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Disarming dissent: The institutional politics of sexual violence in the Australian neoliberal university

Anna Hush

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

School of Global and Public Law
Faculty of Law and Justice
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May 2022

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Abstract

For decades, feminists at Australian universities have fought to publicise and politicise the issue of campus sexual violence. These efforts have recently come to fruition, with universities publicly acknowledging the problem and undertaking various institutional reforms. However, there has been little scholarly attention paid to political struggles over sexual violence within universities. This thesis critically examines the politics of feminist activism against sexual violence at Australian university campuses. It situates this activism against the backdrop of the neoliberalisation of Australian universities, to reveal how feminists have challenged – and at times, acted in complicity with – these transformations in the landscape of Australian higher education. This analysis is both historical, drawing on archival material relating to the history of campus feminist politics, and contemporary, using data from interviews with students currently engaged in organising against sexual violence. It explores the strategies and tactics adopted by feminist collectives, the constraints on feminist mobilisation in the neoliberal university, and the shortcomings of these movements.

This thesis makes two original contributions to knowledge. Firstly, it extends existing analyses of university sexual violence and contributes to the growing body of scholarship on this topic. Research on campus sexual violence in Australia has so far focused on policy analysis and prevalence data. While this provides an important basis for evaluating the scope of the problem and potential remedies, it is largely disconnected from political struggles over institutional responses to sexual violence, a gap this thesis seeks to fill. I offer an analysis of the historical and contemporary struggles that have created the conditions for institutional change, as well as the complex ways in which the neoliberal university undermines and constrains oppositional movements. Secondly, this thesis makes a theoretical contribution to the field of New and Feminist Institutionalism. It critically intervenes in the institutionalist field, drawing greater attention to the roles of macro-social contexts and actors in the form of social movements in processes of institutional change and proposing a framework that foregrounds these aspects of institutional politics.

The findings of this research reveal significant limitations in Australian universities' responses to sexual violence, with their actions falling short of both student demands and expert recommendations. I argue that these actions have largely functioned to consolidate managerial power and mitigate reputational risk, in doing so narrowing the space of political contestation. My analysis further illuminates the specific institutional constraints that bear upon student feminist organisers within the neoliberal university. This analysis offers strategic insights into feminist engagement with institutions, suggesting that student movements must develop the capacity to disrupt processes of institutional reproduction and challenge the reformist approach adopted by universities. A transformative response to campus sexual violence, I argue, will require broader and better-organised coalitions of staff and students in order to collectively challenge and overcome these constraints.

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When I first began this PhD in early 2018, I entered the UNSW School of Law feeling a bit like a fish out of water, both as a non-lawyer and as someone new to UNSW. I was extremely lucky to find there a community of graduate students that is generous, caring and intellectually vibrant. Though PhD study tends to conjure up images of solitude, our practices of reading, writing and thinking together made my experience far from lonely. I am particularly indebted to the critical theory reading group: I won't forget the camaraderie of reading *Capital* together in 2020 over a series of late-night trans-national Zoom calls, as the world around us was beset by a global pandemic and economic crises. Also, our feminist political economy reading group helped me to puzzle through some big questions inside and outside my thesis research; it was the highlight of many of my weeks. Thank you, Angela K, Deb and Lauren. I am also extremely grateful to Angela K for reading drafts of my work and providing thoughtful feedback, encouragement and accountability to keep putting words on the page!

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List of abbreviations

ACTU	Australian Council of Trade Unions
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
AHRCentre	Australian Human Rights Centre (UNSW); known as the Australian Human Rights Institute (AHRI) from 2018 onwards
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ANU	Australian National University
ASIO	Australian Security and Intelligence Organisation
AUS	Australian Union of Students
CAE	College of Advanced Education
EROC	End Rape on Campus
FAUSA	Federated Australian University Staff Association
FI	Feminist Institutionalism
GVRN	Gendered Violence Research Network (UNSW)
HECS	Higher Education Contribution Scheme
HI	Historical Institutionalism
NI	New Institutionalism
NOWSA	National Organisation of Women Students Australia
NTEU	National Tertiary Education Union
NUS	National Union of Students
SCAG	Safer Communities Advisory Group (USyd)
SMIWG	Sexual Misconduct Implementation Working Group (UNSW)
SRC	Students' Representative Council
SSAF	Student Services and Amenities Fee
TEQSA	Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency
THGAP	The Hunting Ground Australia Project
UACA	Union of Australian College Academics
UNSW	University of New South Wales
USyd	University of Sydney
VSU	Voluntary Student Unionism

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Prologue

The problem of sexual violence in Australian higher education has been the focus of both my academic research and my organising work for many years. As an undergraduate student at the University of Sydney in late 2015, I was elected as the Women's Officer, a role within the Students' Representative Council that primarily involves convening a feminist student collective. The following year became a historic one for student sexual violence campaigns, in ways that were altogether unexpected to me. In May 2016, the student news outlet *Pulp Media* broke a story involving a leaked student journal from the elite Wesley College at the University of Sydney. The contents of the journal highlighted the normalisation of coercive, degrading and misogynistic behaviour within residential colleges. This story quickly spread to mainstream media and, with the Women's Collective, I organised to hold a protest on the steps of Wesley College while a formal student dinner was taking place inside.[1] After this protest, stories continued to roll out in the media about sexual assault and harassment within university communities around the continent (though still largely focused on urban, Group of Eight[2] universities).

Although a number of documents similar to the Wesley journal had been released to the media over the years, this one seemed to unleash something that had been lingering just below the surface – a palpable sense of outrage and frustration, and, well before the so-called #MeToo moment, a jolting recognition of the commonplace nature of these experiences. The zenith of the Women's Collective's action that year occurred when, carrying mattresses spray-painted with red anti-rape slogans, thirty of us interrupted an information session for parents of prospective students at the university's Open Day (Figure 1, below). Students seized the microphones and told their stories of sexual violence and the university's inaction to a stunned, dead-silent audience of parents, while some of the most senior members of the university's administration physically grappled with them to take back the microphones and at one point turned off all the lights in the auditorium. It was a rare moment which, to me, felt like a genuine confrontation of power: between some of the most senior 'managers' of the university and a group of organised and angry students and survivors, who were present in a large enough number to take control of the room and make their critique publicly.

[1] Amusingly, we later learnt that a senior member of the college administration had sent a mass text message advising students inside to stay away from the windows in fear of a siege, with contingencies in place if 'projectiles' were launched by the protestors outside. The message from the Master of Wesley College, posted to Facebook, read: 'We ask that NO ONE from Wesley College RESPOND or REACT with any protest, silent or otherwise […] Please close all windows and draw blinds and curtains from 4pm onwards. This will prevent people trying to enter or throwing things into your personal space […] security are here for you, to ensure your safety and make sure no one enters who intends on causing upset or harm.'

[2] The 'Group of Eight' is a coalition between eight research-intensive Australian universities. They represent the oldest and most wealthy universities in the country, drawing in the majority of competitive research funding and dominating national university rankings.

After dedicating much time to supporting survivors of sexual violence at universities, and to organising alongside other students to challenge cultures of sexual violence, I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to approach this issue with the perspective and tools of an academic researcher. My intuition, going into this project, was that this series of events serves as a useful locus for reflection on contemporary feminist politics in Australia. Why, after decades of activist work on the issue of sexual violence (both at universities and more broadly), have these particular feminist demands suddenly gained some public purchase and institutional traction? What are the social, political and institutional conditions that enabled this? What strategies and tactics have student feminists used to stake these claims? And what political possibilities are opened – or, indeed, foreclosed – by these tactics? After being submerged in these movements, I felt the need to take a step back and begin to ask some critical questions about the political dynamics of contemporary feminist movements. I hope it is clear that, given my history and positionality, any critiques I make in this thesis are not intended to disparage or discredit student feminist movements. This critique is put forward in the spirit of a 'critical friend' (Chappell and Mackay 2020) of these movements, as someone committed to a vision of higher education that is socially just, democratic and accessible, and deeply concerned about the insidious effects of neoliberalism on both higher education institutions and feminist movements.

Figure 1: Protest held by the University of Sydney Women's Collective at the university's Open Day in August 2016. Image: *Honi Soit.*

Then there is another strand of this project, one that arises from my experience as a worker in the Australian university sector. While writing this thesis, as a postgraduate student employed on a

casual basis in a long sequence of short-term teaching and research contracts, I became involved in organising alongside other casualised workers at my university around our shared working conditions. This experience brought into sharp relief for me how, as Marc Bousquet (2008, 7) writes, 'the university under managerial domination is an accumulation machine'. Unpaid labour and surplus value are routinely extracted from casualised workers – daily, hourly, by the minute. It is this labour and value that keeps the university running, and is, at the same time, the most expendable. During the COVID-19 pandemic, which struck Australia early in the third year of my PhD, I saw my colleagues get laid off from casual roles mid-way through the teaching term, and others fired and blacklisted from their worksites due to their open involvement in union activity. I felt strongly that the two political problems I was grappling with – of the indifference of universities to sexual violence, and the accelerating neoliberal transformation of the higher education sector – were not unconnected. This thesis, then, is – in a messy and incomplete way – an attempt to weave some connections between these two poles. I am reminded here of Alyssa Battistoni's reflections on organising graduate workers at Yale: 'I went to graduate school to study political theory, in hopes of figuring out what to do about the dilemmas that weighed on me. But it took something else to give that theory meaning in my own life' (Battistoni 2019).

Chapter 1 | Introduction

> Feminism's engagement with neoliberalism's stronghold on the university must extend far beyond simply naming the neoliberal or corporate university, and instead contend with how neoliberalism does its work through the rhetoric of risk *and* in the name of feminism.
> – Jennifer Nash, 'Pedagogies of Desire'

On the evening of September 11, 2018, Bettina Arndt – a former sex therapist, now self-described 'voice for men's rights' – arrived at the University of Sydney to give a talk titled 'Is there a rape crisis on university campuses?'. This talk was part of a tour of campuses by Arndt to speak about what she called a 'manufactured rape crisis', claiming that statistics about sexual violence at universities (particularly those published by the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2017) had been deliberately inflated in a concerted attack by feminists on men (Arndt 2021; see also Arndt 2020). The talk was hosted by the Sydney University Liberal Club and was met with a substantial counter-protest organised by campus feminists, including some friends of mine. I turned up to the scene slightly late, when dusk was just falling on the sandstone quadrangle. When I arrived, the corner of the quad, near the History Room where the talk was due to take place, had already erupted into chaos. The narrow hallway leading to the room was filled with students packed shoulder-to-shoulder, yelling and jostling, with a handful of campus security guards interspersed through the crowd. I climbed a winding flight of stairs overlooking the hallway to get a better view. People hoping to attend Arndt's talk were trying to squeeze their way through the protesters and into the room, while protesters were shouting and linking arms, attempting to block their path. Security guards tried to clear a pathway into the room for the attendees, but were having little success. The crowd surged and heaved below me, while protesters on megaphones gave speeches and led chants against Arndt. I could see that a table had been pushed up against the door of the room where the talk was to be held, and eventually I saw Arndt herself standing on top of the table, cramped within the doorframe and yelling into the hallway, her voice inaudible over the din. All of a sudden, an emergency alarm sounded, then riot police appeared. They dragged protesters out of the hallway and into the quadrangle, while the attendees filtered into the room for Arndt's talk to begin, with security guards flanking the door. I gathered with activists in the quad to discuss the event and debrief, but police shortly issued a move-on notice, and we went off to the closest pub.

