meanings of justice are multiplied further when we begin to theorise the potential for informal justice in digital society.

Daly (2017: 109) has suggested that victim-survivors have a broad view of justice, that their "perspective is not narrow or self-centred, but widens to embrace others in a justice activity." While the discussion in Chapter 7 demonstrated that victim-survivors' views can be broad, I also argued that there were limitations to participants' willingness to embrace digital society within their understandings of justice. This chapter exhibits the potential for digital society as a site of informal justice by returning to some of the key themes and theories raised throughout this thesis. The ways that victim-survivors talked about their disclosure practices, as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, signal to the potential for informal justice in digital society when discussed in tandem with the conceptual framework advanced in earlier chapters. Bringing together notions of community, safety, trauma and identity, the following discussion positions digital practices of speaking out alongside feminist and poststructural concepts of recognition, the queering of justice, and the potential for a collective politics of speaking out.

This chapter presents a way of understanding justice as occurring at multiple levels within digital society; at the individual level of victim-survivors who engage online, at a community level (of victim-survivors as collective peers), and lastly, at a societal level, which may encompass both the structural and the discursive. The concluding discussion demonstrates that experiences of justice are multiple, existing across varying levels which interact and influence each other whilst occurring simultaneously in the lives of victim-survivors. Through the voices of participants, this chapter illustrates the transformative effects of digital practices in their individual lives, their peers, and broader society. At an individual level, victim-survivors are able to speak out, connect with others, shape their identities, and experience recognition through their disclosure practices. At a community level, peers form communities that can represent particular collective experiences and politics. Beyond this, the "chorus" of voices that Kathleen spoke about can challenge structures and dominant discourses, highlighting the potential for narratives to fuel activism and social justice. I contended in earlier chapters that there are evident tensions in how victim-survivors navigate digital society and what they can say. Dominant discourses shape dictate the (im)permissibility of their speech, whose stories can be heard, and how victim-survivors prioritise safety when navigating digital space. While these factors present implications within the following discussion, I argue for the possibility of multiple avenues to justice within digital society that provide opportunities and contexts where a greater number of voices and narratives can be heard.

The potential for individuals' justice-seeking in digital society

Digital society consists of various spaces where victim-survivors can disclose sexual violence, and I have contended that these practices are often shaped by individual factors and considerations, particularly the desires for safety and connection. In Chapter 7, it was evident that although many victim-survivors did not reflect upon their digital practices as constituting justice-seeking behaviours, there are several ways that their disclosures aligned with scholarship about justice needs (Herman, 2005; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018). This discussion established that individual victim-survivors are able to speak out, be heard, and have a sense of autonomy and control in their online disclosures. These features of online disclosures have been considered as forms of 'informal justice' in digital criminological literature (Fileborn, 2014b, 2017; Powell, 2015a, 2015b; Salter, 2013; Wood, Rose and Thompson, 2018). Indeed, digital society provides opportunities for victim-survivors to share their stories in positive ways compared to formal and procedural justice processes. Rather than rehashing these points, the discussion in this section contrastingly demonstrates the influence of various discourses upon victim-survivors' digital practices. Neoliberalism and trauma discourses shape disclosure practices and I argue that this affects whether digital society is as an appropriate site for informal justice. Neoliberalism and late capitalism manifest within digital society as an environment

that both pressures and validates individuals who speak out, as occurred during #MeToo for some victim-survivors (see Chapter 6). Here, I juxtapose this with the (potential) transformative consequences of online disclosures that participants spoke of, highlighting the tension between an environment where some victim-survivors feel pressured to speak in particular ways and the transformative effects that this speech can have. While there are implications of considering digital society as a site of informal justice, I argue that digital spaces can allow for a broadening of justice to encapsulate lifesaving outcomes that occur in the lives of some victim-survivors when they speak out online.

Complicating individual justice and neoliberalism in digital society

Participants often expressed that any choice that victim-survivors made in the aftermath of sexual violence, whether it be reporting to an authority accessing an online forum, are appropriate and valid. For example, Coryn said:

> When someone comes on [Reddit] and says, 'I don't know if I should report or not,' people give pretty balanced advice, you know? [They are told] that it's a very personal decision, and that people who report are celebrated and that people who don't are comforted and told it's ok [to not report]. – **Coryn**

This quote demonstrates the potential impacts of a neoliberal mindset on victim-survivors of sexual violence in digital contexts. As discussed in Chapter 2, the neoliberal turn of the 1980s impacted upon both justice mechanisms and other state-based responses to sexual violence particularly in the context of Western liberal democracies. Kristen Bumiller (2008: 95) argues that the neoliberal state treats sexual violence as a "risk" it can manage by "placing responsibility on women to become experts themselves in prevention strategies or, if already victimised, to recognise the necessity for professional help." Likewise, Gavey (2009: 111) suggests that the turn to neoliberalism resulted in an emphasis on psychological interventions and explanations in the aftermath of sexual violence, rather than looking to broader social structures to analyse sexual violence and the extent to which it occurs. To some extent, the neoliberal turn provides victim-survivors with a greater array of options in the aftermath of sexual violence. However, scholars have also noted that these options are scripted and bounded by societal perceptions of sexual violence (Gavey and Schmidt, 2011; Marecek, 1999). When victim-survivors disclose their experiences to family or friends, they are often encouraged to follow particular scripts of reporting, pursuing an investigation, or seeking therapy. As such, victim-survivors' 'choices' exist within and are often shaped by discourses produced by rape culture and trauma frameworks. Thus, the neoliberal victim-survivor of sexual violence is individualised, depoliticised, and bears the sole responsibility to pursue justice, therapeutic interventions, and indeed, prevention of and protection from further victimisation (see also Carmody and Carrington,

2000). As I argued in earlier chapters, victim-survivors in these contexts are responsibilised to speak about their experiences to prevent sexual violence. Neoliberal subjectivity is a persistent condition shaping digital practices, and indeed, casts potential limitations upon conceptualising informal justice in digital society.

Considering how digital and neoliberal society intersect, it is worth discussing the dangers that victim-survivors' disclosures bring about unintended outcomes that potentially condone sexual violence or monetise digital practices of speaking out (Gill and Orgad, 2018; Salter, 2019). While digital society can facilitate mass speak outs, such as #MeToo, these 'movements' remain constrained by neoliberalism, capitalism and patriarchy. Loney-Howes (2019: 32) contends that state-based responses to anti-rape movements like #MeToo "may simply serve the carceral agenda of the neoliberal state, rather than a 'feminist' one." This argument echoes Bumiller's (2008) comments that the neoliberal state co-opted the anti-rape movement, ultimately depoliticising it and reinforcing carceral politics. It seems that digital society can be similarly neoliberal, whereby victim-survivors are individually responsible for responding to sexual violence in particular ways. This research has found that often victim-survivors' digital practices align with therapeutic goals and recovery journeys. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, when victim-survivors speak out in digital society it is often motivated by individual outcomes, such as the need for support, advice, or an audience, rather than for political reasons. This demonstrates the salience of trauma frameworks amongst victim-survivors, and affirms what Harrington (2018: 11) argued regarding 'My Rape Story' videos on YouTube: "for the most part, these accounts [do] not tell a feminist story of male power and female oppression but a neoliberal story of resilience, trauma and regaining control." In this way, the neoliberal and digital nature of these new ways of speaking out actually remove the political from the personal (see also Loney-Howes, 2019; Serisier, 2018b). Neoliberal digital society then serves to complicate the collective politics of the feminist anti-rape movement. That is, although victim-survivors benefit and often have positive experiences from their individual participation in digital society, this benefit primarily occurs through recognition of hyper-individualised rape narratives that centre on lexicons of healing and recovery, which, I argue, might destabilise the political foundations of speaking out. As will be discussed later in this chapter, this raises important questions regarding the extent to which justice itself is 'personal' or 'political.'

The neoliberal ideology resonated with participants in this research, who discussed the importance of being able to navigate digital society by making choices appropriate to their individual circumstances. This is unsurprising given that neoliberalism and the development of free-market economies have enabled digital society to prosper and proliferate globally, creating technologies and social media that feed into individual self-management (Lupton, 2015). As I discussed in preceding chapters, victim-survivors actively sought different digital platforms according to their varying needs

in the aftermath of sexual violence. The need for safety, anonymity, privacy, or connection with others greatly influenced victim-survivors' practices. However, many participants, like Coryn above, clarified that victim-survivors had different needs and that their responses to sexual violence were equally valid. Likewise, Mariah said:

> I feel like to heal everyone needs something different. So, if you feel like you need to, you know, go down to the police station, make a police report and file charges for you to feel better, like, do that. But if you feel like you need to go on Reddit, tell your story and get support online through people, like, do that as well. – **Mariah**

Victim-survivors' uptake of neoliberal frameworks to understand their digital practices is significant. On one hand, this excerpt suggests that any 'choice' a victim-survivor makes in response to sexual violence is sound. As noted in Chapter 7, they were typically critical of formal justice processes and supportive of therapeutic interventions, but despite these reservations, they persistently felt that any response that helped a victim-survivor "feel better" was appropriate. Indeed, this could be considered a subversion of the scripted and hegemonic ways that victim-survivor can experience the aftermath of sexual violence. Mariah and Coryn's acknowledgment that online options are as appropriate compared to the typical 'scripted' responses of seeking formal support or pursuing formal justice is significant. It potentially demonstrates that online communities can undermine the normative expectations that victim-survivors discuss their experiences face-to-face, to therapists, to police officers, and so on. As I argued in Chapters 5 and 6, victim-survivors who disclose in online communities appreciate having an audience of peers who have a capacity to understand the lived experience of sexual violence. Online communities are typically spaces where victim-survivors are validated and supported regardless of how they respond in the aftermath of sexual violence. As Coryn noted above, these communities provide victim-survivors with support for choosing not to report. In this way, it seems that victim-survivors could experience empowerment and a sense of stability and control in knowing that they will be supported by their community irrespective of whatever 'choice' they make. Fileborn (2014) suggests that having control over a disclosure may offer a sense of justice to victim-survivors, but notes that digital platforms may be limited in providing this. Indeed, it is difficult to know the full range of consequences that might arise for individual victim-survivors who navigate digital society, and as I suggested in earlier chapters, their need for safety and privacy might actually restrict the 'choices' that they have in digital society.

On the other hand, then, this neoliberal lens presents clear implications in pursuing informal justice in the aftermath of sexual violence. Firstly, the suggestion that victim-survivors have 'choices' within the structures of neoliberalism, late capitalism, and carceral politics is worth questioning further. Critiques of liberal and neoliberal feminism have contended with this question, particularly whether women have agency within a 'postfeminist' era (Bumiller, 2008; Chen, 2013; Gill, 2008,

2016; Kiraly and Tyler, 2015). Moreover, I contend that with choice comes a responsibility to decide what to do and in a context where victim-survivors bear the burden of these choices, it is worth considering the implications of placing the onus on them. Secondly, although online communities and supports offer numerous benefits to individuals, in many ways using these platforms might undermine the responses and services that the state provides. I do not suggest this as something categorically negative or positive, as for many victim-survivors, formal therapeutic and justice mechanisms can do further harm as well. It is arguably a limitation to see the increase of choices for victim-survivors' in digital society as tantamount to an increase in solutions. As I argued earlier, perhaps digital society should be considered as a stopgap, rather than a catch-all. Coryn likewise saw online communities as a place to "catch people when they were falling," where victim-survivors unable to easily access support or justice could do so online. However, most interview participants simultaneously acknowledged that validating a victim-survivor's choice to seek support online in lieu of professional support or formal justice options was unlikely to be appropriate in all instances. In this way, the supportive environments of digital society validate choice and agency, but ultimately, individuals are accountable for the consequences of whatever choice they make. As was noted in earlier chapters, this can restrict and limit victim-survivors digital practices.

The emphasis on the neoliberal subject provides an opportunity to acknowledge that alternative responses to sexual violence are necessary beyond the avenues of the formal justice system or therapeutic interventions. Individuals turn to digital spaces to fulfil needs that are not prioritised within systems that respond to sexual violence. Furthermore, although the structures of neoliberalism and late capitalism affect digital space, this does not mean that digital society cannot provide a means to expand justice outside of the control of the state. These digital platforms offer contexts in which justice and support can be peer-led, crowd-sourced, accessed remotely, and with minimal expense. However, there are implications in acknowledging digital society as a site for justice given the onus that this places on victim-survivors to speak out, to support others in community contexts, and to navigate the potential consequences of disclosing online. Victim-survivors' navigation of digital society is impacted by neoliberalism as much as it is by trauma discourses that lead victim-survivors to focus on healing and recovery. In the following section, I consider the extent to which healing and recovery might be considered as forming part of individuals' potential informal justice experiences in digital society.

What *is* justice? Rethinking the dichotomy of justice and trauma responses to sexual violence

Throughout the preceding chapters, I have suggested that therapeutic and justice responses are the two typical avenues that victim-survivors take in responding to experiences of sexual violence. I have

argued that justice can be kaleidoscopic, multiple, and able to shift over time (McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018). In Chapter 3, I distinguished between formal and informal justices, with the former referring to the processes and responses of the criminal justice system and the law, and the latter to processes like alternative courts, restorative justice programs, public apologies, and witnessing atrocities (for examples, see edited collection by Powell, Henry and Flynn, 2015). In Chapter 7, I noted that among interview participants, formal and procedural justice significantly influenced their perceptions of what justice meant (see also Clark 2010, 2015). Therapeutic goals such as individual wellbeing and long-term recovery were salient amongst victim-survivors, who were more likely to speak of their digital practices in therapeutic terms than as a form of justice. Scholars have noted that within the context of digital society, informal justice practices can include storytelling, digital activism and naming perpetrators (Fileborn, 2014b, 2017; Powell, 2015a, 2015b; Salter, 2013; Sills et al., 2016). Here, I expand upon this literature by discussing the potential for informal justice to encompass digital practices that allow victim-survivors to move towards increased wellbeing and connection in both digital society and their everyday lives.