***

In the years leading up to the event recounted above, there had been a heightened wave of feminist activism at Australian universities, and globally, around sexual violence in university communities (Phipps 2020b; Thorburn 2018b; Vimalarajah 2015). Feminists highlighted the prevalence of sexual violence amongst students, its impact on their educational experiences, the history of universities covering up and suppressing information about sexual violence and university administrations' inadequate and sometimes downright callous responses to survivors who had reported their experiences (End Rape on Campus Australia 2017). This wave of activism galvanised a range of institutional responses including policy reform, service provision and various attempts at primary prevention initiatives. However, it also sparked a backlash from the political right, such as the 'fake rape crisis' campaign led by Arndt (Albrechtsen 2017; Arndt 2017; Latham 2017; Merritt 2018). This backlash is inextricable from the broader rise of far-right groups as well as hysteria in the corporate media and in federal politics about a 'free speech crisis' on university campuses, supposedly symbolised by 'no-platform' protests such as the ones organised by feminist groups in opposition to Arndt (Lesh 2019). The issue of campus sexual violence is not contained within the campus – it is bound up with larger contestations around gender politics, academic freedom, policing and the status of Australian universities. Though university feminist organising takes place on a relatively small scale, it echoes well beyond the boundaries of the campus, confronting far-right groups, online trolls, shock jocks and parliamentary politicians, and raising critical questions about what the university is, what responsibilities it has to respond to harm and what shape these responses ought to take.

This thesis critically examines the politics of feminist activism against sexual violence at Australian university campuses. In particular, I situate this activism against the backdrop of the neoliberalisation of Australian universities, to reveal how this activism has challenged – and at times, acted in complicity with – recent transformations in the landscape of Australian higher education. To do this, I contextualise contemporary activism within a long legacy of feminist organising against sexual violence, as well as ongoing contestations within feminist politics (and left politics more broadly) over how to approach hostile or conservative institutions. I consider the strategic tension between seeking incremental change by gaining power from within, creating separatist spaces that agitate for more radical and transformative change, or pursuing a mixture of these approaches. This tension, I argue, forms an undercurrent that runs beneath the diverse strategies and tactics taken by contemporary feminist activists on university campuses. Through a series of interviews with fourteen student activists at two Australian universities and in-depth analysis of archival and secondary material, I explore the challenges and successes they have

experienced in their organising against sexual violence. Reflecting on these mixed successes, I analyse how the neoliberal political economy of contemporary Australian universities creates both constraints and some limited opportunities for feminist student organising.

This introductory chapter first provides an overview of existing research on campus sexual violence, focusing particularly on scholarship that situates sexual violence within the political-economic context of the neoliberal university. I then explain the focus and purpose of this project, and how it addresses gaps within this literature by applying a critical and political-economic analysis to the Australian context. This approach extends existing research on campus sexual violence in Australia, which has to date focused on prevalence data and policy analysis, by locating the issue within the broader historical trajectories of higher education and gender politics in Australia. I outline the theoretical approach employed to do so, and conclude with an overview of the structure and chapters of this thesis.

1. Context and background

As I explore in detail in Chapter 5 of this thesis, university students have been organising against sexual violence for many decades. However, the period between 2010 and 2020 saw renewed and heightened international attention to this issue. In the United Kingdom in 2011, the National Union of Students published the results of a major survey of students that revealed widespread sexual violence and institutional complicity (Phipps and Smith 2012; Smith 2010). In South Africa in 2016, the hashtag #Endrapeculture spread across university campuses, with public demonstrations against sexual assault being held on campus (Orth, van Wyk, and Andipatin 2020). The same year in Brazil, students at the Federal Rural University of Rio de Janeiro formed a group called 'Tell Me When You Get There', drawing attention to their institutions' silence following reports of rape (Costa 2020). In Chile in 2011, and again in 2018, students staged protests, sit-ins and shut-downs that sought to disrupt gendered power imbalances within universities and that at times paralysed the university system (Bartlett 2018). Following the #MeToo movement, students in China spoke out about sexual harassment within universities, despite the censorship of hashtags used to circulate these stories online (Kuo 2018). And in New Delhi in 2020, students staged week-long rolling protests after women students were harassed and molested en masse during a festival at Gargi College (*The Times of India* 2020). Campuses around the world were roiled by angry students with a shared sense of injustice, seeking accountability and redress from their institutions.

In the United States in 2011, the Department of Education Office for Civil Rights (OCR) published a 'Dear Colleague' letter setting out the 'proactive efforts' that the OCR expected universities to take in order to 'end [sexual harassment and violence], prevent its recurrence, and address its effects' (United States Department of Education 2011). These requirements were underpinned by an interpretation of Title IX of the Education Amendments (1972), which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in any federally funded university, as extending to encompass the right of students to an education free from sexual harassment and other forms of sexual misconduct (Brodsky 2016, 823).[3] Following the 2011 'Dear Colleague' letter, students across the country rapidly began to file complaints against their colleges under Title IX, with 305 open cases and 197 resolved cases at the time of writing.[4] As Jessica C. Harris and Chris Linder (2017, xi) summarise,

> Student activism and the fastidious growth of schools under investigation for Title IX violations ignited a media storm that instantaneously positioned sexual violence as one of the most challenging and critical issues for educational leaders to address on college campuses.

This represented a significant shift in the institutional politics of sexual violence at US colleges, firmly establishing sexual violence as an administrative (and in some cases, criminal) issue that colleges had legal obligations to address, and couching this claim in the familiar language of the civil right to anti-discrimination (Brodsky and Deutsch 2015). In Australia, however, the legal responsibilities of universities to prevent sexual violence are less clear-cut. The *Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021* [2017] creates obligations for universities to provide mechanisms for resolving grievances that are timely, confidential and fair (Durbach and Keith 2017, 45–46). However, the Australian higher education regulator has not yet taken action against any university for breaching these obligations in relation to sexual violence despite a number of complaints being lodged in recent years (Duncan 2019).

The efforts of students in the US utilising Title IX to hold their colleges accountable were depicted at length in the 2015 documentary *The Hunting Ground* (Dick 2015). The film received significant international attention including both acclaim from feminists and uproar from opponents, who claimed that the film was a 'seriously false picture […] of the general sexual assault phenomenon at universities' (New 2015). Unsurprisingly, when the film was screened across Australia by the

[3] This interpretation was not without significant public controversy (Melnick 2020), and the 'Dear Colleague' guidance was repealed by the Trump administration in 2017 (Office for Civil Rights 2020).
[4] For current figures, consult the Chronicle of Higher Education's Title IX tracker: http://projects.chronicle.com/titleix/

advocacy organisation The Hunting Ground Australia Project (THGAP) from February 2016 onwards it sparked similarly fierce debate about the extent of sexual violence at Australian universities and the comparability of the Australian context to colleges in the US (see, e.g., Bingemann 2017; Funnell and Hush 2017). Nevertheless, the heightened public attention afforded to this issue benefitted feminist student activists who took the opportunity to hold demonstrations and put forward key demands of their universities, including changes to reporting and disciplinary procedures and the need for primary prevention programs (La Paglia 2016; University of Sydney Women's Collective 2016).

Around this time, a national survey of Australian university students to investigate the prevalence of campus sexual violence and students' experiences of reporting sexual violence to their universities was instigated by the Australian Human Rights Centre (AHRCentre) in partnership with THGAP. The survey, carried out by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC or 'the Commission'), produced the first comprehensive statistics on the issue in Australia. The ensuing report, *Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities* (*'Change the Course'*), was released in August 2017 and garnered national attention. The report found that experiences of sexual assault and harassment remain all too prevalent in the lives of Australian university students. Of the 30,930 students that responded to the survey, the Commission found that 51% of respondents had experienced sexual harassment at some time in 2016 and 6.9% of respondents had experienced sexual assault in 2015 and/or 2016, with one in ten women experiencing sexual assault during this time (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 49). Women, trans and gender diverse, LGBTIQ students, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and students with disability were all at a higher-than-average risk of experiencing sexual harassment and sexual assault (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 49–51). The report also found that the majority of students who experienced sexual assault or harassment did not report it to their university, and those who did report were generally dissatisfied with the response or support they received (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 120–21, 136–37).

The publication of the AHRC's report, and the national attention it drew to the issue of campus sexual violence, can be read as a major achievement for student feminists, who had laboured for many years to establish the prevalence and seriousness of campus sexual violence. University managers also took this opportunity to congratulate themselves for their participation in the investigation, which they began to claim they had 'commissioned', despite the fact that all

universities, except one, refused to participate when the national survey was initially proposed (Stanton 2014; Universities Australia 2021). In the wake of the report, universities loudly publicised the initiatives they had taken or planned to take, with the peak body Universities Australia (2018b) announcing triumphantly on the report's one-year anniversary that universities had taken '800 major action and initiatives'. Yet the release of the *Change the Course* report is not the end of this story, nor is it the beginning. Rather, it was a moment in an ongoing process of political struggle over gender relations within Australian universities – a struggle that began decades earlier, and is still (perhaps, will always be) unfinished.

In this vein, I seek to historicise these developments and to consider why and how they have unfolded at a particular time in the development of the Australian higher education sector, indeed during a period in which Australian universities are undergoing rapid structural transformation. In Chapter 4, I explore the development of the neoliberal university in Australia, considering a number of features that are popularly considered to differentiate the *neoliberal* university from earlier forms of the institution. Many of the tendencies I identify, such as the internationalisation of the student population and the privatisation of the university's revenue streams, are not new and have historical roots stretching back past landmark reforms in the 1980s. Yet these tendencies have become more salient over time, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic in which the closure of national and state borders disrupted the flow of international students (and their fees) to Australian universities and plunged these institutions into a period of economic crisis. During the period in which this research project was carried out, the pandemic brought to the surface the contradictions at the heart of the contemporary Australian university, with the pressure for continual expansion in tension with the steady withdrawal of public funding (Jayasuriya 2020). The acceleration of these trends in recent years has caused shifts in the nature and orientation of Australian universities, imposing new forms of managerialism, precarity and discipline upon staff and students.

This thesis is thus situated at a particular historical juncture at which the neoliberalisation of Australian universities is coming into sharp focus, while feminists are making heightened demands of universities to address the issue of sexual violence. A small body of existing research, outlined in the following section, has contributed to an understanding of how the neoliberalisation of universities has provoked insufficient and reactive responses to sexual violence. This literature begins to scrutinise how decisions are made within the neoliberal university, according to which logics and whose interests, and how these decisions can re-entrench gender norms, racism,

managerialism and other forms of power. While this scrutiny of the university is necessary, and indeed a significant task of this thesis, I argue that it is also necessary to subject feminist organising to a similar degree of critical analysis so as to consider the shortcomings of feminists' engagement with the neoliberal university. In this thesis, I consider the legacies of competing modes of feminist politics within Australian campus feminism and the divergent conceptions of sexual violence (and hence its remedies) that coexist within feminist politics. This attention to the disunity within feminism, I believe, can help us to think through the relationship of different modes of feminist politics to institutions and to understand how certain strands of feminism are able to enter into an uneasy complicity with the neoliberal university and its various harms – in Alison Phipps' (2020a, 3) words, to attend to 'the violence we can do in the name of fighting sexual violence'.

2. Overview of dominant approaches to researching campus sexual violence

Alongside the wave of activism, media reporting and public attention afforded to campus sexual violence that I noted in the prologue, a growing body of research has investigated this issue from various angles. In this section, I map out a number of emerging trends in research on university sexual violence. First, I briefly overview the major methodological approaches to researching campus sexual violence to date: quantitative prevalence research, policy analysis and psychological studies. These approaches have established the scope and scale of campus sexual violence, its impact on student-survivors and the deficiencies of university prevention and response frameworks. I then turn to the emergence of research that focuses more directly on students' sexual violence activism. I argue that while this work usefully expands the focus of this field to encompass political contestations over institutional responses to sexual violence, much of this scholarship treats feminist activism relatively uncritically, affording a level of epistemic privilege to student activists that precludes critical engagement with their activism. This section therefore identifies a key gap in the literature that this study proposes to address.

i. Prevalence data

In the US, quantitative data on the prevalence of campus sexual violence has been collected since at least 2000, with this research often funded by the US Department of Justice (e.g. Fisher, Cullen, and Turner 2000; Krebs et al. 2007; for a recent systematic review of prevalence data, see Fedina, Holmes, and Backes 2018). The largest prevalence study to date (n=181752), published in January 2020 by the Association of American Universities, found that 25.9% of women undergraduate

students had experienced sexual assault (Cantor et al. 2020).[5] Collection and publication of prevalence data in the US is supported by the *Jeanne Clery Act* (1990), a consumer protection law that requires federally funded colleges and universities to publish campus crime data annually. In Australia, there is no corresponding requirement for universities to collect and publicise data on crime, or on sexual violence specifically. Data on the prevalence of sexual violence in Australian universities began to be collected by the National Union of Students (NUS), who conducted a national survey of students' experiences of gendered violence in 2011 and again in 2015 (National Union of Students 2011; 2015). While these surveys had small sample sizes (n=1549 and 1366 respectively) and were thus not necessarily reflective of the national student cohort, they provided an important basis for the later national survey carried out by the Australian Human Rights Commission.[6]

ii. Policy research

The public attention generated by student activism and media reporting has put pressure on universities to take concrete actions in response to sexual violence. A corresponding research priority has therefore been to establish best-practice policy guidelines for university responses. Policy analysis in this area has proliferated in the UK (Bows, Burrell, and Westmarland 2015; Fenton and Mott 2015), US (American Association of University Professors 2012; Backman et al. 2020), Australia (Durbach and Keith 2017) and internationally (Towl and Walker 2019). This field of research has examined universities' legal and regulatory obligations in regards to sexual violence, the shortcomings of existing complaints procedures and support services and evidence-based standards for effective primary prevention initiatives. In doing so, scholars draw on research evidence and consider how this might be translated into effective and localised initiatives to reduce the prevalence of sexual violence and improve universities' responses after it does occur. This field is largely reform-oriented, framing sexual violence as a matter of both ethical obligation and legal compliance for university administrators. This thesis departs from this approach, seeking instead to understand the nature of the political struggles and economic imperatives that have created the conditions for such changes, as well as how students have contested the depoliticised framing of sexual violence as an administrative problem that prevails in policy-focused research.

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[5] The terms 'sexual assault', 'sexual violence', 'rape', 'sexual abuse' and 'sexual harassment' are defined and used differently in different social, historical and legal contexts. In this thesis, I mostly use the term 'sexual violence' to capture a spectrum of gendered forms of abuse and harassment to recognise that these phenomena are interrelated in that they are sexualised in a gendered manner. For a useful delineation of the meaning of these terms in the contemporary Australian context, see Henry 2018.

[6] A similar trajectory is observable in the UK, where student unions have taken the lead in collecting large-scale prevalence data (Smith 2010), with universities subsequently undertaking policy reviews (Universities UK 2016).

iii. Psychological studies

There has been a significant amount of research in the fields of psychology, nursing and social work investigating the emotional, psychological and social impacts of sexual violence on survivors of sexual violence in university communities. Major themes in this research include how, when and to whom survivors choose to disclose their experiences (Ahrens, Stansell, and Jennings 2010; Halstead, Williams, and Gonzalez-Guarda 2017; Orchowski and Gidycz 2012); the quality of services provided at campus counselling centres and other support providers (Artime and Buchholz 2016; Kirkner, Lorenz, and Ullman 2021); the impact of experiences of sexual violence on academic performance (Banyard et al. 2020; Stermac, Horowitz, and Bance 2017) and physical and psychological wellbeing (Pegram and Abbey 2019); characteristics or risk factors for perpetration of campus sexual violence (DeGue and DiLillo 2004; Jacques-Tiura et al. 2015) and the efficacy of primary prevention efforts, including bystander training (McMahon, Postmus, and Koenick 2011), resistance training (Senn et al. 2015) and consent education (Borges, Banyard, and Moynihan 2008).

Though this body of research is generally focused on individual behaviour and experience, some trauma researchers have attempted to situate individuals' experiences within broader institutional contexts, allowing for a more overtly political analysis of these experiences. Carly Parnitzke Smith and Jennifer Freyd's (2014, 575) influential concept of 'institutional betrayal' highlights 'the role of institutions in traumatic experiences and psychological distress following these experiences', thus foregrounding institutional responses to harm as a major factor shaping recovery and healing for survivors. However, even in this work, there is little focus on students' agency, survivors' perspectives and the ways in which students conceptualise, challenge and resist cultures of sexual violence. As Kathleen Krause (2017, 215) and her colleagues summarise, such research is generally conducted 'on students, not with students'.

iv. Research on student activism

Contrastingly, research that focuses on student sexual violence activism aims to foreground the dynamics of resistance, grassroots organising and social change. Researchers in this sub-field have made methodological and ethical commitments to include students in the research 'as partners in the production of evidence for change' (Krause et al. 2017, 212). This approach thus provides a welcome contrast to quantitative research, policy analysis and psychological research in which the political agency of students is largely absent. Though this is a small and emerging field, there are some clear themes that arise in this research. Firstly, there has been a heavy focus on students' use of social media platforms, particularly in the wake of #MeToo, as sites of 'counter-public

discourse, resistance and organizing' and networking across campuses (Rentschler 2018, 506; see also Linder et al. 2016; Vemuri 2018).[7] Secondly, researchers have concentrated on the relationship between sexual violence activism and identity, with the concept of intersectionality prominent in this literature (Koehn 2020; Linder 2018). Thirdly, this research also follows a broader trend in scholarship about contemporary student activism, which attempts to demonstrate the benefits of student activism to students' educational achievement or educational values more broadly, presumably as an effort to highlight the value of this activism to the institution. This approach thus focuses on leadership (Chambers and Phelps 2015), 'connection to global society' (Quaye 2007, 3), critical thinking (Tsui 2000) and other values that are supposedly shared by student activists and universities (e.g. Bovill et al. 2021; Koehn 2020).

Existing research on student sexual violence activism generally sees greater collaboration between students and the university as a lynchpin in ending sexual violence, with the potential for this collaboration to be underpinned by shared values (Bovill et al. 2021, 178; Koehn 2020, 2; Krause et al. 2017, 220; Lewis and Marine 2018, 144; Linder 2018, 133). Notably, these authors do not consider the *negative* political impacts that greater collaboration with university managers may have on student activism. Given the specific forms that managerial power assumes within the neoliberal university, collaboration may in fact foreclose more antagonistic or militant forms of organising through processes of co-option and neutralisation (as I explore in the next section). These authors also hold an underlying presumption that collaboration is what students are seeking, ignoring the fact that some student organisers – at least in the Australian context – are overtly hostile to university managers and do not seek to enter into a closer relationship with them (see, e.g., Thorburn 2018a). Most importantly, existing research on student sexual violence activism tends to see this activism as inherently positive or progressive, and only rarely engages with its potential shortcomings or limitations. This is, in some ways, surprising – feminist theory has historically been highly attentive to the internal contradictions and exclusions that have characterised feminist politics. Yet the mandate in this research to 'center student experiences as the authority' (Krause et al. 2017, 213) has its limitations: it can homogenise these experiences and elevate them to a level of epistemic authority that precludes a more critical interrogation of how students understand and organise around sexual violence, obscuring the fact that students do not have all the answers and are in fact capable of championing flawed or reactionary responses to sexual violence.

[7] I have written elsewhere about the uneasy relationship between campus feminist movements and #MeToo in Australia, drawing on a survey of student activists who were highly critical of #MeToo and resisted the conflation of their work with the #MeToo hashtag (Hush 2020).

3. Critical theories of sexual violence in the neoliberal university

In this section, I turn to the nascent body of literature that critically analyses university responses to sexual violence, and/or feminist resistance to sexual violence, specifically within the context of the neoliberalisation of universities. Much of the scholarship identified is from Canada, the US and UK – the bias in this analysis towards Anglophone countries in the Global North is a significant limitation of my reading work that is only in English. As this work makes some important theoretical headway towards understanding how sexual violence manifests in the neoliberal university, I review this literature here in some detail. I argue that this body of research usefully problematises the politics of resistance to sexual violence within university communities and foregrounds the divergent approaches to sexual violence, from neoliberal to abolitionist, that coexist uneasily within feminism. I draw out five themes from this literature that inform my research and propose that there is value in extending this analysis to the Australian context. While there are many similarities with the cases used in the existing literature, there are also significant contextual differences between Australia and the places in which these theories emerged, suggesting the benefits of using the Australian context as a novel case study.

i. Conceptions of the neoliberal university

Considering the role that sexual violence plays in the neoliberal university firstly requires some conception of what exactly the neoliberal university is. What is 'neo' about it? In other words, how does it differ from the liberal university more generally, and from other historically specific forms of the institution? In this literature, the neoliberal university is broadly understood as either being or acting like a business, especially through the traits of 'corporate competitiveness', relentless 'restructuring and privatizing', entrepreneurialism and 'increased managerial control of faculty' (Slaughter and Rhoades 2000, 73–74). While these are undoubtedly salient features of contemporary universities – though in ways that differ markedly across different institutions and places – foregrounding the *newness* of the neoliberal university can also risk promoting an ahistorical understanding of this 'move toward the marketplace' (Slaughter and Rhoades 2000, 73) as a novel phenomenon, glossing over the shifting roles that universities have played in capitalist political economies throughout their histories.