When conceptualising informal justice in the context of digital society, I contend that the ways that therapeutic responses are considered as distinct from justice ought to be re-evaluated. In Chapters 5 and 6, I established that victim-survivors' digital practices include finding and establishing communities of support, connection and storytelling. In Chapter 7, it became evident that there was potential that online disclosures can fulfil a 'sense of justice' although it may not quite resemble the dominant structures of procedural justice. Considering this, it appears that some victim-survivors were able to move beyond the criminal justice system as being the primary definer of what justice can mean for victim-survivors in the aftermath of sexual violence. This research expands how justice itself might be (re)imagined, particularly when beginning from a foundation that there are kaleidoscopic elements in how individuals perceive and experience justice over time. Therefore, I argue that informal justice in digital society is multiple and encapsulates finding supportive audiences to validate and recognise victim-survivors' disclosures (see also Fileborn, 2014b; Powell, 2015b). As previously discussed, within public discourse and within some scholarship, victim-survivors' participation in informal justice-seeking practices is typically equated to vigilantism. Recall Kate, who thought that any form of justice in digital society would be spurred by vengeance. However, when analysing the digital practices that were most common in this research, the findings have instead confirmed Powell's (2015b: 12) assertion that a key aspect of informal justice in digital society is to voice "personal narratives of sexual violence to be acknowledged amongst a trusted audience." My findings suggest that the ways that individuals navigate digital society, seek connection, audience, and a place to be validated, do surmount to informal justice insofar as they provide due recognition that sexual violence has occurred and that it has ongoing and lasting impacts. There is no time limit on

participation in digital society, and as such, online spaces and communities can foster and support an individual through their experiences in the aftermath of sexual violence as they shift and change over time. Emphasising the significance of this, several participants in this research had been accessing various online communities for many years and spoke of returning to them when they felt it was necessary. Digital society can thus provide space for those who have ongoing needs for individual recognition regarding the enduring impacts of sexual violence in their lives. By establishing that seeking support and community within digital society can be conceptualised within a framework of a variegated informal justice, I hope to deconstruct the hierarchy placed on formal and informal responses to sexual violence that emphasises particular types of justice responses. Indeed, having support and community in digital contexts aligns with aspects of transformative and alternative justice in the context of queer communities. As Hammer and Gossett (2016: 229) note, "so many of us are lacking a community… that becomes a big thing when we think about alternative forms of justice that are community-based. How do you go about that for people who are isolated from community, who don't feel connected to other people?" Community and healing has long been a feature within justice discourses, particularly amongst LGBTQ communities and communities of colour (Hammer and Gossett, 2016; Harris, 2011; Morris, 2000; Nelson, 2016; Picker, 2016) and I contend here that there is potential for community-based alternative justices to develop in the context of online communities in digital society.

Exemplified by Mariah's quote in the preceding section, participants placed a higher value on their healing and recovery than the criminal justice system. Some sexual violence scholars, notably Daly (2017), are hesitant of conflating therapeutic interventions or "wellbeing" outcome with justice mechanisms (see also Jülich and Landon, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018). Daly (2017) contends that justice mechanisms exist to deliver different outcomes to therapeutic responses, and amalgamating justice with wellbeing places too much expectation on what justice should provide to victim-survivors. However, for participants in this research, navigating the aftermath of sexual violence in digital society typically involved *both* therapeutic and justice outcomes that overlap and blur, they are not easily distinguishable. For instance, Lionel saw support and justice as being connected:

> I think justice is in a way part[ly] support, but justice is what a lot of survivors feel
> they've not had. And so we try to support each other as best as we can. We're not
> perfect, but I've certainly found it quite empowering the amount of support I've had off
> other people. – **Lionel**

This excerpt suggests that support can, in some ways, recompense for losses experienced through the injustice of sexual violence, which can lead to individual empowerment and a greater sense of justice needs being met. Digital platforms seemed to provide contexts in which both justice and support

needs could be met in a multiplicity of ways over a long period. It also emphasises the role of connection with other victim-survivors online in achieving a sense of validation that the experience occurred, particularly in instances of institutional child sexual abuse where experiences are repeatedly denied and silenced. In this example, the power of support from peers who have experienced the same abuse, at times from the same perpetrator(s), is unsurprisingly transformative and not a feature that formal justice typically provides. For groups of victim-survivors who live in disparate geographic locations, Twitter and other platforms provide opportunities to gain a sense of justice that "they've not had." Ultimately, Lionel's quote indicates that victim-survivors' digital practices lead to outcomes in their lives that are potentially both support *and* justice. Importantly, support from peers can provide recognition that society has been unwilling to provide. I argue that this connection online provides a unique form of recognition. In digital society, informal justice encompasses multiple dimensions, and in this context, I contend that to rigidly distinguish between therapeutic 'wellbeing' outcomes and justice outcomes with regard to victim-survivors' diverse digital practices ends up limiting how they can perceive justice.

Trauma discourses have had significant impacts upon how sexual violence is framed and understood by victim-survivors, service providers (including those within the justice system), and broader society. Therapeutic options such as counselling and rape crisis centres have emerged as standard responses to acknowledging the trauma of rape in Western liberal democracies (Gavey and Schmidt, 2011; Vera-Gray, 2019). In earlier chapters, research findings indicated that victim-survivors who are participating anonymously or within private groups in digital society are often doing so for support and connection with other victim-survivors, or otherwise supportive audiences. Perhaps consequently, participants in this research framed their experiences according to the trauma of rape discourse (Gavey and Schmidt, 2011). By extension, I argue that their online disclosures and digital practices are themselves impacted by trauma models that frame understandings of sexual violence in specific ways. For instance, on Reddit, victim-survivors would often ask for strategies in moving past the traumatic impacts they were experiencing in the aftermath of sexual violence (see Chapter 6). As I argued in Chapter 6, online communities can constitute spaces where many victim-survivors seek ways to 'fix' the aftermath of being raped. This bears particular implications, notably for victim-survivors who do not feel that they are 'recovering' from sexual violence. Kathleen, for instance, noted that "one of the things about [online spaces] that I find quite difficult, like I personally really don't like the term survivor, I don't feel like a survivor, I feel like this is killing me and that it hasn't finished killing me yet." This quote suggests that trauma discourses can fundamentally shape digital society and the victim-survivor communities within it, potentially excluding those whose narratives exceed the bounds of permissible trauma talk. Despite these constraints, I argue that it is important to critically engage with the potential relationship between trauma discourses, therapeutic responses,

and the concept of informal justice in digital society. Although trauma discourses can certainly restrict the types of 'speech' that occur in digital society, the support that victim-survivors receive online is fundamental to them feeling recognised, contributing to their individual needs being met and a 'sense of justice' occurring.

Experiencing recognition in digital society

Recognition is a necessarily social and a collective process occurring when societies acknowledge, respect and offer autonomy to citizens who have experienced injustice (Fraser and Honneth, 2003; Taylor, 1997). Here, I suggest that the presence of a politics of recognition is at its clearest when considering the experiences that individual victim-survivors have when being recognised or misrecognised in digital society. In the previous chapter, I demonstrated that digital practices have the potential to offer respect, support, belief and validation directly to victim-survivors who share their narratives online, thereby also providing them with recognition (see also Powell and Henry, 2017). In Chapter 5, I presented some of the positive aspects of seeking support online, particularly for those victim-survivors who were isolated or unable to seek adequate supports in their everyday lives. However, this did not fully convey the transformative qualities that many victim-survivors described about experiencing recognition. For example, Allison commented, "without being dramatic, Twitter literally was part of saving my life." Likewise, Tara reflected:

> It's entirely possible that I'd be dead without it, completely possible, because it has helped me cope with so much distress when I first started [disclosing] like, I don't really know what I would have done without it … it had an impact on my healing process in so many ways, and I've developed so many useful self-care and coping skills that I genuinely think that [the community] had a very big hand in the fact that I'm now able to live a reasonably happy life and hold down a full-time job, you know, it has helped to keep me alive. But also, I think it has given me a space to talk about stuff that I can't talk about anywhere else, so I don't feel silenced, I think is the other big thing. – **Tara**

These quotes illustrate the significance of digital platforms in the lives of victim-survivors, along with tangible support that victim-survivors they provide when navigating the aftermath of sexual violence. In earlier chapters, I indicated that victim-survivors navigate their disclosures in ways where they know who their audience will be, and in turn, that they will receive a sympathetic and supportive response, that they will be *recognised*. In short, being recognised in digital society and knowing that this can occur online anytime they need it, helps victim-survivors to speak about sexual violence.

The impacts of rape culture and the trauma model that shapes understandings of sexual violence and how victim-survivors disclose in digital society can influence victim-survivors' needs for recognition. Discussed in Chapter 2, rape culture refers to the socio-cultural impacts of a society that

normalises sexual violence, impacting upon victim-survivors by shaping the ways that broader society responds to their experiences (Estrich, 1987; Gavey, 2005; Phillips, 2017). It creates a context where victim-survivors are often misrecognised by broader society by having their experiences devalued, minimised, or met with disbelief and victim blaming attitudes. Moreover, the dominant model that sexual violence requires therapeutic responses might lead victim-survivors to narrate their stories in particular permissible ways within communities of support (see also Marecek, 1999). As such, many victim-survivors disclose in digital society because they can find an audience who will believe and recognise them (see Chapter 6). Several participants framed digital society according to a trauma model and knew it would often provide spaces of belief, particularly in private communities of victim-survivors. Sarah called it her "healing process," while Olivia referred to it as a means of "moving forward." Umbrae suggested that receiving recognition online meant that they could reach "healing milestones" more quickly. The support and recognition offered in these digital contexts enable victim-survivors to manage and move through the impacts of sexual violence.

Some victim-survivors, like Chandler, were already seeking support from counsellors prior to using digital platforms, but thought that the additional online supports and being able to share his story and help others was "life-changing:"

> Digital media and the Internet as a whole has sped up my healing journey exponentially, I mean, I've moved along and healed unbelievably quicker by utilising the resources that are out there and being smart about who I align myself with and who I interact with and the content that I allow myself to take in, so it all you know, it all serves to heal and encourage healing behaviour and healing activity and healthy mindsets and all of that type of thing, so. I would say it's been ridiculously life-changing. – **Chandler**

These excerpts highlight that digital platforms can be transformative, easing and shifting the ways that victim-survivors live through the aftermath of sexual violence. Moreover, it affirms arguments made in Chapter 5 about how victim-survivors navigate digital society. Chandler's decisions to "be smart about who [he] align[s] [himself] with" echoes some of the earlier discussion about how victim-survivors prioritise safety. However, it is worth noting the responsibilities placed on individuals like Chandler to find communities with similar values around healing, and the potential implications if those healing needs are not met online. For example, both Patti and Coryn suggested that the online support they had received had been inadequate, leading them to access additional formal supports in their everyday lives. This too suggests that online support and recognition, and indeed, informal justice-seeking behaviours, can provide victim-survivors with tools to survive.

Although many participants spoke of being validated and supported after making an online disclosure, it should be noted that recognition is not a guaranteed result of victim-survivors' digital

practices. Discussed further in Chapter 2, several scholars have illuminated the potential harms and impacts of online platforms and digital technologies on victim-survivors who use them. Regarding recognition, Fileborn (2014b) raised the potential impacts on victim-survivors if their online disclosures are not 'heard' or if they receive a negative response to their disclosure. As I have noted above and in earlier chapters, participants in this research emphasised that seeking online support bore mostly positive impacts and outcomes in their lives. Many participants emphasised the limitations in relying solely on digital platforms as places to fulfil support and justice needs. For instance, while occurring infrequently, some participants commented on the negative impacts of having a disclosure ignored. When this happened, it could cause victim-survivors to question their disclosure, to delete it, or to decide not to share their story again within that community. In some ways, this echoes Ullman's (2010) observations that unsupportive attitudes to initial disclosures of rape often result in victim-survivors not seeking further support or disclosing their experiences elsewhere. The potential of having a disclosure ignored was a concern of victim-survivors in this research, but not enough to impede their use of digital platforms. As Umbrae aptly noted, "I think that [the support and resources in online spaces are] really helpful. It does also lead to setbacks sometimes… So there is definitely good and bad, but nothing is all good or all bad. That's only to be expected." This quote summates an idea that was present in all interviews, that is, victim-survivors were able to see the beneficial outcomes of their participation in digital society but also simultaneously felt the complexities and challenges inherent to making an online disclosure.

Victim-survivors gave careful consideration to these factors when determining where and how to discuss their experiences of sexual violence (see Chapters 5 and 6). Considering safety and needs to be supported and heard, victim-survivors typically preferred to share more detailed disclosures in contexts where recognition is a likely result (as opposed to spaces where misrecognition, trolling and so on may occur). Discussed further in Chapter 5, victim-survivors actively navigate digital society, seeking out platforms and shape their online disclosure experiences so that they will be safer. Here, I argue that the recognition that results from these practices is not coincidental to victim-survivors' disclosures. Rather, recognition is actively sought and (re)produced within digital environments where peers mutually understand each other's needs for connection and validation. As will be discussed further in the following section, it is evident that victim-survivors who access online communities regularly do so to provide support to others, making recognition a reciprocal *collective process* that involves exchanging mutual care. This suggests that victim-survivors value both being recognised and recognising others, and as such, within the context of online communities, some level of support or validation is likely to occur after a disclosure.