This orientation towards the neoliberal university as something radically new is evident in a 2012 special issue of the journal *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*, which brought together a series

of articles under the theme 'Policing the "Penn State Crisis"'.[8] Here the 'Penn State Crisis' refers to the 2011 conviction of Jerry Sandusky, a football coach at the prestigious Pennsylvania State University (PSU), for 45 counts of child sex abuse over at least fifteen years. In the special issue, the Sandusky case is conceptualised as a nexus at which the profit-seeking behaviours of the corporate university, hierarchical gender relations and the insular and highly protected nature of college sports are revealed as interrelated phenomena that together underpin the prevalence of sexual violence (Bass, Newman, and Giardina 2012; Cannella and Perez 2012; Giroux and Giroux 2012). Each of the articles in this special issue, in its own way, relies on a particular understanding of what the university once was – a force for public good, a vital public institution that was trusted, safe, democratic, or even 'a locus of free thought, critical inquiry, and radical democratic pedagogy' (Bass, Newman, and Giardina 2012, 303) – and how that status is currently being 'corrupted' by money and power (Giroux and Giroux 2012, 267). Only one author acknowledges, in passing, that:

> Of course, the old-fashioned notion of universities as repositories of culture and value has serious problems – not the least of which, they were often systematically exclusionary. (Dimitriadis 2012, 291)

The fact that this special issue emerged in the wake of a specific event, framed as a 'crisis/scandal/tragedy' by the editors of the special issue (Giardina and Denzin 2012, 259), is reflective of a broader tendency for the media, scholars, university managers and activists alike to react to 'spectacular' events of sexual violence in moments of 'crisis', rather than to analyse the everyday and normalised nature of sexual violence within university communities. Abolitionist university scholars Abigail Boggs and Nick Mitchell (2018, 434) name this tendency the 'crisis consensus': it positions the university as 'a good in itself, as an institution defined ultimately by the progressive nature at its core', with exceptional moments of violence framed as crises that disrupt the smooth functioning of the institution. Boggs and Mitchell (2018, 434) argue that the crisis consensus rests on a certain nostalgia for the supposed 'golden age' of the liberal university. This orientation carries 'the glossy patina of an ostensibly progressive liberal humanism', yet fails to reckon with the histories of expropriation, violence and exclusion that have always characterised

[8] The term 'policing the crisis' is adopted from the 1978 book *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, The State, and Law and Order*, by Stuart Hall et al. This book examines rising anxieties in Britain around the crime of mugging in the 1960s and 1970s and how the state manipulated a sense of crisis as a mechanism 'for the construction of an authoritarian consensus, a conservative backlash […] the slow build-up towards a '"soft" ' law-and-order society' (Hall et al. 1978, viii). However, Stuart Hall and his co-authors' critical stance towards policing and law and order throughout the original text is not carried through to the special issue of *Cultural Studies ↔ Critical Methodologies*. The editors of the special issue simply state that 'it is necessary to police this crisis', and describe the idea that we should 'let universities do their own policing; keep the police/government out' as a 'reactionary discourse' (Giardina and Denzin 2012, 260). This stands in contrast to other work, discussed below, that questions the efficacy or ethics of increased policing or securitisation as a response to sexual violence (e.g. Doyle 2015).

universities as institutions – in other words, the *ordinariness* of crisis, or crisis as a constitutive state for universities (Boggs and Mitchell 2018, 434). Unless these histories are brought to the surface and traced into the present, an understanding of how sexual violence is linked to underlying phenomena such as racialised hierarchies and capitalist exploitation is foreclosed. This historical treatment ultimately shapes how sexual violence is understood: as an extraordinary 'crisis/scandal/tragedy', or as something constitutive to the university and internally related to these forms of power. This points to the need for scholarship that engages carefully with the history of universities as institutions, as well as with political-economic analyses of the structure of contemporary universities, to properly account for the entrenched and 'ordinary' nature of sexual violence in university communities.

ii. Reputational risk management

There is a shared recognition in this body of literature that the public exposure of incidents of sexual violence and institutional complicity pose a threat to the brand identity, and thus the profit-potential, of the neoliberal university. Elizabeth Quinlan et al (2017, 61) notes that the corporatisation of universities 'has contradictory effects on universities' response to the problem of sexual violence, simultaneously suppressing and motivating initiatives to address sexual violence on university campuses'. In other words, universities attempt to avoid damaging information coming to light, but once this information is made public, they are then motivated to respond in ways that are perceived by the public (and, especially, by potential fee-paying students) as effective, progressive and compassionate. This is affirmed by Matthew Hawzen et al. (2018) in their analysis of Florida State University (FSU)'s response to an incident of sexual assault committed by the football team's star quarterback, Jameis Winston. The university's strategy, they argued, 'was a success from a public-relations perspective, effectively insulating the incident from the public' until it reached the media, at which point 'strategies at FSU changed *from suppression to opportunism*' with college authorities finally condemning Winston's actions (Hawzen, Anderson, and Newman 2018, 85, emphasis added).

Drawing on her twelve years of work on sexual violence in universities across the UK and Europe, feminist theorist and sociologist Alison Phipps (2020b, 230) describes a pervasive culture of 'institutional airbrushing'. Incidents of sexual violence are treated as reputational blemishes on the brand image of the university, which its managers seek to keep spotless:

> Blemishes of this sort can be airbrushed out in one of two ways: complainants may be discouraged from pursuing allegations; or allegations may be acted upon but alleged perpetrators allowed to withdraw quietly. (Phipps 2020b, 231)

Phipps and her colleague, Liz McDonnell, further note that in some instances, 'institutional polishing' is achieved through the mobilisation of equality and diversity work to 'generate a marketable image of the university rather than tackling the inequitable truth' (Phipps and McDonnell 2021, 7). Reflecting on the function of the Changing University Cultures (CHUCL) collective in which they were both involved, these authors conclude that they were ultimately used as the 'master's tools'. Despite holding the shared intention of radical and transformative change, the work of CHUCL – in particular, the reports and documentation it produced – were 'neutralised, co-opted and weaponised' to the benefit of university managers (Phipps and McDonnell 2021, 2).

iii. Surveillance, policing and securitisation

Drawing on work in the fields of critical and abolitionist university studies, recent feminist scholarship interrogates the university's relationship to the interrelated forces of policing, racial capitalism and state power. Scholarship in Canadian universities in particular has reflected on the securitised nature of universities' reactions to incidents of sexual violence – that is, the dominance of surveillance, increased policing and the presence of more security staff as proposed ways to manage or prevent sexual violence within university communities. In Canada, such responses have often emerged as recommendations of independent 'safety audits' after highly publicised incidents of sexual violence (Gray and Pin 2017, 87; Ikeda and Rosser 2010, 42). Techniques of securitisation provide visible and tangible mechanisms for universities to show that they are acting in response to sexual violence. However, Naoko Ikeda and Emily Rosser (2010, 37) describe increases in campus police and security personnel as 'law and order methods' that 'lack an analysis of campus rape as a structural issue of oppression'. These responses also take place alongside 'responsibilising' discourses, which attempt 'to ground safety in individual responsibility and hyper-vigilance' (Gray and Pin 2017, 97), for example advising women students to travel in numbers or be more aware of their surroundings. Further, Mandi Gray and Laura Pin (2017, 91) describe an emerging 'campus sexual assault industry' in which safety is commodified and marketed to students, particularly to young women, in the forms of apps, alarms and gadgets such as university-branded rape whistles. While these initiatives may sometimes be motivated by a genuine desire to prevent sexual violence, 'read through a more critical lens […] these modifications are indicative of the extent to which purported solutions can themselves be violent' (Gregory 2012, 68). A critical lens thus presses us to ask who is kept safe by the presence of more police and security guards on university campuses, how such responses relate to the broader, racialised infrastructure of policing in the community and how these initiatives may feed into the circuits of accumulation that constitute the neoliberal university (Doyle 2015).

Against a mainstream tendency to treat feminist activism as an inherently positive or progressive force (see, e.g., Atkinson and Standing 2019), some authors have also explored how the demands of student activists might align with or legitimise these concerning trends. While feminist activism has undoubtedly had a significant impact in publicising and raising awareness around the issue of sexual violence as well as motivating institutional reforms, students have also, at times, championed militarised, racialised or otherwise conservative reactions to sexual violence. Canadian sexual assault survivor and feminist researcher Mandi Gray (2019, 199) writes that:

> There needs to be an acknowledgement that not all student and activist work around sexual assault is actually beneficial to those who experience sexual violence and some of these groups actively contribute to the securitization and militarization of campus.

This can occur, for example, through organised demands for greater police presence on campus or more security guards, made without regard to how this may affect non-white, low-income, queer and trans students and staff (see, e.g., La Paglia 2016). Ikeda and Rosser argue that some students have also contributed to the production of racialised understandings of sexual violence which are mapped onto poorer neighbourhoods outside the university. They quote an editorial from the Ryerson University student publication following a sexual assault in a student dorm: 'Our grey, sometimes dirty, urban community isn't that pretty. But feeling safe on campus is a beautiful thing' (Ikeda and Rosser 2010, 38). Such statements promote a vision of the campus as a precious and exceptional space that must be made secure, even when this security comes at the expense of communities around the university for whom increased policing does not equate to safety.

iv. The outrage media and carceral feminisms

Student activism and the demands made by campus feminists circulate out from the university and are intertwined with wider public understandings of sexual violence, particularly as represented through the media. Nickie Phillips and Nicholas Chagnon (2018, 58) examine how the media and the public responded to the 2015 *People v. Turner* case,[9] arguing that discourses surrounding this case 'cast the justice system as overly lenient and offenders as irredeemable or monstrous, railing for harsher punishment and equating it with higher quality of justice'. Widespread outrage that Turner's punishment was too lenient (he was sentenced to six months in jail, served three, and was

[9] In 2015, Stanford University student Brock Turner was charged with the rape of 22-year-old Chanel Miller after being found late at night outside a fraternity on top of Miller, who was unconscious (Phillips 2015). Turner was convicted of three charges of felony sexual assault and sentenced to six months in jail and three years on probation (Xu 2016). The case received international media attention after the publication of Miller's victim impact statement in the media (Baker 2016), as well as a letter written by Turner's father pleading for leniency for his son which was argued to 'epitomize rape culture' (Gray 2016).

released on parole) eventually led to reform of California rape law to eliminate the possibility of probation and introduce mandatory minimum sentences (Dunlap 2016). Examining feminist advocacy for harsher sentencing and punishment for perpetrators of sexual violence, Phillips and Chagnon (2018) argue that this trend is representative of a carceral feminist politics, which advocates for strengthened state power and social control and positions the criminal justice system as the rightful mechanism for responding to sexual violence. Carceral feminism is ultimately supported by an 'outrage economy' in the media that sensationalises instances of sexual violence (particularly those suffered by young, white and wealthy women) and demands swift and tough responses from the state (Phipps 2020a, 95–96). As Kristin Bumiller (2008, 21–22) notes, these discourses contribute to a racialised imagery of rape targeted particularly at black men, serving to justify the mass incarceration of black men in the neoliberal era while also detracting attention from the many forms of violence experienced by black women.