Despite the apparent ways that victim-survivors experience recognition following an online disclosure, whether this amounts to informal justice in digital society requires further scrutiny. Justice

can be a highly individualised experience, particularly in relation to sexual violence, whereby neoliberal society expects victim-survivors to take their experience through the criminal justice system. Indeed, I have contended throughout this thesis that it is useful to focus on individuals' experiences in theorising what informal justice might be, as it centres their perspectives and in doing so, reveals that justice is multiple inclusive of therapeutic outcomes. However, as discussed in Chapter 3, justice also typically refers to broader societal interests, whether it is through criminal justice, or through social, political, and community-based conceptualisations of justice existing beyond these rigid institutions. Consequently, while one victim-survivor may experience a sense of recognition, validation, or justice following an online disclosure, this *may* have little impact beyond those individuals accessing and providing online supports. Indeed, Fraser (2003: 8) cautions the overemphasis of individuals, commenting that "the demise of communism, the surge of free-market ideology, the rise of 'identity politics' in both its fundamentalist and progressive forms…decentre, if not to extinguish, claims for egalitarian redistribution." Here, Fraser (2003) is calling for a framework for justice that considers the equal distribution of resources, suggesting that the hyper-individualisation of neoliberalism and the focus on recognition distracts from the communal goals of justice. While there is merit to such critiques, it is worth noting that the process of seeking and receiving recognition in digital spaces is *necessarily* collective and social, and as such, it does not suffice to suggest that recognition is an occurrence that only brings about justice for those involved in it. Victim-survivors' digital practices bear multiple and diverse outcomes which have implications for justice, and resultantly, there is the potential that informal justice in digital society extends beyond individuals' experiences. The remaining discussion highlights that informal justice not only kaleidoscopically refracts in the lives of victim-survivors, but also that it is multiple, iterative, and layered, whereby victim-survivors' participation in digital society can contribute to justice in their own lives, within a collective setting, and beyond.

The potential for collective justice in digital society

This research has established that individual victim-survivors pursue informal justice in digital society through an array of disclosure practices that meet their support and justice needs. Here, I argue that communities of victim-survivors and their supporters constitute a collective justice. As I posited in Chapter 7, many victim-survivors spoke out to prevent perpetrators from abusing others and to hold them accountable to a broader community, which signals towards community-based and collective justice goals. Moreover, in Chapter 6 I demonstrated how many victim-survivors disclose online to specific audiences, either to peers or to people who are likely to be supportive and have shared values. The victim-survivors in this research often navigated online spaces in ways that limited risk of negative interactions or trolling, typically achieved by remaining anonymous or maintaining privacy.

In Chapter 5, I have illustrated the varying ways that victim-survivors form communities online. The following sections extend the arguments in each of these chapters by establishing how online communities are sites of *collective recognition*, where victim-survivors can mutually provide ongoing care, advice, and support for their peers.

Digital storytelling and collective witnessing: online communities as sites of informal justice

In the previous section, I suggested that understandings of informal justice in the aftermath of sexual violence should broaden to include victim-survivors' digital support seeking practices. In these spaces, victim-survivors not only seek support but also provide and receive it. As such, informal justice is not just an individual process, but one that occurs in communities through the interactions of those seeking recognition and the audience 'witnessing' the disclosure. In Chapter 5, Coryn exemplified this as being "more of a helper on Reddit and not much of a sharer." Victim-survivors routinely described that their desire to provide support for peers led them to access communities and groups intermittently and over extended periods. Community is, therefore, an important element in the collective healing and connection that occurs for victim-survivors when they disclose in digital contexts. I contend that although community has been an overlooked aspect of informal justice in digital society, the interactions that occur in these spaces often fulfil important justice needs. As discussed further in Chapter 6, communities emerge and take shape in myriad ways online and they can be 'unbounded,' amorphous, and have ever-changing members (Lupton, 2015: 155; see also Powell, Stratton and Cameron, 2018: 59). Furthermore, the ways that victim-survivors find connections in digital society echoes Turkle's (2011) conceptualisation that networked sociality inversely fostering isolation and community. Turkle (2011) seems to caution the reliance upon digital connection at the expense of "physical real" connection, contending people are 'alone' despite their relationships with technology. Contrarily, this research found that for victim-survivors technology bridges spatial distances and decreases some of the isolation they experience in their everyday lives in the aftermath of sexual violence. This is particularly important when considering the stigma that remains attached to "speaking as" a victim-survivor (see Alcoff, 2018). While victim-survivors' digital practices and the communities that they participate in are unbounded, transient and multiple, they experience 'togetherness' by participating in collective peer support.

This 'togetherness' might also be described as a *collective recognition* and by extension, a collective informal justice occurring for victim-survivors as communities of peers. In relation to online feminist activism, Powell and Henry (2017: 286) state that "online testimonies of sexual violence and harassment facilitate emerging practices of both individual informal justice and collective recognition in response to rape." This infers that the personal stories of victim-survivors have political

significance and, through activism, can spur a collective recognising of the injustices of sexual violence. This research affirms and extends this notion by demonstrating that the collective recognition produced through victim-survivors' testimonies, disclosures, and participation in online communities does not occur exclusively at the level of feminist activism (although this aspect will be further discussed in the following section.) Rather, collective recognition also occurs in digital spaces where victim-survivors have purposefully sought out audiences to assure safety and anonymity in their disclosure. I contend that this collective recognition occurs similarly in response to 'private' and 'public' disclosures through the witnessing and acknowledgment of sexual violence and its lasting impacts. However, victim-survivors might experience collective recognition differently in private contexts because the audience has the capacity to not only recognise their disclosure but also understand and connect with narratives of sexual violence (see Chapter 6). As I demonstrated in Chapter 6, victim-survivors 'speak in' online communities to connect with people who had similar experiences and who could provide advice about the aftermath of sexual violence. This type of support and recognition cannot necessarily be achieved amongst a broader online public through online anti-rape activism. Although, as Powell (2015b) has noted, there is likely to be some overlap in understandings of online anti-rape activism and avenues to informal justice in digital society, I likewise suggest that these digital practices are not interchangeable, nor are the outcomes and impacts necessarily analogous. However, the finding presented here that victim-survivors provide one another with collective recognition in community settings extends scholarly understandings of informal justice in digital society. I contend that this adds layers and multiplicity making informal justice practices accessible even to those victim-survivors whose disclosures occur in private and anonymous ways.

Collective recognition, regardless of the context of the disclosure, requires ongoing participation and commitment by victim-survivors to ensure the continued support to those who disclose. It requires an audience of victim-survivors, who are willing to listen, support, believe, hear, and recognise the testimonies of individual victim-survivors who come into a community. While having stories acknowledged and believed are important aspects of individuals' experiences disclosing online, there are shared community values in participating as a listener and being the audience to stories. Thus, a key finding is that amorphous communities in digital society are not only an example of collective recognition but also *collective witnessing,* where victim-survivors are each other's witnesses. In a sense, victim-survivors' connections and 'togetherness' in digital society echo the values underpinning transitional justice processes highlighted in Chapter 3, such as civil society tribunals in the aftermath of wartime sexual violence (Henry, 2010). Moreover, as noted earlier and in Chapter 6, the promise of collective witnessing amongst peers in online communities allows victim-survivors to

speak to the pain of sexual violence in ways that are rendered 'unspeakable' in other contexts (Caruth, 1996; Ferreday, 2017; Keller et al., 2016; Scarry, 1985).

As I discussed in Chapter 7, digital storytelling is an important way that victim-survivors can fulfil individual justice needs of being heard and being believed (see also Powell, 2015a, 2015b). My analysis extends this, highlighting the importance of *peer connection* in digital society. There is scope for informal justice to be fostered in online community settings whereby outcomes are centred on recognition and witnessing. Moreover, digital storytelling and activism are not the only ways that victim-survivors disclose sexual violence online and the process of seeking justice goes beyond these practices (see also Chapter 5). I argue that the collective witnessing of rape disclosures in online communities does not require the presence of a full narrative, and often victim-survivors might not want to share, articulate, or remember their experiences in precise detail. As Supriya indicated in Chapter 7, online communities provided a space to experience support and recognition without the potential trauma of telling the full story. Collective recognition that occurs in the "broader community" is arguably less comfortable for some victim-survivors:

> It's more relaxing, it's more personally supportive to spend time online with other survivors… I feel a bit more seen then, because sometimes if I share something in order to draw attention to an issue in the broader community, people will think 'wow you're so brave to share that' and stuff, but it's a bit like inspiration porn or something. It's like people just are so curious to hear about your horrible story and they just think it's so gory and entertaining and although they might genuinely think it's great that you're sharing this to draw attention to this or whatever, they also are not really seeing you as a person. They're kind of seeing you as a, some kind of, I don't know it's a bit objectifying or something. Whereas in the survivor community most of the time when I'm online talking to fellow survivors, we're not really talking about our anxiety attacks or our medication, we're just talking about, like, how there's a new season of Star Trek now. – **Supriya**

This quote acknowledges that the type of disclosure and audience will produce diverse experiences of recognition. Those who favoured accessing communities as support spaces typically felt safer in these contexts because the implications of disclosing to other victim-survivors were less traumatising, risky, or daunting than sharing to a broader public. These findings place value in private, partial and incomplete disclosures made to audiences who will validate and believe experiences of sexual violence, rather than question or 'objectify' them. Claiming that informal justice occurs at this community level expands the concept. Moreover, it legitimises the practices of victim-survivors who choose not to participate in movements that typically require public and identifiable disclosures, such as #MeToo (see Chapter 6). Broadening informal justice in this way acknowledges that it is enough

to identify as a victim-survivor in digital society and disclosing specific details or narratives need not be a requirement. Collective recognition and witnessing can occur without being specific about the experience itself. As Zadie mentioned in Chapter 6, victim-survivors do not necessarily "owe" their narratives to the broader public, or to anyone. To imply that informal justice only occurs through such disclosures is, I contend, inherently limiting and often excludes the participation of those who prefer to engage with digital platforms in private and anonymous contexts.

Although victim-survivors who participated in this research universally referred to having supports in digital society as beneficial to their lives, some saw limitations in these communities. For instance, some contended that online communities do not produce lasting impacts beyond the individuals who use them and were critical of the culture that arises through collective recognition. Some wondered if it was an effective way to bring about change or action in everyday contexts, outside of the community. Helena often felt frustrated by online communities and thought that their focus on trauma narratives could hold victim-survivors back, keeping them stuck in a repeating loop of reading and validating other's experiences. She said:

> I think sometimes it's a bit like being survivors from a shipwreck and we just kind of cling together after the experience, and we're just paddling in the water, and it's not going to make the boat come up from undersea again. I just feel like we're trying to keep each other's head above the water…I don't think I would [keep] return[ing] unless I found some positivity in [the connection it provides] in the moment, but, I do wonder sometimes if it keeps us trapped in that headspace. – **Helena**

This demonstrates that although these online communities are a site of collective recognition, they might be limiting for some of the people who access them. This is because victim-survivors will likely have differing support and justice needs, as noted in earlier chapters, and as a result, communities are unlikely to provide the same experience for everyone who participates. Helena strongly desired a formal justice outcome that she was not able to pursue and as a result, these informal justice spaces lacked what she needed and to an extent kept her "trapped in that headspace." Likewise, Kathleen thought that these communities had a dominant framework where the only 'acceptable' outcome in the aftermath of sexual violence was 'recovery.' This demonstrates a limitation of these communities, as they create prescribed ways of knowing about sexual violence and particular ways of responding to it in the aftermath that is typically informed by trauma models. Therefore, despite the potentially multiple aspects of informal justice in digital society, these practices remain limited by the dominant paradigms and discourses that frame how victim-survivors can speak about sexual violence. As was noted in Chapter 2, the task of speaking about pain and trauma is fraught, it necessitates speaking while creating an insurmountable task (Levi, 2014; Scarry, 1985). This research has found that the ways that speech is restricted also serves to confine informal justice practices in digital society.

It is worth considering the feminist view that women, victim-survivors, and other oppressed groups, need their own spaces separate from broader society to resist, organise, and collectively pursue justice (Clark-Parsons, 2018; Megarry, 2017a). Contrary to Helena's views above, Susie thought that online communities could foster resistive and collective politics alongside being a space for support. Although Susie's online community comprised of fellow students who she likely knew in everyday contexts, her perspective indicates that digital spaces form on the basis of multiple and varied shared values and beliefs. As discussed in Chapter 6, victim-survivors have different experiences depending on the cultural norms within the communities they are part of (Lupton, 2015). Susie further commented on the importance of the digital nature of her community on Facebook:

> I really do feel like because it's an Internet space, it's not a physical space that can be taken away from us, it's not like they can monitor who's going in and out of the women's room, and 'No, we're not going to give you a women's room,' or there's a lot of spaces in the college that women just don't feel comfortable to go, full stop. And certainly, men would not allow women to just be there by themselves. The fact that there is a space that we have control over who can come in and come out, that they don't have access to see what's going on in there, and that we can all share our experiences, I think is definitely manifesting itself in outside action. – **Susie**

Susie's experience is demonstrative of the significance of digital space compared to other spatial contexts as constituting an alternative site for informal justice. Although it can originate in digital contexts, I argue that informal justice is not necessarily restricted to these domains. Rather, its impacts are potentially fluid, extending into terrestrial experiences and action. The 'safety' of these spaces, discussed throughout Chapter 5 and 6, might provide a sense of control and empowerment that leads to action elsewhere. There is a potential relationship between safety and informal justice, whereby safety is both an outcome of pursuing justice (in some contexts) online, and it may also spark further action or movement towards justice.

Fraser (2008b) contends that recognition is not enough to paint a complete picture of social justice. Justice is comprised of recognition of injustices, redistribution of resources, and equal political representation, whereby social conditions shift such that all people in society can equally participate in social life (Fraser, 1998: 30). The discussion presented in the preceding sections could indicate that victim-survivors' navigation of digital society as individuals or collective communities leads to fuller participation in public life. Digital society is a significant aspect of the lives of victim-survivors who disclose, and participants revealed its transformative effects on their everyday lives. As Tara said earlier, participation in digital society meant that she was able to live a "reasonably happy life," and allowed her to maintain full-time employment. This suggests that the individual and collective recognition occurring in digital society can, to an extent, impact how victim-survivors

participate in broader society, therefore exemplifying Fraser's (2008b) ideas of social justice. As discussed in Chapters 5 and 6, given that victim-survivors navigate digital society in particular ways according to their varying needs, in some instances, their participation in digital society might result in increased political participation in public life. In the next section, I discuss how disclosures also lead to informal justice occurring beyond individual and collective communities of victim-survivors. These additional layers of informal justice encompass the broader structures of society and the discourses that shape how sexual violence is understood, which, as I note below, might be impacted by the proliferation of rape narratives produced in digital society in a post #MeToo context.

The potential for societal and discursive justice in digital society

In this section, I address an additional layer of informal justice that occurs through victim-survivors' digital practices. I discuss this in two distinct parts, the first of which acknowledges the potential structural impacts of digital practices, which can shift societal and institutional responses to sexual violence. Following this, the discussion turns to the discursive shifts that arise from informal justice in digital society, referring to how victim-survivors' disclosures challenge how sexual violence is perceived by victim-survivors themselves and the broader community. For instance, the development of #MeToo has, arguably, impacted how broader society understands sexual violence, and in some contexts, societal responses to sexual violence (Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019b; Gleeson and Turner, 2019; Loney-Howes and Fileborn, 2019). However, it has simultaneously created barriers about who can speak out and constructed contexts where particular survival stories are acceptable and normalised at the exclusion of others (Fileborn and Phillips, 2019; Ison, 2019; Kagal, Cowan and Jawad, 2019; Onwuachi-Willig, 2018; Phipps, 2019). As I indicated in earlier chapters, victim-survivors can feel left out of these kinds of movements. Thus, while informal justice can produce discursive shifts that encourage others to speak out, these practices also produce exclusionary effects and dominating scripts surrounding sexual violence victimisation that impact how some individuals navigate digital society. Indeed, the extent to which recognition, redistribution and representation occur for individual victim-survivors seems highly dependent on their case-by-case experiences (see Fraser, 2008b). While informal justice can occur through online disclosures, there is a need to examine the potential structural and discursive impacts of victim-survivors' digital practices.

Speaking out and social justice: victim-survivors, public testimonies, and online activism

Victim-survivors' digital practices can be understood as contributing to a broader social justice through contributions to public discourse. For example, the viral consumption of Chanel Miller's Victim Impact Statement led to shifts in structural responses to sexual assault in the state of

California, notably through changes to the legal definition of rape to include digital penetration (Miller, 2019; see also Serisier, 2018b). Serisier (2018b: 78) suggests that "a document designed to speak within the institutional and discursive framework of the legal system became when recontextualised, an indictment of that system." While Serisier (2018b) framed Miller's (Baker, 2016; Miller, 2019) statement as "public speech," here I argue that the digital nature of its 'recontextualisation' is significant. The virality of the statement and the outrage it amassed worldwide played out within digital society, and while it was a heavily reported case within the media, the extent to which the statement was discussed and shared amongst digital social networks arguably produces further "stickiness" around the narrative, making structural responses within the legal system possible (Ahmed, 2004). Indeed, scholars have made similar comments about online feminist activist movements, noting that the stickiness of hashtags has perhaps to an extent produced a culture of belief (Mendes, Ringrose, and Keller 2019; Serisier, 2018b, 2019).

Scholarly analysis of activist movements such as #BeenRapedNeverReported, #YesAllWomen and #notokay, have discussed the transformative impacts of online activism, particularly noting the ways that it challenges rape culture (Baer, 2016; Bogen et al., 2018; Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016). As Loney-Howes and Fileborn (2019: 336) suggest, "far from being *just* another hashtag, #MeToo has engrained itself in popular discourse." #MeToo perhaps offers greater promise than preceding online feminist activism, simply because it remains on the agenda in news media and, to an extent, within the political sphere. In many industries, #MeToo has called for a change in how men are able to abuse and harass women without consequences, and in some instances has arguably presented opportunities to address gender inequalities (O'Neil et al., 2018). Simultaneously, however, these types of disclosures are highly bounded in the types of change they can affect. As argued in Chapter 6, it is incongruous to automatically label victim-survivors' speaking out as activism or to contend that is inherently political (see also Loney-Howes, 2019). While it is hoped that hashtags will be a starting point to change, often little is achieved with regards to dismantling the political and structural causes of sexual violence (Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019a). Megarry (2018) contends that to conclusively suggest that hashtags like #MeToo and #BeenRapedNeverReported are themselves 'movements' problematically implies that feminist hashtags can produce social change comparable to those brought about by the Women's Liberation Movement. Moreover, while #MeToo amassed millions of disclosures, as Umbrae noted, "I couldn't tell what people [were] saying their experiences were because they weren't actually using words at all, it's just like a hashtag." This suggests that some aspects of the #MeToo 'movement' lack cohesion or clear political goals, which limit what disclosures achieve in terms of structural impacts and social justice. Despite these potential limitations of feminist online activism as a tool to achieve social justice, there are well established scholarly links that critically engage with the ways that public forms of speaking out fits

within the concept of informal justice (Fileborn 2014, 2017; Henry and Powell, 2017; Loney-Howes 2017; Powell 2015a; Powell, Stratton and Cameron, 2018). This literature suggests that hashtag events visibly shift and redirect public discourse around sexual violence to more feminist or political understandings of these issues (see also Rentschler, 2015).

Research exploring #MeToo from the perspective of people who used the hashtag contends that participation stemmed from an "inability to remain silent," while simultaneously being a potentially traumatic and "affective" process (Mendes and Ringrose, 2019: 40). My research both extends and critically engages with Mendes and Ringrose's (2019) findings, asserting that although victim-survivors understand the transformative impacts of informal justice practices in digital society, there are also significant consequences for those who are rendered unable to participate. Some participants, like David, praised #MeToo, saying, "it brings a human face to [sexual violence]." This might be especially important for victim-survivors whose experiences exist on the margins, such as male victim-survivors, who are often silenced by dominant discourses framing women as victims and men as perpetrators (see, for example Ison, 2019; Kagal, Cowan and Jawad, 2019). Moreover, several participants saw #MeToo as being able to raise awareness about sexual violence, even if they personally did not or could not participate. However, despite acknowledging the importance of #MeToo, several victim-survivors, like Tara, were also highly critical of its outcomes in broader society:

> I think #MeToo is important but I just, I don't know, it's like, everyone's acting like 'oh well #MeToo's happened, so everything's okay now' is it? Fuck. I'm sorry but #MeToo's like, a nice hashtag that happened… and I think the problem is that some people have for years been dealing with [the impacts of sexual violence], this is affecting my physical health, my mental health, my career, my relationships, my friendships and my finances, and then people invented a Twitter hashtag one day and suddenly everyone thinks the problem's just like 'oh well we're all aware of it now,' – no you're fucking not.
> – **Tara**

Tara acknowledges the importance of #MeToo, but importantly raises questions about how awareness-raising is celebrated in broader society as a significant outcome of disclosures of sexual violence. This problematically infers that awareness-raising is 'enough,' and in doing so, denies the significant impacts and ongoing (sometimes lifelong) experiences of injustice in the lives of victim-survivors living through the aftermath of sexual violence. Moreover, as argued in Chapter 6, #MeToo places expectations that victim-survivors will speak out, and in doing so, erases the challenges that they face when navigating and speaking out in digital society and beyond. Due to these pressures and limitations of hashtag movements, victim-survivors may not experience recognition in the same ways in these contexts as they do in online communities of peers.

Despite the exclusionary and silencing impacts of online anti-rape activism, these disclosures can provide informal justice outcomes that positively impact victim-survivors ways beyond individual recognition. The conversations that these hashtag events spark in digital society can have significant impacts on victim-survivors. For example, Allison spoke of how online conversations about sexual violence and other social justice issues on Twitter continued to shape her knowledge. She said:

> For me, I think that ongoing conversations are essential to recognise the frequency with which these things occur. The fact that they are wrong. The fact that your emotional and physical and psychological responses to them, whatever those responses are, are valid. You know, whether you choose to report, whether you choose not to report, whether you disclose or don't disclose, whether you… fought back, whether you couldn't fight back and you froze, whether your body responded or didn't respond or, you know… however you responded, or choose to respond, or choose to respond in the future, that you're heard and that you're understood and that you're supported and that whatever decisions you make around your experience are okay. – **Allison**

This excerpt demonstrates that discourses that emerge in digital society, often in the wake of hashtags, can challenge the prescriptive ways that sexual violence embodied and responded to by individuals. Similarly, Rentschler (2015) suggests that the hashtag #safetytipsforladies sparked online conversations about how rape culture infiltrates understandings of sexual violence prevention. These conversations about rape and rape culture, sparked by victim-survivors' disclosures, can serve as catalysts for individuals to understand and reframe their experiences. In this way, online anti-rape activism has greater impacts in shaping conversations and educating society about sexual violence.

Although public disclosures of sexual violence and online anti-rape activism can contribute towards a sense of informal justice and social justice, it could also be argued that these digital practices do little to shift the economic order or to fully 'redistribute' capital and resources. Fraser (1998) contends that this as a fundamental element of social justice. While the discussion in this chapter has exemplified a clear connection between digital society and victim-survivors' experiences of recognition and representation, it is unclear the extent to which redistribution is a possible outcome. However, Henry (2015: 209) has posited that in instances of wartime sexual violence, redistribution can occur in the form of *victim satisfaction*, restitution, or monetary compensation (emphasis added). Although some of these outcomes, especially economic distribution, do not typically occur as a result of digital disclosures, I have demonstrated that many participants in this research felt satisfied after finding a context in digital society where they could tell their story and be heard. I argue that when victim-survivors share narratives to specific audiences and to a broader public, this has societal effects. Moreover, these collective practices increase the potential for victim-survivors to participate in informal justice. Moreover, it is through the critical online discourses that

emerge resultant from, as discussed in Chapter 6, victim-survivors are often inspired to speak out by their peers. The ongoing conversations that these practices spark in broader publics demonstrate that a "feminist politics of recognition" can occur which contributes to a dismantling of societal oppressions of victim-survivors (see Henry and Powell, 2017). This exemplifies how recognition, representation and redistribution can occur at intertwined and varying layers that include personal outcomes alongside the political.

Representation or a Politics of Difference? Political impacts and implications of victim-survivors' digital practices

It is unclear whether digital practices can unequivocally provide victim-survivors with increased representation in the political sphere (Fraser, 2008b). I have argued in this chapter that victim-survivors' disclosures may increase their socio-political standing through recognition of their experiences of injustice. This too can result in substantive shifts in how sexual violence is framed at a societal level, which can produce ripple effects to the opportunities victim-survivors have moving through life in the aftermath of sexual violence. In *Scales of Justice*, Fraser (2008b) contends that participatory parity is not only a benchmark of the outcomes of social justice but also a way to highlight the obstacles in achieving justice. Much like Derrida, she suggests that the outcome of full social justice may be an ideal never fully realised. The notion of participatory parity therefore also allows for the critical analysis and revelation of structures and other socio-cultural factors that impede justice from occurring. Likewise, Young's (1990) earlier development of a politics of difference framework encourages the identification of oppressive systems that reinforce structural injustices. She signals to the importance of working from a position that acknowledges experiences of oppression, emphasising the diverse ways that individuals experience oppression and domination because of systems and institutions (Young, 1990). Therefore, according to both Fraser (2008b) and Young (1990), the *identification* of structures that cause injustice can shift the social ideals in which justice may occur. Fraser (1996, 2008b) outlines the role of counterpublics in revealing and resisting the hegemonic norms that facilitate injustice. Salter (2013) contends that when victim-survivors' digital practices resist the confines of the justice system it consists of an online counterpublic (Salter, 2013). Powell (2015a) further argues that these counterpublics constitute a resistive politics and legitimise the ever-developing technosocial practices that can achieve informal justice. Resultantly, steady online discourses about sexual violence and the shifting digital practices that are utilised to engage in resistive politics demonstrate the strength of counterpublics in challenging dominant structures and elucidating the injustices experienced in the aftermath of sexual violence.

Digital society produces various contexts where resistive online discourses and counterpublics are shared widely and have differing socio-cultural impacts. For instance, in online

communities of victim-survivors, trauma discourses create a supportive environment that frames sexual violence as something that victim-survivors 'recover' from (see Chapter 6). As discussed in Chapter 5, the types of advice sought in these community spaces shape how the people accessing them understand sexual violence. For example, issues such as consent are discussed in ways that constitute a resistive politics to normative societal understandings of rape. In these contexts, victim-survivors are able to say as little or as much as they like about their experience, and while there are certainly rape scripts present in these digital environments (see also Loney-Howes, 2015), victim-survivors perceive that storytelling in these spaces is more autonomous than in other institutional settings like the criminal justice system (see Chapter 7). On Reddit, the dominant discourses of the space shape particular norms that aim to be inclusive, supportive, and provide the information that victim-survivors need, which then positively affect most of the victims-survivors who access /r/rapecounseling. By contrast, online counterpublics that occur in other digital contexts will have different discursive impacts. For instance, the counterpublics that emerge through online events like #MeToo and other digital anti-rape activism will have greater impacts on the ways that broader society understand rape. These counterpublics can challenge the normative framings of sexual violence on a much bigger scale, where a broader public is more likely to interact with these shifting discourses. As discussed in Chapter 2, scholars have discussed how these kinds of counterpublics challenge rape culture (Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016; Loney-Howes, 2018; Mendes, Ringrose and Keller, 2018; Rentschler, 2014; Sills et al., 2016).