For those sceptical of the criminal justice system, universities' administrative mechanisms for responding to sexual violence may hold promise as an alternative approach avoiding the involvement of police and prisons. It has been suggested that these mechanisms may be able 'to satisfy a broader range of justice interests than can be accommodated within those adversarial and carceral criminal processes' (Cowan and Munro 2021, 321). However, empowering universities to make findings on incidents of sexual violence and punish students for 'sexual misconduct'[10] may replicate some of the more pernicious aspects of the criminal justice system – for example, the overrepresentation of black men in reported incidents of sexual violence, underpinned by racist stereotypes around sexual aggression. An analysis of incidents reported to Colgate University, New York, found that:

> Black students comprised only 4.2 percent of the student body, but they accounted for half of the sexual violation accusations reported to the school, and 40 percent of the students put through the formal disciplinary process. (Levine and Meiners 2020, 28; see also Srinivasan 2021, 145–46)[11]

[10] The term 'sexual misconduct' has also been exposed to criticism. Melissa Gira Grant (2018, 196), for example, argues against the rhetorical displacement of sexual harassment: 'Misconduct can sound like a purely interpersonal problem, a disagreement that causes "offense" but is no one's fault in particular […] in rewriting accusations as instances of "sexual misconduct," and not workplace harassment, women are returned to the unwanted role of sexual gatekeepers.'

[11] Janet Halley makes a similar point in her critique of 'governance feminism' as manifested in Title IX enforcement (Halley 2015, 106–8). For a recent critical perspective on Halley's work, see Kennedy and McCann (2020).

Further, many university reporting systems adhere to a punitive philosophy focused on disciplining individual perpetrators. Rather than tackling and transforming the underlying conditions that give rise to sexual violence, these systems may bolster a mode of retributive justice rather than transformative justice. Phipps (2020b, 236) reflects that 'firing staff and expelling students were common demands by [her] participants'. She argues that this may inadvertently support the managerial tendency to 'clean up' the institution by removing individual 'bad men', and also interacts with stratified structures of power/value to disadvantage those at the bottom of the hierarchy. This analysis is further supported by the work of Sharon Cowan and Vanessa E. Munro in the UK context. Examining the use of universities' sexual misconduct policies and their compliance with regional regulations, Cowan and Munro (2021, 310) observe a 'criminal justice drift' in how these universities conceive of their responses to sexual violence. While they note that there is an important intention to utilising universities as alternative sites of justice for survivors of sexual violence given the enduring 'justice gap' within the criminal justice system, universities are increasingly displaying an 'uncritical mimicking of criminal-style investigative adversarial paradigms'. This drift, they write:

> […] poses a number of risks, including the creation of protracted and adversarial procedures that are often beyond the competence and training of those involved in university discipline and have been shown in other contexts to impose additional harm and distress upon complainants of sexual violence. (Cowan and Munro 2021, 309)[12]

v. Primary prevention: beyond 'affirmative consent'

Finally, scholars have questioned the norms of sexuality that are promoted by universities' prevention initiatives as well as student activists' demands. Drawing on feminist criticisms of the concept of consent as a contractual paradigm grounded in property ownership (see, e.g., J. Butler 2011; Pateman 1988; Serisier 2015), scholars have queried the dominance of consent education as a proposed remedy to sexual violence. In the US context, Jennifer Nash (2019, 204) argues that colleges' enthusiastic espousal of the ethic of affirmative consent is best read as an attempt to 'transform students into sexual citizens who perform precisely what universities need them to perform: risk management'. This individualised imperative to manage the risk of sexual violence is identifiable in the emergence of consent apps, which propose a neat technological solution to the 'messiness of sex and its potential for harm and hurt' (Serisier 2015). Apps such as We-Consent, Legal Fling and Good2Go, marketed largely to North American university students, can be downloaded to smartphones and used to document consent before sexual interactions, with

[12] Similar analyses in the US have explored how Title IX replicates certain dynamics of the criminal justice system, especially in its focus on individual punishment rather than structural transformation (see Collins 2016; Strait 2020).

participants signing a digital contract using their fingerprints. A typical example of such a contract, from an app called SaSie, reads:

> From this point on, it shall be the responsibility of the parties listed in this Agreement to determine a clear way to communicate permissions and limits with each other, both before and during any sexual encounter they have, whether now or in the near future. (Alptraum 2016)

Legal theorists have pointed out that if consent is retracted at any point during a sexual encounter without that retraction being recorded on the app, the signed contract could be used in legal proceedings as evidence against any sexual assault charges (Danaher 2018). These apps demonstrate the way in which seemingly well-meaning interventions in cultures of sexual violence can dovetail with neoliberal agendas of security and risk management (Nash 2019; see Hush 2019 for further analysis).

Janice Haaken extends this analysis to bystander programs, another form of primary prevention that is increasingly prevalent in universities. Haaken argues that the bystander model tends to 'substitute moralizing slogans – "It's on us!" – for genuine analysis of the dynamics of group life on college campuses' (Haaken 2017, 24). By positioning bystander programs as the solution to sexual violence, Haaken (2017, 18) argues, 'activists [may] inadvertently reproduce a narrow and ultimately conservative vision of sexuality'. As Emily Colpitts (2021, 11) notes, the kinds of primary prevention programs that are taken up by the neoliberal university tend to be individualised and depoliticised as they are 'more easily quantified and measured and […] more likely to align with the neoliberal orientation towards profitability'. By tracing links between the specific forms and contents of primary prevention programs and the political economy of the neoliberal universities, these analyses reveal how more holistic and transformative approaches to sexual violence prevention are foreclosed by the hegemonic paradigms of affirmative consent and bystander education.

4. Purpose of this study

The conceptual themes and theoretical insights of the body of literature discussed above provide the basis for a critical analysis of the institutional politics of sexual violence in the neoliberal university, one that does not assume the inherent goodness or progressiveness of either the university or feminist activism. Such an approach leaves open the potential that some responses to sexual violence, whether they are proposed by Vice Chancellors or student feminists, may do more harm than good. This body of work situates the politics of sexual violence within a wider

frame, considering how institutionalised responses to sexual violence might shore up the injurious dynamics of neoliberal capitalism, racism and gender regimes. This approach therefore resists a teleological narrative of progress whereby once activists have raised sufficient awareness about the issue of sexual violence and universities have taken action, the prevalence of sexual violence will gradually decrease, and the university will become a safer place. This stance informs the orientation of this thesis: an openness to the limitations and contradictions of, on the one hand, the neoliberal university's treatment of sexual violence, and, on the other hand, feminist activists' framing of sexual violence and their proposed solutions. A careful interrogation of the relationship between feminist collectives and the university, as well as the broader social, political and economic contexts in which these contestations take place, provides the basis for understanding why transformative responses to sexual violence in this context have been so difficult to achieve, as well as the conditions of possibility for more transformative responses to be enacted in the future.

To date, however, there has been no such analysis applied to Australian universities. The relatively scant research on university sexual violence in the Australian context has largely been confined to prevalence studies and policy analysis (e.g. Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a; Durbach and Keith 2017). While these provide an important basis for evaluating the scope of the problem and the inadequacy of universities' responses to date, they are largely disconnected from analyses of the history of Australian universities and their wider social context or the localised dynamics of political struggles over sexual violence. This context is critical, as it shapes the distribution of power and decision-making processes within universities and the specific forms that proposed solutions to sexual violence take. Research on best-practice policy responses to sexual violence sets a standard for universities, but only analysis of living political struggles within institutions can reveal the barriers to implementing these changes and provide a roadmap for how we might get there.

The application of this lens to Australian universities also promises novel insights due to the significant contextual differences between Australia, North America and the UK. Despite all being English-speaking countries in the Global North, there are nonetheless historical, economic and cultural factors that differentiate Australian university contexts from those in other settings. Firstly, as political economists frequently observe, neoliberalism has been marked by its 'uneven geographic development' (Harvey 2007, 23), with different paces, forms of coercion and institutional effects. As such, the 'neoliberal university' is not a monolithic entity – the relationship of Australian universities to the neoliberal political economy deserves specific and contextualised analysis. Secondly, cultural differences shape both the nature of sexual violence and feminist

resistance to it. For example, while critical research on campus sexual violence in the UK has centred around the phenomenon of 'lad culture' (Phipps et al. 2018), some translation is required in order to adapt concepts like this to the Australian context. Additional features of the Australian cultural landscape, such as the role of white masculinities within a settler-colonial context (Wadham 2004), deserve contextual analysis. Rather than proposing a grand theory of the relationship between sexual violence and the neoliberal university, I suggest that the politics of gender within neoliberal institutions must be grounded in their local political-economic circumstances and cultural histories.

As is the case in other contexts, Australian universities' current responses to sexual violence take place in a context of significant and increasing political backlash. Some of the developments mentioned above, including the introduction of consent programs within university settings, have been the objects of outrage and ridicule from right-wing opponents of feminism. Amidst frequent portrayals of university student activists as 'fragile snowflakes' unable to handle the responsibilities and vicissitudes of adult life, initiatives such as consent education have been framed as a pernicious extension of identity politics on university campuses. In such a context, there are certainly risks in posing further criticisms of these developments – for example, the potential that these criticisms will be mobilised by the right to portray students as divided and uncertain, or to justify further political attacks on the student left. However, this fraught context makes a critical appraisal of feminist activism all the more important. This imperative also aligns with the 'activist research' methodology adopted in this thesis (see Chapter 2), which seeks to contribute to a more rigorous politics of resistance to sexual violence within the neoliberal university. By considering the efficacy of existing strategies and tactics employed by student feminist activists, I consider how these activists might better navigate backlash and the specific constraints imposed by the institutional setting of the neoliberal university.

Research questions

The two major research questions investigated in this thesis are:

1. How are Australian universities' responses to sexual violence conditioned by the ongoing neoliberalisation of the Australian university sector?
2. How have student feminist organisers challenged and contested Australian universities' institutional responses to sexual violence since 2015, and how effective have their strategies been?

5. Theoretical approach

In order to analyse student feminist activism in Australian universities, this thesis draws on and critically engages with concepts from the field of Feminist Institutionalism (FI). This approach orients the thesis towards the *institutional* context of student feminist activism – that is, the context of the neoliberal university. FI, a field of research in political science, conceives of institutions as consisting of sets of formal and informal rules that shape and constrain the behaviour of actors within these institutions (Chappell and Waylen 2013; Kenny 2013a; Krook and Mackay 2011; Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010). Drawing on insights from the broader field of New Institutionalism (NI), FI seeks to understand how and why institutions reproduce gendered hierarchies of power, with a view to better understanding how institutions may be utilised by feminist actors to intervene in and transform these hierarchies.