Although online counterpublics are a significant way to pursue informal justice and might impact broader societal understandings of rape, it would be misleading to suggest that these shifts in discourses are effective in wholly challenging or subverting dominant scripts of sexual violence. Throughout this thesis, I have shown that online counterpublics are not so subversive as to create environments in which *all* victim-survivors are able to freely share and discuss their stories and the impacts of sexual violence. In fact, online counterpublics can exclude those who cannot speak because their experiences do not fit within the norms created within online discourses. Movements like #MeToo have received criticism for being dominantly for white women, and therefore not inclusive of victim-survivors who do not fit within this norm (Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019b; Kagal, Cowan and Jawad, 2019). For example, David commented that he participated in #MeToo to highlight that "[sexual violence] does happen to guys." Moreover, the discourses produced by hashtags like #MeToo can alienate individuals who cannot (or do not want to) speak out publicly. To this effect, online counterpublics can further marginalise victim-survivors who already experience potentially debilitating and overlapping oppressions in the aftermath of sexual violence. This can occur in closed online communities too, although perhaps to a lesser extent, where the norms of these spaces do not allow for all experiences to be heard. For instance, Xanthea said that several

online communities would not allow references to religion, as it is a topic likely to trigger other participants. Likewise, Coryn discussed being removed from an online community after raising the topic of orgasm during rape. Evidently, in attempting to create safe and non-triggering environments, these communities create norms and taboos that reinforce the unspeakability of particular experiences of sexual violence.

The ongoing socio-political, cultural, discursive, and individual impacts of online counterpublics on broader sexual violence discourses is sadly beyond the scope of this thesis and will be an important topic of future research. For instance, Helena commented that one of her fears about the proliferation of #MeToo was the potential that it would normalise sexual violence, with negative consequences for victim-survivors. She said, "I almost think that the problem is that it reveals how it has happened to so many of us, we almost think it's part of life and we just have to deal with it, and if the next person deals with it, why can't I?" The normalising of sexual violence may justify sustained backlash in broader society, where victim-survivors are further responsibilised to "just…deal with it." Indeed, as I have discussed in earlier chapters, this backlash has already begun to occur, although (see Fileborn and Phillips, 2019; Hindes and Fileborn, 2019). If a sustained backlash to #MeToo and victim-survivors' disclosures continues to occur, much like the backlash against 'victim feminism' in the 1990s, issues of rape justice may again lose social momentum and impetus needed to shift rape culture and create the social conditions in which justice can occur. Helena's concerns are just one example that underlines the importance of ongoing scholarship in this area to understand the longer-term impacts of online discourses and resistive politics about sexual violence.

Discussion: navigating the aftermath in digital society and moving towards justice

> With a lot of… social [and] political issues… I personally feel like the biggest and best thing that a lot of people can do without having any great sort of standing in society is to create a space for discussion and then to make the spaces as visible as possible… it's a really immediate and fairly accessible way of, like not only sort of facilitating change in whatever degree but also, there's establishing, in whatever way, a sense of community I guess, giving people the opportunity to be heard when particularly in this instance, they're probably very rarely heard. – **Dylan**

Dylan's words succinctly outline how victim-survivors' digital practices can have ripple effects at an individual level, at a community level, and a societal and discursive level. They identify that sexual violence is a social and political issue, contending that creating spaces for discussion is likely to have

societal impacts. Moreover, they highlight that digital practices create a sense of community and opportunities for individuals to be heard. While this highlights the various levels at which disclosures can have impacts, I contend that it also demonstrates the *layered* nature of digital practices and informal justice. In the following discussion, I discuss these layers of informal justice, commenting on some of the ways they influence and interact with one another, at times occurring simultaneously. Ultimately, I argue that understanding informal justice as occurring through layers that have this capacity to interact and influence one another extends the notion that justice is kaleidoscopic (see McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018), illustrating the importance of having frameworks that support the existence of fluid and shifting conceptualisations of informal justice.

Throughout this chapter, I have discussed how informal justice can occur for individuals and collective groups of victim-survivors alongside its potential transformative impacts within society. Here, I argue that these different layers and impacts of informal justice are not only multiple but also interactive, potentially shaping victim-survivors' digital practices and their outcomes. To best understand how these different aspects of informal justice interact, I suggest that it is useful to visualise something less contained than the kaleidoscope. Kaleidoscopic justice, while a shifting and refracting pattern, is contained mostly within an individual's view, with each victim-survivor potentially seeing justice as something different (McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018). In Chapter 7, it became clear that although victim-survivors had diverse perspectives of what justice is, they were simultaneously bounded by structural and discursive constraints that meant that procedural justice often framed their perceptions (see Clark, 2010, 2015). This bore particular implications for considering informal justice in digital society. However, I argued that the outcomes of victim-survivors' digital practices can meet justice needs and provide a sense of justice that procedural justice might not be able to provide (see also Clark, 2010). This indicates that there may be a need to conceptualise informal justice in digital society beyond the individuals' perspective, looking instead to the broader impacts of these practices that occur in multiplicity, that influence victim-survivors to seek connection and a space to share their stories online. Informal justice in digital society can occur in multiple ways through a diverse range of digital practices, in contexts that are diverse and layered, resultantly, conceptualising it requires an acknowledgement of its multiplicity. This is particularly important given that these informal justice-seeking practices do not make up a dominant perspective within justice discourses.

Informal justice is multiple and layered, and individuals' digital practices might both shape and be shaped by the spaces they are disclosing in (see Chapter 6). For instance, victim-survivors' digital practices can impact the ways that communities develop and how collective witnessing occurs. Similarly, these practices can influence the shifts occurring at the level of society and discourse through a resistive politics that seeks to challenge the dominant scripts of sexual violence. However,

it is worth repeating that these interactions are fluid and therefore multi-directional and the outcomes of disclosures are likely to impact how victim-survivors engage in digital society (see Chapter 5 and 6). The justice outcomes that occur at societal and discursive levels are capable of shaping the digital practices and informal justice-seeking behaviours that happen at other levels. For example, online conversations occurring about sexual violence, such as those facilitated by #MeToo or the Stanford case, can impact and change victim-survivors' digital practices by causing them to mute their Twitter feeds or disengage from social media (see Chapter 5). These differing impacts of victim-survivors' digital practices interact in ways that continue to influence and shape how these practices occur, and in doing so, shape how informal justice develops. Informal justice in digital society occurs through multiple and diverse disclosure practices, which are then further shaped by the impacts, outcomes, and responses to those practices. As such, informal justice in digital society is likely to shift along with the technosocial practices that make up these justice-seeking behaviours.

The fluidity of this model suggests that informal justice practices and their impacts will continue to shift as changes develop at each layer. Moreover, it demonstrates that there is no specific way of understanding what practices constitute informal justice. It supports what Powell (2015a) has argued, that technosocial practices are likely to continue to emerge, through different platforms, 'movements,' communities and so on. Indeed, it is entirely possible that with further research and theorising, that additional layers and levels at which justice occurs will emerge. The model I outline and suggest here, therefore, does not aim to be deterministic or prescriptive. Rather, it illustrates the diverse ways that justice can occur, that these layers can occur simultaneously, and supports the argument in Chapter 7 that victim-survivors can have varied and complex understandings of how occurs in society and their personal lives. Understanding informal justice as multiple and interactional also demonstrates that despite the individualised ways that sexual violence experiences are disclosed, these digital practices are also collective, and at times, socio-cultural. In this way, informal justice traverses both the personal and the political. While these practices can be highly individual and at times difficult to navigate (see Chapter 5), I have argued in this chapter that the consequences of disclosure often go beyond the person who has shared their experience by facilitating collective recognition and witnessing.

This framework also illustrates the importance of considering the overlaps of therapeutic and judicial responses in the aftermath of sexual violence. The collective witnessing and communal support that occur simultaneously in digital spaces demonstrate a coalescence of therapeutic and justice discourses. Both of these discourses work to frame sexual violence, as discussed in earlier chapters. Trauma and therapeutic discourses have had a significant impact on how sexual violence is framed and understood in broader society (Gavey and Schmidt, 2011). As noted in Chapters 5 and 6, Reddit disclosures and interview participants frequently referred to healing, recovery and therapy. By

considering the role of individual and communal healing as a part of the process of collective witnessing, the concept of justice might broaden to be inclusive of those victim-survivors who have little interest in interacting with the criminal justice system or a formal reporting process. This is not necessarily to advocate that these formal structures be abandoned, as they constitute an important role in society. Indeed, I contend that there is much that these structures can learn from the informal justice-seeking practices that occur among victim-survivors in digital society. However, given the extent to which these systems fail victim-survivors of sexual violence, informal justice processes must be validated as real and tangible ways that victim-survivors can obtain a sense of justice. Informal justice should not be seen as inferior, or supplementary, or even necessarily complementary, to formal processes. This research has shown that digital practices have significant and transformative impacts on the lives of victim-survivors and their communities. As noted in Chapter 7, many interviewees felt that justice was an experience limited to those who reported to police or had a trial. Victim-survivors should be able to envisage their digital engagement, whether it is to seek support, to be part of a community, or to participate in activism, as being a form of justice.

Derrida (1992) suggests that justice is elusive, and to attempt to rigidly define and wholly understand it is to ultimately limit its conceptual potential. He argued that through deconstruction and questioning the social context in which injustice occurs, society could move towards the 'horizon' of justice (Derrida, 1992). The multiple layers of informal justice outlined throughout this chapter allow for this deconstruction to continue, while simultaneously acknowledging the political realities of Western liberal democracies and the experiences of victim-survivors who have lived through sexual violence. As such, the contribution of this thesis is to argue that our understandings of justice cannot be limited to any one level of informal justice discussed in this chapter. Moreover, to rely on structures and systems such as the law and criminal justice system, that exude the power to decide what is 'just,' is limiting. To focus solely on the experiences of individuals who have experienced injustice, as if these experiences exist outside of the context of societal oppressions, is limiting. As such, this multilayered conceptualisation of informal justice not only provides a fuller picture of what justice can be but also considered together, suggests that there is value in conceptualising justice from different positions and subjectivities.

There are numerous ways in which this framework may be considered inconsistent, and it is worth recognising some of these limitations. Each of the levels of justice has arguable fallacies, which is a key reason why it is important to consider how these levels interact and inform one another. argued in Chapter 7, there are complexities and nuances in how individual victim-survivors perceive justice, which is often influenced by their environment and understandings of formal justice systems. As I indicated in that chapter and here, victim-survivors could simultaneously acknowledge failures of formal justice, the importance of online communities, and the potential societal and discursive

impacts of these digital practices. As such, the framework outlined in this chapter, despite its potential inconsistencies, derives directly from the simultaneously multiple perceptions that victim-survivors had of justice. Thus, by acknowledging the complexities in how victim-survivors perceive justice it can be understood that victim-survivors' digital practices contribute to individual and collective experiences of informal justice through socio-cultural recognition, collective witnessing, and community support. Moreover, the impacts of these digital practices shape broader societal understandings of sexual violence through continuing shifts in conversations and discourses. This framework provides ways to consider alternatives to formal justice processes, acknowledging that informal justice can have diverse impacts and outcomes that influence and shape how digital practices occur. That is, informal justice in digital society occurs in a multiplicity of ways, and its impacts on victim-survivors are diverse, multi-directional, and act to potentially further shape their online disclosure practices.

Conclusion: the multiplicity of informal justice

This chapter has sought to engage with and build upon the extent to which justice is 'kaleidoscopic,' particularly by considering the ways that victim-survivors disclose their experiences of sexual violence online. Here, I have developed a framework for thinking through the multiplicity of informal justice in digital society by presenting the different levels at which victim-survivors' disclosures could lead to movement and change in their own and each other's lives and amongst broader society. In earlier findings chapters, I presented some of the implications and benefits of therapeutic discourses upon how victim-survivors navigate their experiences in digital society. In this chapter, I argued that the recognition, connection, and support that victim-survivors provide one another in digital society can be understood within a framework of informal justice; that seeking connection in an anonymous capacity amongst groups of victim-survivors can be equally transformative and restorative (or more so) than seeking formal justice responses to sexual violence. Digital society, therefore, presents opportunities for individuals and groups of victim-survivors to navigate the aftermath of sexual violence in a variety of ways, providing opportunities to speak about their experiences and to feel 'safe' about who they were disclosing to. While this was not without its implications and consequences for safety, identity, and how sexual violence narratives themselves are 'spoken' and 'heard,' I argue that these potential limitations did not negate the positive aspects of online spaces that do suggest that digital society can be a site for individual, collective and social justice in the aftermath of sexual violence.

The chapter also discussed whether digital society is an appropriate site for social justice that effects change amongst broader society. The discussion demonstrated victim-survivors' hope for collective voices to spur changes in how sexual violence is perceived in popular discourse. When

interviews were conducted, #MeToo was in its budding moments and although several victim-survivors were critical of it, there was a sense of hope in how they talked about its potential impacts. Indeed, despite all of the apparent issues within the #MeToo movement, that it amplifies particular voices, that it has silencing effects, and that it produces particular narratives about sexual violence, on a discursive and structural level the impacts remain ongoing. The movement has provided spaces for unprecedented conversations about sexual violence in digital society and beyond. While these conversations undoubtedly have flow-on effects for individual victim-survivors, who then might have to navigate digital space to avoid feeling triggered or unsafe, there is significant potential that #MeToo has broadened public understandings of sexual violence. While the reality of backlash is significant and has been commented on elsewhere in this thesis, it remains evident that victim-survivors exist within a cultural moment where if they disclose online they are likely to be heard and believed, if not in their everyday lives, then certainly in (some) spaces within digital society.