A major theoretical task of this thesis is to critically appraise the ability of feminist institutionalism to explain the dynamics of collective feminist mobilisation within universities. Through my theoretical and empirical analysis, I argue that while key concepts from New and Feminist Institutionalism (NI and FI) provide insights into the nature of institutions and the barriers to institutional change, these concepts need to be situated within a more holistic analysis of the broader social, political and economic contexts in which institutions are embedded. I suggest that through further engagement with a) the macro-level political economies in which institutions operate and b) the role of collective movements within institutions, FI theorists may develop a richer understanding of how institutional change comes about as well as the barriers to such change. This analysis therefore contributes to the central task of feminist institutionalism; that is, to grasp how 'institutions reflect, reinforce, and structure unequal gendered power relations in wider society', and in turn to offer 'insights into the dynamics of continuity and change – and the means for interrupting them to promote or undermine feminist goals' (Krook and Mackay 2011, 6).

In Chapter 3, I develop a close critical engagement with the new and feminist institutionalist literature. Institutionalist theorists have deliberately moved away from structuralist theories of institutions in which institutions are subjugated to macro-scale forces, seeing these theories as overly deterministic. As John Campbell and Ove K. Pedersen (2001, 14) write, 'by adopting a middle-range approach to theory, scholars found that institutional analysis offered an escape from the quagmire of grand theory'. However, feminist institutionalists have also offered thoughtful reflections about what is lost in this meso-level focus (e.g. Kenny and Mackay 2009; Findlay 2015)

– in particular, a substantive theory of power and explanatory models of institutional change that link institutional dynamics to the wider social ecology. In this vein, Tammy Findlay (2015) argues that concepts from the discipline of political economy help FI theorists to explain *how* and *why* certain institutional rules emerge and the relations of power that underpin these rules.

Extending Findlay's argument, I propose a framework which I term *embedded institutionalism* that aims to highlight the interconnections between institutions and the macro-social contexts in which they are embedded. Applying this framework in my analysis of feminist activism within universities, I focus on the neoliberal political economy in which contemporary Australian universities are embedded as an example of how macro-level contexts significantly shape and structure institutions and constrain the possibilities for feminist transformation. The secondary purpose of this model is to foreground the role that collective actors play within institutional settings through challenging, subverting or breaking the institutional 'rules of the game' and thus acting as a key motivator of institutional change. This model provides for a multi-level analysis of collective feminist mobilisation within universities, encompassing the history and political economy of the university, the internal rules and dynamics of the university and grassroots projects of political transformation. This analysis enriches both the analysis of student feminist activism as a social movement, by embedding this activism within its institutional and political-economic context, and the analysis of the neoliberal university as an institution, by foregrounding the living struggles of actors within the university that seek to transform it.

Approaching this project as a feminist researcher has also prompted reflections on my positionality. I have been involved and invested in these movements for several years: first as the campus Women's Officer at the University of Sydney in 2016, then as a co-director of the national advocacy group End Rape on Campus Australia, from 2017 to the time of writing. In many ways, my position as a researcher mirrors my position at the protest recalled at the beginning of this introduction: involved in the action, but slightly to the side, trying to get a different angle on what is happening to those directly in the fray. I began this research project with the aim of undertaking some critical reflection on this period of student feminist activism, to understand how these organisers have achieved what they have, but also to understand the limitations and shortcomings of campus feminist organising. A key concern was the production of knowledge that would be useful to organisers themselves, rather than being consigned to the silence of the academic archive – though this question of usefulness and movement-relevance raises some thorny methodological problems, which I work through in the next chapter.

Scope and limitations

This thesis focuses on how students have challenged their institutions' responses to sexual violence, and in doing so utilises two Australian universities as case studies. This focus excludes detailed consideration of the role of non-managerial university staff in the institutional politics of sexual violence given the distinct nature of the employment relationship between these staff and the university (Cowan and Munro 2021, 310). Further, I do not claim that my findings are generalisable to all Australian universities. University campuses are highly stratified in their student demographics, political histories and internal dynamics. Instead of attempting to map the state of student feminist organising on a national level, I have chosen to investigate two localised settings in greater detail in order to provide for a richer and finer-grained account of the institutional dynamics within these two universities. In the next chapter, I explore the question of generalisability in greater detail, arguing that the methods and findings of this project – while locally situated – nevertheless have value to analyses of university sexual violence in other contexts.

6. Thesis in overview

Chapter 2 outlines the methodological approach adopted in this project. This chapter explores the concept of 'action research' – research that is grounded in a particular political context and aims to contribute materially to political change within that context. I consider questions about the objectivity of action research and the tension between political commitment and academic rigour, arguing that practices of accountability and reflexivity at the heart of action research provide the epistemological grounding for its claim to situated objectivity. I then move on to outline the specific methods and techniques deployed in this project, including semi-structured interviews and archival research. This chapter concludes with a reflection on the process of gaining institutional ethics approval for this research and what that process revealed about how the university manages and controls knowledge in regards to sexual violence.

Chapter 3 sets up the theoretical framework that is deployed throughout this thesis. Introducing key concepts from the fields of New Institutionalism (NI) and Feminist Institutionalism (FI), this chapter moves into a critique of how, in their aversion to 'grand theories', these fields have moved away from analysis of the macro-level contexts in which institutions are embedded. I present a model ('embedded institutionalism') which aims to conceptualise the dynamic relationship between macro-level processes, institutional structures and collective organising within institutions in order to ground a more holistic analysis of institutional dynamics. Embedded institutionalism expands the horizon of institutional theory by 'thinking bigger' about the broader social functions

that institutions play and argues that this context can help answer the critical question of *how* and *why* certain institutional rules are put in place and why they are, at times, so resistant to change.

Chapter 4 inquires into the historical and political-economic context in which Australian universities have evolved. This chapter examines the 'Dawkins reforms', a series of major reforms to the higher education sector rolled out under the Hawke Labor government in the late 1980s that are often framed as the genesis of the neoliberal university in Australia. Examining four key aspects of these reforms, I trace continuities between higher education policy in the Dawkins era and in earlier periods, situating the neoliberal university within the historical development of the Australian capitalist political economy. I argue that these reforms were not so much a 'revolution' (Croucher et al. 2013b) as a process of layering in which new rules and practices did not displace but were added onto older ones. In many cases, neoliberal reforms served to reinforce and perpetuate older rules and norms, such as gendered and racialised hierarchies of power. This chapter forms the basis for my analysis, in Chapter 8, of how the political economy of Australian universities shapes their responses to sexual violence.

Chapter 5 presents a contemporary history of feminist politics in Australian universities. Drawing on archival material from student newspapers as well as secondary literature, this chapter explores the history of feminist organising against sexual violence at Australian universities from the 1970s to the contemporary period. In this chapter, I argue that despite the continuity of this work and the consistency of the demands that have been put forward by feminists over the past half-century, feminist political strategy on university campuses has in fact shifted significantly over this period. An initial focus on separatist organising and revolutionary tactics gave way to a reformist political orientation during the mid-1970s, with liberal feminism largely eclipsing socialist and radical modes of feminist politics. I attribute this shift in strategy partially to attacks on student unions and campus trade unions, which sought to limit the radicalism and militancy of these bodies, and partially to broader trends in Australian feminist politics, including the influence of the 'femocrat experiment' (Eisenstein 1991) starting in the early 1970s. These factors combined to reorient the politics and strategy of campus feminist movements and reinforce a dominant focus on institutional credibility, a legacy that informs student organising against sexual violence to the present day.

Chapter 6 moves to the contemporary context, presenting the results of my interviews with fourteen students engaged in organising against sexual violence at two universities. It examines three key aspects of these universities' responses to sexual violence – student consultation, primary

prevention and changes to institutional reporting procedures. The interview data is supplemented with analysis of key policies, procedures, reports and statements from the two universities in question in order to triangulate and contextualise the perspectives of these activists. This chapter then considers the strategies and tactics that student organising groups have engaged in to contest their institutions' responses to sexual violence and begins to evaluate the efficacy of these strategies within the context of the neoliberal university. The overall picture painted by these interviews is that while students achieved some small, local wins, overall, they felt a shared sense of frustration in failing to achieve the transformative institutional changes that they sought.

Chapter 7 is a brief chapter that focuses on the role of the report, *Change the Course*, released by the Australian Human Rights Commission in 2017. It examines the process by which the report was produced, universities' responses to the report and the difficulty of implementing the report's recommendations. I argue that the report ultimately had a demobilising impact on student activism due to the way in which it was co-opted by university managers as evidence of their commitment to tackling sexual violence.

Chapter 8 discusses and analyses my interview data, placing it in the context of my earlier historical and conceptual analysis of campus sexual violence. I first consider how the layering of newer and older rules in the neoliberal university has shaped universities' responses to sexual violence and underpinned responses that are focused on mitigating institutional risk. Second, I examine the specific constraints that bear upon student activists within this institution context, outlining three modes of institutional constraint (rules, practices and narratives) that acted to narrow the possibility of transformative change. Finally, I revisit the tactics and strategies adopted by the student activists I interviewed, seeking to explain why they had success in creating public awareness, political pressure and momentum, but not in converting this momentum into effective and lasting institutional transformations.

Chapter 9 returns to my research questions, summarising my findings in relation to three key themes of institutional responses to sexual violence, institutional contestations around these responses and the underlying question of institutional power. Having conceptualised the neoliberal university as a constrained space for feminist organising, I consider the necessary conditions for feminist transformation in this institutional context, including coalitions between staff and students, the mobilisation of international students and stronger links between on- and off-campus movements. Finally, this chapter reflects on the theoretical and methodological contributions

made in this thesis: namely, the development of a more holistic conception of institutional dynamics as embedded in macro-social contexts as well as a call for more politically engaged methodological practices in institutionalist theory.

Chapter 2 | Methodology: Ethics, epistemology and practice in action research

> Sometimes, after all, the theoretical work done in social movements teaches us more than that written in libraries.
> – Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, 'Empire, Twenty Years On'

Introduction

Before starting this research project, I had spent three years involved in student activism and student unionism related to sexual violence and other political issues. As an undergraduate student in 2016, I was elected as the Women's Officer of the Students' Representative Council at the University of Sydney. In this role, I convened the Women's Collective, a grassroots feminist collective of women and non-binary students, and organised campaigns to increase awareness of sexual violence and challenge the university's treatment of this issue (Hush 2016; University of Sydney Women's Collective 2016). Subsequently, I became a co-director of End Rape on Campus (EROC) Australia, a national grassroots organisation working to advocate for survivors of sexual violence in university communities. One key objective of EROC Australia is to support the advocacy and activism of campus-based feminist groups, and as such we frequently liaised with active student organisers. I therefore began this project with perspectives about the topic of campus sexual violence that were shaped by my own experiences as an activist and organiser. My personal connections to these movements and the people involved in them also mean that I am interested in these movements not just at an intellectual level, but I am also invested in contributing to them via scholarly work that is 'movement-relevant' (Bevington and Dixon 2005) and that honours the experiences of student activists and survivors of sexual violence.

These commitments raise a number of methodological and epistemological questions. What is my role in this project as a researcher, and is it compatible with my simultaneous participation in the topic of my research; that is, feminist activism to address sexual violence? When these academic and political commitments come into conflict, how is one to navigate them? Is it possible to produce research that is both politically engaged and partisan, but also intellectually rigorous? And what does it mean to work *on* the university – in the sense of being engaged in struggles to transform it – from *within* the university, as a researcher, a wage-labourer and an activist? These questions are not unique to this project, but common to much politically engaged research. This

chapter lays out my answers to these questions through an exploration of the methodological practices that underpin this project: namely, those within the tradition of action research. The term 'action research' is used here in the broader sense to refer to an action-oriented or activist approach to undertaking research, rather than to the specific design of Participatory Action Research with which the term is sometimes conflated.

The first section of this chapter traces the theoretical and political lineages that inform my approach to fieldwork. This section navigates critiques of the traditional role of academic researchers and academic institutions from the fields of Marxist, postcolonial and feminist studies, and tracks the development of action research approaches that emphasise political engagement as a fundamental aspect of research. The second section examines the justificatory context for action research, reviewing epistemological theories of situated knowledge and standpoint theory and arguing that these developments challenge and reframe the conceptual standards with which action research is justified, especially through the guiding concept of reflexivity. The third section discusses the specific methods and techniques of data gathering used in this project, including the use of institutional case studies, semi-structured, in-depth interviews and textual and archival analysis. These multiple methodological tools are used to produce a holistic and nuanced understanding of the institutional dynamics of sexual violence, weaving together the lived experiences of activists and survivors with rigorous analysis of their institutional context to reveal how this setting creates constraints and opportunities for grassroots feminist movements. The fourth section explores the ethical questions that emerged during the research process, through a reflection on my experience of going through a difficult process of institutional ethics review and my encounters during fieldwork. This experience unexpectedly became its own source of insight into how the neoliberal university 'manages' sexual violence, in part through constraints on the production of oppositional knowledges.

1. The roots and practices of action research

i. Critical perspectives on the social function of academia

The methodological approach adopted in this research project is informed by a long tradition of politically engaged research both inside and outside the academy. This tradition is grounded in a critique of the social role that academic research and teaching have traditionally played, which are at best politically detached and abstracted from lived experiences and social struggle, and at worst can act to justify, conceal and reproduce oppressive social relations. Such critiques have emerged from several related intellectual lineages. First, Marxist thinkers have analysed the role that

academic thought and academic institutions have played in simultaneously obscuring and reproducing class society; that is, their central role in producing ideology in the Marxist sense. Karl Marx himself, most notably in *Capital*, sought to expose the role that bourgeois political economists played in legitimising and naturalising the specific relations of production inherent to capitalism. In the case of bourgeois economics, Marx writes, it is 'no longer a question whether this or that theorem was true, but whether it [is] useful to capital or harmful, expedient or inexpedient, in accordance with police regulations or contrary to them' (Marx 1990 [1867], 97; see also Marx and Engels 1977 [1932], 65). Marx's attempt to construct a scientific account of the capitalist mode of production, one able to reveal its true dynamics of exploitation, alienation and accumulation, is posed directly as a critique of the 'apologetics' of bourgeois intellectualism. In the early twentieth century, Antonio Gramsci, drawing on Marx, further developed this line of critique. Gramsci argued that intellectuals typically act as 'deputies' to the dominant social group, assisting in the maintenance of social hegemony and ideology (Gramsci 2014 [1947], 12). However, he argued, organic intellectuals exist in every social group, and elaborate the political and philosophical position of the group; thus the organic intellectuals of the working class, for Gramsci, are a critical aspect of the development of class consciousness and counter-hegemonic strategy (Gramsci 2014 [1947], 15). And while Pierre Bourdieu is not typically considered a Marxist thinker (see Burawoy 2018; Desan 2013), his analysis of the cultural capital of the intellectual class and its role in reproducing class relations is nonetheless undoubtedly influenced by this theoretical heritage. Bourdieu elaborated the roles of cultural and social capital, alongside economic capital, in order 'to grasp capital and profit in all their forms' (Bourdieu 1986, 242). For Bourdieu, educational institutions form key sites through which cultural and social capital is distributed and thus aid in the social reproduction of capitalism (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977). The field of critical university studies, consolidated in the 1990s, has continued to analyse the relationship between academia and the capitalist mode of production, particularly in the context of neoliberal political economies (Williams 2012).

A second and related strand of critique emerges from the fields of postcolonial and black studies. In 1968, the publication of Brazilian educational theorist Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (*Pedagogia do Oprimido*) exposed the role of education in colonial domination, 'indoctrinating [students] to adapt to the world of oppression' (Freire 1972, 52). Drawing on Frantz Fanon and Erich Fromm, Freire argues that education acts as a means of inculcating the 'oppressor consciousness' within the oppressed, creating a docile and subjugated population that is less disposed to resist colonial domination (Freire 1972, 34; see also Giroux 2001; hooks 1994; and

Tuck and Yang 2012, 19–21 for a critique of Freire's interpretation of Fanon). Like teaching, academic research practices can perpetuate colonial and imperialist patterns of domination – Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith has powerfully critiqued the extractive, objectifying and Eurocentric tendencies of academic research, arguing for the need to decolonise methodological practices (Smith 2013). The latter part of the twentieth century saw the creation of dedicated spaces within Western universities for subaltern disciplines such as black studies, Indigenous studies and postcolonial studies, yet in some cases, the institutionalisation of these disciplines has led to an attenuation of the political force and radicalism of their earlier anti-colonial critiques (Greenwood 2008; Spivak 1999). These political critiques have also had limited uptake in adjacent fields such as women's studies, which Indigenous feminists argue continues to reinforce racist and colonialist power relations (Felton and Flanagan 1993; Moreton-Robinson 2000).

Most thinkers in this tradition have an equivocal perspective on universities as both sites of ideological domination and exploitation but also as potential sites for social transformation, through critical and radical pedagogies and politically engaged research practices.[13] It is through this intellectual lineage, working in tandem with social struggles inside and outside the university, that new research methods have emerged, ones which are more directly linked and accountable to social struggles. It is no coincidence that many of these methodological practices took root in the mid to late twentieth century, at the same time as a diverse array of social movements around gender, sexuality, class, racism, war and ecology were waging battles inside and outside the university. These movements challenged the alienation of academic theory from practice and motivated a rethinking of the role and responsibilities of the academic researcher. They disrupted the presumed binary between the detached, objective, neutral researcher and the engaged, partisan, subjective activist.[14] More academics began to think about and theorise ways of occupying both positions simultaneously, a task that abolitionist theorist Ruth Wilson Gilmore describes as 'talk-

[13] The emerging field of abolitionist university studies is an exception here. It holds that a much broader and deeper social transformation is necessary in order to reckon with colleges' and universities' complicity in histories of slavery, land theft, colonialism and the carceral state (Boggs et al. 2019; Boggs and Mitchell 2018; Harney and Moten 2013). Robin D. G. Kelley (2016), writing in this tradition, suggests that more moderate critiques of universities 'demand that universities change in ways that we cannot expect them to change', and that any truly transformative or emancipatory politics must 'by definition […] [take] place outside of the university'.

[14] These developments can be seen, for example, in debates in the field of anthropology from the 1970s onwards in which anthropologists began to grapple with their complicity in colonialism and their responsibility to engage in political action and solidarity (Lewis 1973; Stauder 1974; see Scheper-Hughes 1995 for a proposal for a 'militant anthropology'). Parallel developments in the field of sociology challenged the role of the sociologist as an 'impartial observer, at once ubiquitous and invisible', with Bourdieu proposing that sociology should be used as 'an instrument of liberation' (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992, 254, 212; see also Burawoy 1998; Gouldner 1970). Notable precursors to these approaches include Kurt Lewin (1948) and the tradition of the workers' inquiry (Engels 2009 [1845]; Marx 1938 [1880]; see also Woodcock 2014 for a history of the workers' inquiry).

plus-walk' – not just oppositional *study*, but also oppositional *work*; that is, the 'organisation and promotion of ideas and bargaining in the political arena' (Gilmore 1993, 71).

Feminist research has also expanded on the responsibility of academic researchers to contribute to emancipatory social change. From the inception of women's and gender studies as academic disciplines, feminist researchers have been active in developing egalitarian research methodologies that amplify the voices of women as a means of intervening in patriarchal social relations (Fonow and Cook 1991). Critical of the paternalistic and masculinist nature of much 'expert research' that has historically failed to engage with women's experiences, feminist researchers hold an overarching commitment to questioning and deconstructing hierarchies of power between the researcher and the researched, emphasising the importance of cooperation and co-production in the research process (Maguire 1987). This is informed by an ethics of care (Porter 1999) that is particularly central to the work of black feminist scholars (Collins 1989, 765–67), as well as a broader attentiveness to experience, emotion and affect. Feminist researchers generally hold that the dialectic interplay between lived experience and feminist theory is the basis for projects of social transformation (Collins 1986; Gottfried 1996). This includes feminist institutionalists, who – as I will discuss further in the next chapter – have drawn links between their theoretical project and the aim of transforming institutions in ways that promote feminist aims (Krook and Mackay 2011, 6). These insights inform the underlying aim of this thesis to contribute to movements led by survivors, students and feminists that seek to transform Australian universities and their responses to sexual violence.

ii. Action research and methodological innovations

Weaving together the diverse theoretical and methodological developments summarised above, the term 'action research' (sometimes also referred to as 'activist research' or 'activist scholarship') encapsulates an array of methodological approaches that understand research not merely as a means of producing knowledge, but also of creating social change. Fundamentally, action research holds that these two endeavours should be linked. It insists that knowledge should be relevant to the process of social change, created in partnership with communities involved in efforts for social change, and accessible and accountable to these communities (Koirala-Azad and Fuentes 2009). This is grounded in a recognition that academic research is not the sole domain of knowledge production – social movements, too, create knowledges that are organically linked to the process of social struggle (Choudry 2013; Nabudere 2008). Within this field, the approach of Participatory Action Research (PAR) is the most prominent operationalisation of these commitments (Gutierrez and Lipman 2016, 1242). PAR generally involves co-designing research projects with participants

in response to concrete, local issues, in the recognition that community members often have valuable skills to contribute to research design and development. Importantly, this process can also help to make the research aims and findings more relevant to the needs of participants and their communities, rather than being dictated by the assumptions of the researcher (The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010).