Considering rape justice within a poststructural framework simultaneously offers potential and "impossibility" (Loney-Howes, 2017). While this chapter has engaged with tangible ways that victim-survivors can pursue informal justice, it is evident that these possibilities remain contingent upon and bounded by permissible ways of speaking about sexual violence. This presents limitations in how justice can be achieved through online disclosures; if digital society is unavoidably 'navigated' by victim-survivors, can it actually constitute a space for informal justice? Moreover, as Susie described in Chapter 7, at times it is difficult to know what justice is, particularly when victim-survivors' perceptions of it are shaped by their understandings of judicial systems. Despite this, the analysis in this chapter has attempted to point towards the productivity that exists within these tensions, suggesting that this multiplicity of informal justice validates the processes and steps being made towards justice, rather than focusing entirely on its 'impossible' outcome. By arguing that the various digital practices that victim-survivors engage in constitute a form of justice acknowledges victim-survivors' individual and collective movement towards change in their lives. Maintaining that informal justice is possible in digital society also serves to further acknowledge is 'kaleidoscopic' qualities (McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018) insofar as its capacity to shift over time or to have differing and multiple meanings amongst people who have experienced harms such as sexual violence. This chapter has argued that recognising the multiplicity and, to an extent, the unknowability of what justice can be, provides a space of possibility, productivity, and progress towards it.

Zadie, Kate, and Allison

On hope

I don't think me sharing my stories on Tumblr where no one sees it would have made any difference for anyone else, but maybe on that [online community] where I can say, "Hey, this happened to me too" and help other people feel less alone as well. Who knows? I hope so. – **Zadie**

❖

It surprises me how often people say … that me speaking about it actually gives them hope. You know, one of my kind of by-lines that I started using when I was, one of the others actually started it on the forums years ago and, you know, he used to just say "hope endures" the end of his post and he…suffered a horrific amount of abuse and, yeah, anyway, and so I kind of adopted it and tend to say, "hope endures for a healing journey." And, you know, because that's my experience is that there is a lot of healing possible, but it is definitely a journey, so, I just try to be real about my own experience. You know, I'm not there saying, yeah that happened to me and like everything's fine now because that would just not be true. But I can say that this happened to me and I've found things that have helped me a lot and I'm better now than I was and I continue to look for ways that I can go and find wholeness in my life and even though this felt like it kind of shattered me, what I'm finding is that the bedrock, you know, there's a wholeness there, still. – **Kate**

❖

I've definitely seen a shifting in the conversation regarding sexual harassment and sexual assault and consent that I guess gives me a little bit of hope for the future… this [online] conversation has been sustained and is ongoing and doesn't seem to be going away, and there seem to be more and more things coming up and more and more people, you know, being called out and…so I think that's what fills me with a little bit of hope that this might be the moment. – **Allison**

9
Disclosing rape, seeking justice?

> Hope is not at the expense of struggle but animates a struggle; hope gives us a sense that there is a point to working things out, working things through. Hope does not only or always point toward the future, but carries us through when the terrain is difficult, when the path we follow makes it harder to proceed. Hope is behind us when we have to work for something to be possible (Ahmed, 2017: 2).

At the outset of this thesis, I acknowledged that though digital society provides new opportunities for disclosures of sexual violence, it does not follow that all such disclosures are experienced as empowering, political, or part of a broader movement. Through speaking with victim-survivors, I have found multiplicities, tensions, and contradictions in their experiences, motivations, and outcomes of disclosing online. I have demonstrated that not all experiences in digital society are positive. Yet, victim-survivors navigate these disclosures with agency and reflexivity, with many finding support, healing, and *hope*. As Zadie, Kate and Allison illustrate in the final interlude, victim-survivors' digital practices inspired hope in them – hope for shifting conversations and healing from sexual violence. Accordingly, I conclude this thesis reflecting on hope because not doing so would be denying the *transformative potential* of digital platforms in the lives of victim-survivors. For many, digital platforms provide avenues and means for new forms of storytelling, and with them, new semblances of hope. I must conclude with this, as the alternative is to despair at the profound power of oppressive and fallible institutions that often impedes victim-survivors' opportunities for justice.

This thesis has argued that formal justice systems have failed victim-survivors and for some, speaking out online symbolised an opportunity to be heard, to resist, and challenge how society understands sexual violence. In making these arguments, this thesis has revealed the significant role that digital platforms have in the lives of some victim-survivors. Of course, this is not without exception, and this research has also illustrated the pitfalls and challenges of pursuing rape justice in digital society. In the lifetime of this project, victim-survivors' disclosures have become uniquely relevant within academic research and broader public discourse, particularly amidst the groundswell of notable hashtag movements such as #MeToo. Discussion throughout this thesis has been careful to highlight the nuances evident in how digital platforms are navigated in the aftermath of sexual violence (see also Mendes, Ringrose and Keller, 2019). It has centred the voices and experiences of victim-survivors. It has empirically and theoretically examined how victim-survivors use digital platforms. It has also considered whether these varying digital practices could be considered as acts

of informal justice. In achieving these aims, this thesis presents an original contribution to the fields of sexual violence research along with feminist, digital and critical criminologies.

Throughout the following sections of this closing chapter, I return to the reiterative themes that arose throughout this thesis. Firstly, I discuss the notion of safety, which was present in the ways that victim-survivors navigated their use of digital platforms, shaping many victim-survivors' digital practices. Secondly, I re-examine the importance of 'speaking out' and 'speaking in,' which throughout the research was explored in relation to how victim-survivors navigate and share their stories, what they discuss, and who their audiences are across private and public digital spaces. Following this, I discuss the key findings pertaining to justice, returning to the theoretical dialogues of Chapters 7 and 8. In tandem to these key themes are notions of community, victim-survivor identity and trauma discourses, each of which arose throughout the research within the context of speaking out, seeking safety, and pursuing justice in digital society. Lastly, I conclude the chapter by exploring potential challenges and future research in this area.

Navigating safety in digital society

At the outset of this research, relatively little was known about why victim-survivors were disclosing their experiences online, but empirical research describing their digital practices was rapidly emerging (see, for example Burrows, 2011; Fileborn, 2014; Moors and Webber, 2013; Powell, 2015a, 2015b; Salter, 2013; Webber, 2014; Webber and Moors, 2015; Webber and Wilmot, 2013). As this research progressed, scholars have increasingly examined how victim-survivors use digital media to challenge rape culture, pointing towards a diverse range of disclosure practices (see, for example Fileborn, 2017; Harrington, 2018; Karlsson, 2018; Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016; Loney-Howes, 2017, 2018; Mendes, Belisário and Ringrose, 2019; Mendes, Ringrose and Keller, 2018; Sills et al., 2016). This thesis has extended this literature by providing a more complex understanding of the multiple platforms that victim-survivors *simultaneously* use to disclose sexual violence (see Table 1, Chapter 4). Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 5, how victim-survivors navigate digital platforms depends on whether they want their disclosure to be public, private, identified, or anonymous. The extent to which participants in this research chose to identify and publicise their disclosures were deeply tied up with their conceptualisations of safe spaces (Clark-Parsons, 2018). I argued that this is demonstrative of victim-survivors' "safety work" manifesting in digital society (Kelly, 2017; see also Vera-Gray, 2018).

Many of the arguments I have made about safety work in digital society advocate for a broader conceptualisation of safety that encompassed emotional wellbeing. For many victim-survivors in this research, finding safety online was about having an audience who could appropriately respond to

disclosures with belief, support, advice, and validation. For participants who used Reddit and other online communities, anonymity contributed to a sense of safety, because it meant that their disclosures could be distinct from their everyday lives and identities. For those navigating public digital spaces, safety work could occur by blocking and restricting content that victim-survivors see. As Allison said of Twitter, "I've got strategies in place where I just block and disengage." For others, it might mean accessing sites that they perceive to be safer. Recall Zadie, who was adamant that she would never go to Reddit, and if she did, she would "lurk for a year" until she trusted the space. Indeed, trust and safety went hand in hand for victim-survivors when navigating digital society, who often had faith that their disclosures would be responded to in supportive ways, particularly when accessing communities of peers. I argued that this expectation of support also influenced digital practices to an extent, as many victim-survivors, like Coryn, wanted to provide support just as much as they wanted to receive it. For some participants, like Xanthea, providing safety to others was a key reason she moderated a group on Facebook and spoke out about her childhood experiences.

Victim-survivors also navigated their safety online during periods where rape and sexual assault came to dominate public discourse, for example, when Chanel Miller released her Victim Impact Statement to Buzzfeed (see Baker, 2016), which saw victim-survivors turning to Reddit to seek support from peers. Likewise, when #MeToo emerged and disclosures of sexual violence flooded social media in the thousands, victim-survivors like Allison were finding ways to "filter out" potentially triggering content. These examples indicated that on any given day, especially in the aftermath of #MeToo, victim-survivors might have to engage in safety work. Indeed, to an extent, pursuing safety influenced victim-survivors' digital practices, shaping where and what they chose to disclose, as well as when they needed to disconnect. This illustrates that in digital contexts, safety victim-survivors conceptualise safety in different ways to how it might be understood in other spatial contexts (see, for example Vera-Gray, 2018).

Speaking out, speaking in?

In gaining a better understanding of victim-survivors' digital practices, this research has also highlighted diverse ways of speaking about sexual violence in digital society. From Coryn, who was "more of a helper and less of a sharer," to Susie, who thought online groups could be victim-survivors' "little black books," there are myriad ways that victim-survivors connect and share narratives of sexual violence online. Although feminist scholars have discussed the politics of speaking out, both online and in other contexts (see, for example Healicon, 2016; Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019a; Serisier, 2018b), my research has extended this literature to include practices of 'speaking in.' For some victim-survivors, the use of online communities was neo-tribal (see Hardy, Bennett and Robards, 2018; Robards, 2018), that is, spaces were fleetingly accessed separately to their

everyday lives. For many, 'speaking in' provided a site for victim-survivors to label their experiences, and to 'identify' as victims or survivors, and to formulate speech around sexual violence. In this sense, for some victim-survivors, digital society embodies a site where rape is rendered speakable, and where the pain of sexual violence can be acknowledged by peers.

This research also extended the scholarly literature regarding online anti-rape activism, by highlighting the experiences of those who do not identify as 'activists' per se. Dominant themes in the empirical literature pertaining to victim-survivors disclosures on social media platforms such as Twitter framed these disclosures as inherently a form of 'feminist activism' (see Keller, Mendes and Ringrose, 2016; Mendes, Keller and Ringrose, 2018; Mendes, Ringrose and Keller, 2018, 2019; Mendes and Ringrose, 2019; Rentschler, 2014, 2015; Sills et al., 2016). The discussion throughout Chapter 6 problematised this assumption, demonstrating that many interview participants did not see their online engagement as constituting activism, but rather considered themselves 'advocates.' For some victim-survivors, such as those interviewed in Mendes and Ringrose's (2019) analysis of #MeToo, social media 'movements' enable connection to feminist counterpublics and resistive strategies. However, this research conversely presented another side of this narrative, establishing instead the restrictive, exclusionary, and silencing aspects of #MeToo. While this, too, extends the scholarly literature regarding victim-survivors' engagement (or lack thereof) in digital 'activism,' the discussion signified a need for future research examining the unseen impacts of feminist activist movements upon victim-survivors (see also Fileborn and Loney-Howes, 2019b).

Whether speaking out or in, this research argued that digital narratives of sexual violence are often shaped by permissible ways of narrating sexual violence. Indeed, in contexts like Reddit, discourses impacted whether victim-survivors perceived their experiences as real rape, and commenters became gatekeepers who defined what constituted experiences of sexual violence. Moreover, the effects of discourses were apparent in relation to trauma framings of sexual violence, which prompted victim-survivors to understand their participation in digital society as a means to pursue healing and recovery. In some instances, victim-survivors were reluctant to provide full narratives of their experiences because they did not want to trigger a traumatic response in others, which further shaped how victim-survivors spoke about their experiences in particular digital contexts. This is not to discount the significance of trauma lenses in the lives of victim-survivors, because these discourses provide tools to 'move on' from undoubtedly traumatic experiences. In some ways, the focus on trauma talk in these spaces is productive, indeed, for Supriya, accessing "survivor spaces" meant that she was not forced to share "graphic" details to prove the authenticity of her experience. These kinds of details might be expected in other contexts that hear victim-survivors' testimonies, like the justice system. Likewise, as Mariah highlighted about Reddit, "nobody's going to question small details of my story or question my story at all." Therefore, I

argued that victim-survivors' speech in digital society can be liberating compared to institutional settings, but remains constrained and bounded by the normative sexual violence discourses.

Although some victim-survivors can speak within these dominant lenses that shape sexual violence, it is worth reiterating that sexual violence discourses impede how some relate to their experience and their peers. Recall Kathleen, who said, "I don't feel like a survivor, I feel like this is killing me and that it hasn't finished killing me yet." This was similarly reflected in Reddit posts that asked questions like "when will I feel normal again?" Such examples highlight that to an extent, the trauma discourses focus on 'recovery' and the ways that this permeates within online community rhetoric might impede victim-survivors from being able to fully narrate or speak to their pain, rendering them unable to process their experiences unless they are able to frame their aftermath in a way that resonates with norms that shape these spaces. In a sense, sexual violence discourses both script ways that victim-survivors can speak, but can silence narratives that do not align with the norm.

Recognising informal justice

The scholarly literature that formed the foundation of this thesis contended that victim-survivors' use of digital platforms to disclose sexual violence through activism, digilantism, and disclosure, was tantamount to informal justice-seeking, or 'revenge' in digital society (Fileborn, 2014b; Powell, 2015a, 2015b; Salter, 2013). This thesis sought to determine whether victim-survivors perceived their digital practices as informal justice, building upon scholarly emphasis that justice should be constructed from the perspectives of victim-survivors (see, for example Clark, 2010, 2015; Daly, 2004, 2017; Herman, 2005; Jülich, 2006; McGlynn, 2011; McGlynn, Westmarland and Godden, 2012; McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018). This research presented new insights into how victim-survivors perceive informal justice but also flagged implications for further theorising in this area. For instance, many participants in this research perceived justice according to the criminal justice system, which presented a dominating framework that shaped their views of what justice could be (Clark 2010; Loney-Howes, 2017). Victim-survivors simultaneously held complex and varying perceptions of justice, demonstrating its "kaleidoscopic" qualities (McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018). Despite this, when comparing digital storytelling to reporting (or the hypothetical experience of reporting), participants unanimously agreed that disclosing in digital contexts was safer than the justice system and was more likely to result in support and belief by their chosen audiences. This, and the fact that most victim-survivors in this study were highly critical of the justice system, indicates that there is a *potential* for informal justice to occur online, but there was a 'gap' between victim-survivors' perceptions and scholarly concepts.

In the preceding chapter, the potential for informal justice in digital society was theorised as being intrinsically multiple and occurring at various levels of individual victim-survivors, communities of victim-survivors, within broader society, and through discursive shifts. This 'multiplicity' of justice for victim-survivors disclosing in digital society highlighted several tensions in how rape justice has been conceptualised. For example, although many scholars distinguish between justice and wellbeing outcomes, this thesis has argued that victim-survivors' digital support-seeking practices ought to be considered within frameworks of informal justice. The framework also demonstrated the importance of recognition, which I argued occurs in digital society when victim-survivors experience validation, and when communities foster collective recognition and collective witnessing. Recognition produces the outcomes of being heard, connection, and in some instances increased participation in public life (see Fraser, 2008b). This research also demonstrated a capacity for informal justice to occur within society, whereby victim-survivors' disclosure practices lead to structural change and shifts in how discourse frame sexual violence. I argued that these different layers and outcomes of informal justice interact and influence one another, highlighting a multi-directional and undefined understanding of justice in digital society that can shift alongside victim-survivors' perceptions.

The framework presented in this thesis signals to a need for future theorising around informal justice in digital society. In particular, future scholarship might attempt to reconcile the tensions between victim-survivors' perceptions of justice as being the justice system, and their resultant hesitation to label their digital practices as "justice exactly" (Supriya). I contended in Chapter 8 that this incongruence between theory and lived experience signalled to a failure of scholarly theorising to completely broaden to include victim-survivors' perceptions. Moreover, as I argued in Chapter 7, it is worth questioning further whether victim-survivors want to distance themselves from the concept of justice *precisely* because justice systems have routinely failed them. All the while, this framework of considering justice in multiplicitous interacting ways speaks to the work that still needs to occur within these fallible institutional settings. Understanding justice from victim-survivors' perspectives points to countless ways that justice systems could provide safe, inclusive, and 'just' environments for them to share their stories. Indeed, I have demonstrated that much needs to change for the justice system to *facilitate* justice-seeking to the extent that digital society does.

Concluding remarks: future directions and a final 'hope'

Several further questions arose during this project that may be the subject of future research in this area. Firstly, future research should explore digital audiences to sexual violence disclosures. It was beyond the scope of this thesis to expose the impacts of 'bearing witness' and performing labour to support victim-survivors' disclosures, although several participants noted that they tailored their

online experiences to ensure their participation was 'safe.' Moreover, what are the broader implications, particularly for shifting understandings of justice, if victim-survivors continue to primarily disclose in contexts in which they will be believed? Mariah noted that "the people on Reddit believe exactly what I'm saying to be true," which points towards tensions between truth and justice in digital society. In this thesis, I engaged with Serisier's (2019) discussion of a new 'politics of belief' that occurs through victim-survivors' disclosures, although this requires further scholarly engagement amidst climates of "popular misogyny" (Banet-Weiser, 2018) where it is likely increased backlash against victim-survivors will occur (see also Fileborn and Phillips, 2019; Hindes and Fileborn, 2019). However, future research ought to more deeply engage with what it means for justice when the 'truth' of a narrative does not really concern the audience that is there to validate disclosures regardless of veracity. Secondly, future scholarship might build upon arguments made in this thesis to further examine 'speaking out' and 'speaking in' in varying contexts in digital society, particularly in the contexts of anonymous online communities. This thesis has pointed towards some key tensions inherent in the feminist adage of 'the personal is political,' and further research could examine the ways that victim-survivors understand and negotiate personal and political boundaries (see also Loney-Howes 2019).

Thirdly, there is scope for feminist scholars to continue theorising informal justice from the victim-survivors' perspective. When informal justice is taken to mean digilantism and activism, this is not consistent with victim-survivors accounts of their digital practices. Yet other qualities of justice, such as being heard, validated, supported, and recognised, certainly exist and form part of some victim-survivors' experiences of healing, support, and community in some contexts within digital society. Moreover, I contend that sexual violence researchers ought to look beyond structural framings of justice and instead look towards community framings and ways of queering justice in digital contexts (see Harris, 2011; Picker, 2016). For instance, emerging research has argued that restorative justice has been co-opted by colonial justice systems (Blagg and Anthony, 2019). Although beyond the scope of analysis in this thesis, I argue that there is an opportunity for future research concerning digital society to work towards decolonising justice (Blagg and Anthony, 2019; Ryan, 2019). Lastly, this thesis was limited in understanding sexual violence from English-speaking contexts in the Global North, which produces a particular kind of knowledge that does not represent the diverse experiences of victim-survivors globally. Given the global nature of digital society, future research ought to engage with how sexual violence and informal justice might occur in different ways (if at all) for victim-survivors in different spatial contexts.

At last, a final reflection on hope. The recent rise in neo-conservative politics sweeping across many Western liberal democracies including Australia, the UK and the US, has meant that hope, much like justice, can be harder for victim-survivors to grasp. While there have been notable

attempts to resist this, the increasing number of victim-survivors speaking out has not yet shifted power away from known perpetrators of sexual violence (see also Serisier, 2018b). Despite the troubling climates and conservative political turbulence that formed a persistent backdrop to the research, this thesis has demonstrated how disclosing sexual violence in digital society presents opportunities for victim-survivors to speak and be heard. As seen with Allison and Sophie, digital platforms allowed them to make connections with other victim-survivors, ensuring that they were more supported and less isolated. Xanthea and Chandler were able to offer support to peers, fulfilling their passions by advocating for others. Daniel and Lionel were able to name their perpetrators to heal from the past. For Supriya and Jo, disclosures bore opportunities for political conversation, and, to an extent, 'activism.' For Brett and Mariah, online communities offered an opportunity to understand their experiences, to come to terms with their new identities as victim-survivors. David was able to assert that sexual violence "does happen to guys," and in doing so, challenged dominant rape scripts (see also Marcus, 1992). For Sarah, Olivia, and an unknowable number of Reddit users who post, comment, and 'lurk' in online communities, digital society offered spaces to speak or connect with stories, while maintaining anonymity. For Joseph, disclosing was a way to let go, heal, and do recovery work. For Patti, Coryn, and Helena, damaging experiences online led them to consider options beyond the digital sphere. Through creating spaces for storytelling and connection, digital society thus presents new opportunities to do safety work, to pursue recovery, to navigate and attempt to understand one's identity in the aftermath of sexual violence. This research found that the opportunities that digital society afford victim-survivors are not fixed and that individuals disclose for varying and multiple reasons and through a spectrum of digital practices. In digital society, victim-survivors post art, blog, and tweet. They share as much or as little detail as they want to. Importantly, these opportunities for speaking and seeking connection do not operate in an isolated digital sphere, in a context removed from our everyday realities. Rather, as Tara and Zadie suggested, using digital platforms to disclose and forge connections with peers had tangible positive impacts on their everyday lives and survival. Despite the limitations and consequences of being bounded by everyday realities of what it means to experience sexual violence (for example, to live in the context of rape culture that shapes how stories are told and received), digital society presents opportunities that are ultimately hopeful, especially if the impacts described throughout this thesis have been felt or experienced in one way or another by the millions of victim-survivors who have shared their stories in digital society.

Turning now to justice; although this research has critically grappled with what it means to consider justice from the victim-survivors' perspective, it has not shied away from the present challenges in reconciling scholarly understandings with these lived experiences and voices. The criminal justice system presents as the omnipotent solution to those who experience sexual violence,

to the extent that it powerfully shapes how many victim-survivors think about justice itself. Consequently, the challenge emerges – how might informal and alternative forms of justice, those forms of justice that exist beyond the system, in communities, in activism, in digital society, gain recognition as being justice responses in the aftermath of sexual violence? Indeed, scholars, activists, all of us who know a person touched by sexual violence, might take up this challenge and consider how informal and alternative avenues to justice might be expanded in popular discourse, contesting the power of institutions that promulgate as the only possible response. For, as Susie noted in Chapter 7, what is justice? Much like Susie, I'm not sure that there is an easy answer (nor should there be one), and Sara Ahmed's (2017: 2) quote opening this chapter exemplifies the significance of these tensions well: "there is a point to working things out." I have argued that there is a point to recognising victim-survivors' disclosures in digital society as embodying a movement towards justice. By centring the voices of victim-survivors, this thesis advocated for the importance of an alternative view; taking a glance into the kaleidoscope (McGlynn, Downes and Westmarland, 2017; McGlynn and Westmarland, 2018) and "widening the scope" of justice (Daly, 2015). I have demonstrated the possibilities of justice in the context of digital society, and in doing so, I hope that we might enable more victim-survivors to grasp at it.

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Appendix A
Interview Guide

Introductions and opening questions

Safety Plan

Some of the things we might discuss today could be potentially upsetting or have an unexpected impact on you so I want to make sure we have some measures in place if things become overwhelming or difficult.

- o If you become upset or start crying, how would you like me to respond?
- o If you feel like you don't want to answer a question, how will you let me know?
- o What will you do if tomorrow (or in the future) you decide you wish you hadn't participated?

Tell me a bit about yourself?

- o How has your day been, what have you been up to? Probe
- o What do you do in your spare time?
- o Hobbies/interests?
- o Where did you hear about the research project?
- o Why did you decide you participate in this interview today?

Tell me about your engagement online, generally:

- o How active are you online?
- o What platforms do you use? (Probe)
- o Why do you use these platforms?
- o How often do you use digital platforms?
- o How important are digital platforms to you?

Motivations for engagement with digital platforms

I want to focus on your use of digital platforms where you have discussed your experiences. Thinking about these spaces:

- o Firstly, what digital platforms have you/do you use to discuss your experiences of sexual violence?
- o Why have you/do you use _____? Probe
- o Have you used any other platforms? If yes, is it for a different purpose/reason to _____ (initial platform discussed)?
- o How did you first hear about _____ platform(s)?
- o What prompted you to access the space?
- o What led you to disclose or participate in the space?
  - o Could you tell me more about that?
- o How do you access it? (this could refer to technology ie 'with my smartphone,' or physical location ie, 'at home,' 'at work')
  - o Could you tell me more about that? Why do you like to use the platform this way?

- o   Could you tell me about your initial experiences using it?
- o   Have these experiences changed over time, the more you use the platform? If so, how/why?
- o   Why do you continue to use this platform? What does it offer you, personally?
- o   Why is this platform important to you?
- o   What are other users on the platform like?
- o   How do you perceive yourself in this space?
- o   What do you see as the overall purpose of _____? Probe
  - o   What do you mean by that?
- o   Do you have needs from these spaces? If so, what are they?
- o   Storytelling and reporting? What are the differences, roles of reporting?
- o   Bring up the idea of justice here – the extent to which this practices are justice-seeking from the perspective of participants

Outcomes/ Impacts of engagement with platforms

- o   In your view, how does using this space affect your life?
- o   How do you think it impacts other users of _____?
- o   Are these impacts/ outcomes for both you personally, and other survivors who use _____ important? Why?
- o   Can you perceive any broader community impacts of survivors using _____?
  - o   Could you tell me more about that? What do you think are the general impacts of survivors talking about / disclosing their experiences online?
  - o   Are these community impacts/ outcomes important? Why?

Closing questions

- o   Do you think there are ways that _____ could improve? Probe
- o   Are there any other aspects of your engagement with online platforms that you'd like to talk about?

Ending the interview

- o   Demographic questions (Age range, gender identity, sexuality, general location)
- o   Often people write about these experiences using victim, survivor, or another term – do you have a term that you use, and why?
- o   How have you found the interview experience today? Probe
- o   Is it okay if I contact you in a few days to check in with how you are? (What is the best method of contact?/Opt out)

Appendix B
Participant Information Sheet

RMIT UNIVERSITY

Participant Information Sheet/Consent Form

Qualitative interviews

Title	Disclosing experiences of sexual violence online: exploring voices of victim-survivors - Interviews
Chief Investigator/Senior Supervisor	Dr Anastasia Powell
Associate Investigator(s)/Associate Supervisor(s)	Dr Gregory Stratton
Principal Research Student(s)	Tully O'Neill, PhD candidate

What does my participation involve?

1   Introduction

You are invited to take part in this research project, which is called 'Disclosing experiences of sexual violence online: exploring voices of victim-survivors.' You have been invited because you are over the age of 18 and have used digital platforms to discuss experiences of sexual violence.

This Participant Information Sheet/Consent Form tells you about the research project. It explains the processes involved with taking part. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the research.

Please read this information carefully. Ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about. Before deciding whether or not to take part, you might want to talk about it with a relative or friend.

Participation in this research is voluntary. If you don't wish to take part, you don't have to.

If you decide you want to take part in the research project, you will be asked to sign the consent section. By signing it you are telling us that you:

• Understand what you have read

• Consent to take part in the research project

You will be given a copy of this Participant Information and Consent Form to keep.

2   What is the purpose of this research?

The central aim of this research is to understand the motivations of survivors when they use or have used digital platforms (such as forums, social media or blogs), to discuss or disclose their experiences of sexual violence. This research is significant as it aims to gather survivors' perspectives surrounding their access and use of digital platforms. These perspectives and voices will significantly contribute to a broader knowledge, as there is a considerable lack of research studies being conducted with survivors of sexual violence. We are particularly interested in understanding more about:

- The digital platform(s) that you use to discuss your experience(s) of sexual violence
- How and why you have used the digital platform(s)
- Your experiences using these platforms
- The personal outcomes of you using digital platform(s)
- Your perception of the impacts of these platforms for other survivors

This research is also being conducted for the purpose of contributing to a doctoral thesis project. The results of this research will be used by Tully O'Neill to obtain a Doctorate of Philosophy.

3   What does participation in this research involve?

Should you agree to participate, we will arrange a face-to-face interview with you at a time, date and location of your choosing. Your interview will be with Tully O'Neill, a doctoral research student. With your permission, the interview will be audio recorded on a digital/voice-only recording device. Questions will focus on your engagement with digital platforms generally, your use of

digital platforms to discuss your experiences in the aftermath of sexual violence, and the impacts that your use of digital platforms has had on you. We expect that the interview will take between 60 to 90 minutes. Following the interview, you will receive follow-up contact from Tully to debrief on your interview experience.

There are no costs associated with participating in this research project, nor will you be paid.

However, you may be reimbursed for any reasonable travel, parking, meals and other expenses associated with the research project visit.

4   Other relevant information about the research project

This is a small research study, with few research participants (n=30). As such, your feedback is highly valued. The project is being conducted with involvement of RMIT University, Melbourne. This research is not being conducted in collaboration with other universities or institutions. This is an original research project and as such is not an extension of prior research studies.

5   Do I have to take part in this research project?

Participation in any research project is voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you do not have to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage.

If you do decide to take part, you will be given this Participant Information and Consent Form to sign and you will be given a copy to keep.

Your decision whether to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will not affect your relationship with the researchers, or with RMIT University.

If you choose to participate, you may stop the interview at any time. Unless you say that you want us to keep them, any recordings will be erased and information you have provided will not be included in the study results. You may also refuse to answer any questions that you do not wish to answer during the interview.

6   What are the possible benefits of taking part?

We cannot guarantee or promise that you will receive any benefits from this research; however, you may appreciate contributing to knowledge. Possible benefits may include that you have an opportunity to reflect on your experiences of using digital platforms in the aftermath of sexual violence, and to share your perceptions of how these platforms are beneficial for survivors. You might find some comfort in being listened to by a sympathetic listener. You may benefit from knowing that this issue is being studied, and that research exploring this issue is emphasising the voices and stories of survivors using these platforms.

7   What are the risks and disadvantages of taking part?

Legal risk:

In your participation of this study, information you provide will be confidential. If you disclose an experience to the interviewer that you have not reported to police or another authority, you can do so knowing it is in complete confidence. The researcher is not obliged to report this experience to a formal authority. However, if you decide during the interview that you would like to report to a formal authority, the interviewer will help you seek appropriate information and services to do this.

If you decide to report your experience to a formal authority in the future in the weeks, months or years following the interview, the measures in place to ensure your confidentiality mean that any data you provide in the interview will be unidentifiable in a legal proceeding or investigation.

If you are currently undergoing a formal process of investigation or legal proceedings in relation to your experiences of sexual violence, then we will be unable to conduct an interview with you. This is to best protect your interests as the investigation or legal matter moves forward.

Psychological distress:

As the interview questions will be asking you about the past experiences that led you to engage with digital platforms, there is a possibility that you may feel upset, distressed or uncomfortable. You may feel that some of the questions we ask are stressful or upsetting. If you do not wish to answer a question, you may skip it and go to the next question, or you may stop immediately. If you become upset or distressed as a result of your participation in the research project, members of the research team will be able to discuss appropriate support for you. You will be able to withdraw from the project for up to one month following the completion of the interview. Once the interview has been transcribed and the follow-up has been completed, it will not be possible for you to withdraw your data as it will be completely de-identified.

If you experience distress as a result of your participation in this research, you are encouraged to seek assistance by contacting a counselling or support service. You can also use these services to seek further information about reporting your experience to authorities, if you wish to do so. Some services include:

Australia

Sexual Assault Crisis Line: ph 1800 806 292 http://www.sacl.com.au/

1800RESPECT (National Sexual Assualt, Family and Domestic Violence Counselling Service): ph 1800 737 732 https://www.1800respect.org.au/

Beyond Blue: ph 1300 22 4636 www.beyondblue.org.au

Lifeline: ph 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au

New Zealand

HELP - Support for Sexual Assault survivors: ph 09 623 1700 http://helpauckland.org.nz/

Counselling Services Centre: ph 09 277 9324 http://cscnz.org.nz/

Lifeline: ph 0800 543 354 http://www.lifeline.org.nz/

UK

Rape Crisis England and Wales: ph 0808 802 9999 http://rapecrisis.org.uk/

Lifecentre: ph 0844 847 7879 http://www.lifecentre.uk.com/

SupportLine: ph 01708 765200 http://www.supportline.org.uk/

Samaritans: ph 116 123 http://www.samaritans.org/

United States

Rape, Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN): ph 800 656 4673 www.rainn.org

Lifeline: ph 1-800-273-8255 http://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/#

The National Domestic Violence Hotline: 1-800-799-7233 http://www.thehotline.org/

Canada

For hotlines in your province/territory see these websites:

Canadian Women's Health Network (Rape Crisis Centres): http://www.cwhn.ca/en/organization_en/results/taxonomy%3A2998

Canadian Association of Suicide Prevention: http://suicideprevention.ca/need-help/

Europe

Rape Crisis Network Europe: http://www.rcne.com/

8   What if I withdraw from this research project?

If you do consent to participate, you may withdraw at any time. If you decide to withdraw from the project, please notify a member of the research team. If you decide to withdraw from the research, you can do so without prejudice from the researchers or RMIT University.

If you decide to withdraw from the research after commencing or completing the interview, you have the right to have any unprocessed data withdrawn and destroyed, providing it can be reliably identified. However, once your interview data has been processed and de-identified (approximately one month following the interview), we will be unable to remove your data from the study.

9   What happens when the research project ends?

You will have the option of receiving access to works produced through this research, including reports, journal articles and books. You also will have the option to receive a summary of the research results. As this research project forms part of a doctoral thesis to be completed by 2020, the full results of this research may not be published for a number of years. In order to receive these results, you may need to agree to further contact from the research team.

How is the research project being conducted?

10   What will happen to information about me?

By signing the consent form you consent to the research team collecting and using information from you for the research project. Any information obtained in connection with this research project that can identify you will remain confidential. Your contact details will be destroyed one month following the interview, unless you choose to continue receiving information about the results of the research. If you choose to maintain contact with the research team, your contact details will be stored electronically on a password protected computer that is accessible only to the researchers. Your contact details will be kept separate from your interview data, which during the process of transcription, will be completely de-identified. You will be referred to by a pseudonym in any results that are published from this research. Interview data and transcripts will be kept on a password protected computer or locked filing cabinet at RMIT University. Only the researchers will have access to the data associated with your interview. On completion of the project, the de-identified data will be preserved for re-use throughout the named research student's career.

Although this is not a focus of the interview, if, during your participation in this research, you disclose current involvement in illegal activity or planned involvement illegal activity, there is a chance that this may have to be reported.

It is anticipated that the results of this research project will be published and/or presented in a variety of forums. In any publication and/or presentation, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified. Your data may be used in future related research conducted by the research student. In any research where your data is used, you will not be identified.

11   Who is organising and funding the research?

This research project is being conducted by Tully O'Neill, PhD candidate at RMIT University. She has been funded by an Australian Postgraduate Award (APA) Scholarship to conduct this project.

12   Who has reviewed the research project?

All research in Australia involving humans is reviewed by an independent group of people called a Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). This research project has been approved by the RMIT University HREC.

This project will be carried out according to the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (2007). This statement has been developed to protect the interests of people who agree to participate in human research studies.

13　　Further information and who to contact

If you want any further information concerning this project, you can contact the student researcher Tully O'Neill at tully.oneill@rmit.edu.au or on +61 3 9925 0827, or any of the following people:

Research contact person

Name	Dr Anastasia Powell
Position	Chief investigator / Senior supervisor
Telephone	+61 3 9925 3566
Email	anastasia.powell@rmit.edu.au

14　　Complaints

Should you have any concerns or questions about this research project, which you do not wish to discuss with the researchers listed in this document, then you may contact:

Reviewing HREC name	RMIT University
HREC Secretary	Peter Burke
Telephone	03 9925 2251
Email	human.ethics@rmit.edu.au
Mailing address	Research Ethics Co-ordinator
	Research Integrity Governance and Systems
	RMIT University
	GPO Box 2476
	MELBOURNE VIC 3001

Appendix C
Letters of Ethics Approval

RMIT
UNIVERSITY

College Human Ethics Advisory Network (CHEAN)
College of Design and Social Context
NH&MRC Code: EC00237

Notice of Approval

Date: **3 June 2016**
Project number: **CHEAN B 0000020141-05/16**

Project title: **Disclosing on Reddit: Survivor narratives in an online forum**

Risk classification: **Negligible risk**

Chief investigator: **Dr Anastasia Powell**

Status: **Approved**

Approval period: From: **02 June 2016** To: **31 December 2017**

The following documents have been reviewed and approved:

Title	Version	Date
Risk Assessment and Application form	1	24.05.2016

The above application has been approved by the RMIT University CHEAN as it meets the requirements of the *National statement on ethical conduct in human research* (NH&MRC, 2007).

Terms of approval:
1. **Responsibilities of chief investigator**
   It is the responsibility of the above chief investigator to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by CHEAN. Approval is valid only whilst the chief investigator holds a position at RMIT University.
2. **Amendments**
   Approval must be sought from CHEAN to amend any aspect of a project. To apply for an amendment use the request for amendment form, which is available on the HREC website and submitted to the CHEAN secretary. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from CHEAN.
3. **Adverse events**
   You should notify the CHEAN immediately (within 24 hours) of any serious or unanticipated adverse effects of their research on participants, and unforeseen events that might affect the ethical acceptability of the project.
4. **Annual reports**
   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. Annual reports must be submitted by the anniversary of approval of the project for each full year of the project. If the project is of less than 12 months duration then a final report only is required.
5. **Final report**
   A final report must be provided within six months of the end of the project. CHEAN must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
6. **Monitoring**
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by the CHEAN at any time.
7. **Retention and storage of data**
   The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data according to the requirements of the *Australian code for the responsible conduct of research* (section 2) and relevant RMIT policies.
8. **Special conditions of approval**
   Nil.

   In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title above.
   Dr Marsha Berry
   Chairperson

RMIT DSC CHEAN B

cc: Mr Kevin Anslow (Ethics Officer/CHEAN secretary), Ms Tullia O'Neill, Dr Gregory Stratton

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)
Research and Innovation office
NH&MRC Code: EC00237

Notice of Approval

Date:	**12 December 2016**
Project number:	**20476**
Project title:	***Disclosing experiences of sexual violence online: exploring voices of victim-survivors - Interviews***
Risk classification:	**More than low risk**
Chief investigator:	**Dr Anastasia Powell**
Approval period:	From: **12 December 2016** To: **31 December 2018**

The following documents have been reviewed and approved:

Title	Version	Date
20476 Powell appn	Final	7 December 2016
PICF – Face-to-face interviews		7 December 2016
PICF – Telephone/Skype interviews		7 December 2016
Recruitment materials (Forum post, social media post, recruitment tweet)		2 November 2016
Qualtrics form 'Register your interest'		2 November 2016
Interview schedule		2 November 2016

The following documents have been noted:

Title	Date
Response to review feedback	7 December 2016

The above application has been approved by the RMIT University HREC as it meets the requirements of the *National statement on ethical conduct in human research* (NH&MRC, 2007).

Terms of approval:
1. **Responsibilities of chief investigator**
   It is the responsibility of the above chief investigator to ensure that all other investigators and staff on a project are aware of the terms of approval and to ensure that the project is conducted as approved by HREC. Approval is valid only whilst the chief investigator holds a position at RMIT University.
2. **Amendments**
   Approval must be sought from HREC to amend any aspect of a project. To apply for an amendment use the request for amendment form, which is available on the HREC website and submitted to the HREC secretary. Amendments must not be implemented without first gaining approval from HREC.
3. **Adverse events**
   You should notify the HREC immediately (within 24 hours) of any serious or unanticipated adverse effects of the research on participants, and unforeseen events that might affect the ethical acceptability of the project.
4. **Annual reports**
   Continued approval of this project is dependent on the submission of an annual report. Annual reports must be submitted by the anniversary of approval (12 December 2016) of the project for each full year of the project. If the project is of less than 12 months duration then a final report only is required.
5. **Final report**
   A final report must be provided within six months of the end of the project. HREC must be notified if the project is discontinued before the expected date of completion.
6. **Monitoring**
   Projects may be subject to an audit or any other form of monitoring by the HREC at any time.

7. **Retention and storage of data**

RMIT
UNIVERSITY

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)
Research and Innovation office
NH&MRC Code: EC00237

The investigator is responsible for the storage and retention of original data according to the requirements of the *Australian code for the responsible conduct of research* (section 2) and relevant RMIT policies.

1. **Special conditions of approval**
   Nil.

In any future correspondence please quote the project number and project title above.
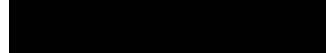
Prof Stephen Bird
Chairperson
RMIT HREC

cc: Tullia O'Neill, Principal research student
        Dr Gregory Stratton, Co-investigator/Associate supervisor
        Dr Peter Burke, HREC secretary.