Action research, however, is not without its challenges. Some of these emerge from its institutional setting: historically, universities have generally been hostile to research that is explicitly in pursuit of emancipatory social change. Action researchers undertaking qualitative research often confront an institutionalised legacy of positivism and the 'quantitative imperative' (Michell 2003). In some cases, this leads to the use of quantitative research standards to judge qualitative research, for example in ethics review procedures (Lincoln 2005), or the disparaging view of qualitative researchers as 'journalists or soft scientists' (Denzin and Lincoln 2011, 7). Action researchers also report institutional hostility or apprehension towards the kind of egalitarian collaboration that is central to participatory approaches, as well as a lack of training or support for this kind of research (Greenwood and Levin 2000; Nygreen 2010). After all, one of the founding conceits of the university is that research is a specialist activity best conducted by professional, highly trained academics, with communities and publics 'outside' the university treated as sources or objects of knowledge, rather than co-producers of knowledge (Gaventa and Cornwall 2008). As I have discussed above, action research has gained increasing uptake in some fields, yet certain factors in the neoliberal policy climate in which universities are situated form structural barriers to such research. These barriers include increasing competition for scarce public grant funding, the growth of private sector and industry-linked funding that is predicated on narrowly defined 'impact' metrics, and the accelerated publish-or-perish imperative that discourages the kind of deep, slow and often painstaking community work necessary for good action research (Mountz et al. 2015). Further, the prevalence of risk management logics in research governance can hinder participatory approaches that are deemed by the university to be 'high risk'; I will return to this point in the final section of this chapter, when discussing the institutional ethics review process in relation to this project.

There are other contradictions and challenges that emerge not from the institutional context of activist research, but from within the methods and practices of the research. Firstly, despite the vocal commitment of action researchers to egalitarian treatment of research participants, there are still inevitable power differentials between academic researchers and non-academic participants

that can never be fully remediated through methodological innovations. Writing specifically about feminist ethnography, Judith Stacey (1988, 23) notes that the researcher can ultimately choose to leave the field at any time, a freedom that participants lack when 'the field' is their home or community (see also Henwood and Pidgeon 1995, 11). Further, even where collaborative writing practices are employed, academic researchers generally have the final say over the texts produced through research, and over the tasks of 'interpretation, evaluation, and judgement' (Stacey 1988, 24). Despite the political and epistemological value of co-authorship, publication of the findings of action research in peer-reviewed journals provides the researcher with material benefits to their career, a process that may have little significance or benefit to participants (The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010). In such moments of tension, the professional responsibilities of the researcher can clash with their political commitment to communities and participants; this is a real hazard of trying to walk the line between research and social action.

These challenges are not unique to action research and may also surface, at times, in mainstream social science research. But as Charles Hale argues, what distinguishes action research is 'an explicit commitment to name and confront' the challenges, to inhabit points of contradiction with honesty, reflexivity and accountability (Hale 2008, 13). Reflecting on and articulating the ethical and methodological justifications for action research is therefore vitally important not only instrumentally, to create space for these techniques within sceptical or hostile academic disciplines, but also for fulfilling the political commitments of action research. As Rhoda Gutierrez and Pauline Lipman (2016, 1243) write, 'activist researchers must be more thorough, more accurate, because the stakes are higher. What we do can have real consequences for people's struggles' (see also Hale 2008, 11). In this vein, the next section will explore the epistemological foundations and the justificatory context of action research; that is, how action researchers produce and validate knowledge, the challenges that action research poses to positivist epistemological paradigms, and justifications for the rigour and validity of the knowledge so produced. This discussion forms the epistemological grounds for the methods and sources that I utilise in this project (discussed in Section 3) as well as my overarching commitment to 'talk-plus-walk' (Gilmore 1993, 71) – producing research that contributes materially to grassroots struggles against sexual violence.

2. Justifying action research: epistemological foundations

In much the same way as social science scholars had to make the case for the use of qualitative methods in the 1970s and 1980s in a period of 'orthodox consensus' around quantitative, positivist techniques (Brinkmann, Jacobsen, and Kristiansen 2014; Giddens 2013), action researchers have had to argue for the methodological and epistemological rigour of their own methods. Action

research methods utilised by feminists and other politically oriented researchers are grounded in particular epistemological assumptions, including an understanding of knowledge as situated, local, partial and inherently related to power dynamics. Activism and political practice, rather than simply being 'directly expressive of individual interests, or emotions, or ethical commitments' (Calhoun 2008, xiii), are seen as legitimate sites of knowledge production. In this way, action research 'provides an epistemological challenge to the social sciences' by '[redefining] what counts as knowledge' (Koirala-Azad and Fuentes 2009, 2; see also Oquist 1978) and calling into question the singular authority of academic knowledge. This raises questions about the status of the knowledge produced through action research: does it have a claim to objectivity, or is it merely an expression of parochial concerns? If all knowledge is situated and partial, how can we mediate between different knowledge claims without falling into the trap of relativism? For activist scholars to justify their place within academic research, as Craig Calhoun (2008, xviii) writes, they 'need to offer truth' (see also Mitchell 2004). Action researchers, however, also offer a critique of the very standards of truth and objectivity established by the positivist tradition, arguing that these standards are themselves expressive of partial interests and drawing instead on concepts such as positioned objectivity and reflexivity to stake their claims (Hale 2008, 13). This section will provide a brief overview of the development of these concepts in the tradition of standpoint theory, arguing that they successfully provide an epistemological grounding for action research methods, before exploring the specific epistemological basis of this research project.

i. Situated knowledges and standpoint theory

Standpoint theory is a tradition of social epistemology, informed by feminist, Marxist and postcolonial theories, that has inaugurated what has been described as a paradigm shift in the epistemology of the social sciences (Hekman 1997, 342). It puts forward two central claims about knowledge:

> i. That knowledge is situated within the context of the knower, that is, shaped by their experience and by social structure;
>
> ii. That not all knowledges are equal or equivalent; some knowledges give us special insight into social processes of domination and oppression. (Intemann 2010, 783)

The first claim, on its own, is a central tenet of social constructionism, which emphasises the ways in which our representations of the world are not natural or immutable but produced and filtered through social processes and experience. However, standpoint theory departs from strong social constructionism with the second claim: that some of these representations offer a privileged (Haraway 2004) or more objective (Harding 1993) perspective on reality. In particular, standpoint theorists claim, knowledge that is produced from the standpoint of marginalised or oppressed

groups presents a more faithful or accurate representation of these relations of oppression. Yet on the face of it, as Susan Hekman (1997, 343) notes, these claims seem somewhat contradictory: how can knowledge be both partial and objective?

Different standpoint theorists give somewhat different answers to this question. Marx, whose work is often cited as the conceptual genesis of standpoint theory (e.g. in Cockburn 2015; Longino 1993), holds that there is an objective reality (i.e. the material dynamics and social relations of the capitalist mode of production) which different classes experience differently, and thus come to *know* differently. Here Marx draws on Hegel's distinction between the essence of things and the appearance of things. Different understandings of the world can be more or less faithful to the actual dynamics of the capitalist mode of production, and can either obscure or illuminate these dynamics. Bourgeois knowledge seeks to separate subject and object (i.e. by positing knowledge and concepts as independent of their knowers). However, the experience of the proletarian worker is that of simultaneously being a subject and an object: where the bourgeoisie develop the *concept* of a commodity, the worker has the experience of *being* a commodity through the constant necessity of selling their labour-power. The experience of waged labour and productive activity, therefore, is what leads to 'the self-revelation of the capitalist society founded upon the production and exchange of commodities' (Lukacs 1923). Phenomena which seem separate or opposed to the bourgeoisie are revealed, from the standpoint of the proletariat, to be dialectically related, part of an organic totality. The proletariat is thus better able to grasp the true nature of capitalist society, and it is for this reason that, as Georg Lukacs (1923) writes, 'the knowledge yielded by the standpoint of the proletariat stands on a higher scientific plane objectively'.

Marxist feminists drew on this analysis, while at the same time seeking to show that the standpoint of the proletariat was not a unified or homogeneous one. In a seminal 1983 paper, Nancy Hartsock sought to develop 'a specifically feminist historical materialism' which complexified the two standpoints (the bourgeoisie and the proletariat) proposed by Marx. Hartsock (1983, 285) follows Marx's assumption that reality is constituted by 'sensuous human activity, practice' – that is, the activity of labour and its relation to nature. The systematic theorisation of this reality, for Hartsock and Marx alike, must begin with 'the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity' (Marx and Engels 1977 [1932], 42). But, Hartsock argued, due to the sexual division of labour within the capitalist mode of production, women's experiences of labour and the material conditions in which they labour are structurally different to those of men – the two experiences

are not reducible to the singular standpoint of the proletariat. Women's labour within the hidden sphere of social reproduction, rather than (or in addition to) the waged sphere of production, provides a distinct insight into 'institutionalized social practices [of gender] and […] the specific epistemology and ontology manifested by the institutionalized sexual division of labor' (Hartsock 1983, 289). Black feminists further developed standpoint theory with a similar movement of critique, arguing that in the development of a materialist feminist standpoint, white Marxist feminists had failed to capture the specific experience and standpoint of black women. While white Marxist feminists such as Hartsock understood domestic labour as unwaged labour done in one's own home, Patricia Hill Collins pointed out that black women often perform this work in white people's homes (indeed, often relieving white women of their burden of domestic labour) for a wage. Collins described this experience as that of being an 'outsider within', experiencing both proximity and exclusion from the domestic institutions of whiteness (Collins 1986). This approach of thinking 'from the margins' (hooks 1989) brings to the surface the dynamic interaction of multiple forms of domination in shaping experience, practice and thus knowledge (Collins 2000; Lorde 1984). More recently, there has been important research in the field of Indigenous standpoint theory, which represents a further epistemological challenge 'waged against the colonising practices of the social sciences' (Moreton-Robinson 2013, 332) through engagement with Indigenous knowledge traditions (G. Cooper 2012; Foley 2003).

The concept of the standpoint has thus undergone a number of important conceptual developments. Of particular importance is the idea that the standpoint is not something that is achieved automatically through occupying a particular social location – rather, it is produced through the process of critical reflection on one's experience. This process makes the difference, for example, between the standpoint of women and a specifically *feminist* standpoint (Hartsock 1983, 289; Mackinnon 1989). As Donna Haraway (2004, 90) writes, 'there is no immediate vision from the standpoints of the subjugated' – the knowledge produced from this standpoint needs to be positioned; that is, placed within an account of how subjugation produces such a vision. This can be compared to Paulo Freire's (1972) concept of conscientisation (*conscientização*) – coming to a critical awareness of the world and the realisation of one's ability to act upon it. In both cases, theory and critique are vital parts of the process. Raw experience can only produce rigorous insights into the nature of social processes of power and oppression through critical elaboration and reflection (Hartsock 1983). It is on this basis that action research aims to mediate between experience and knowledge, using particular methods and tools to ensure that the knowledge produced has methodological rigour and truth-value (Mitchell 2004).

With these insights, the paradigm of standpoint theory calls into question the standards of methodological rigour established by the positivist tradition. The positivist vision of rigour rests on the use of empirical evidence and experimentation to produce conclusions that are replicable, generalisable and universal. For standpoint theorists, however, this is merely a 'god-trick of seeing everything from nowhere' (Haraway 2004, 86) – the elevation of one particular methodology, with all its in-built biases, to the level of objectivity and universality. In the recognition that knowledge cannot be neutral, and is always produced *from* somewhere and *by* someone, standpoint theory and action research instead emphasise the role that accountability and reflexivity play in the construction of rigorous knowledge. In action research, then, 'the principal basis for the claim to methodological rigor [lies in] a deeper and more sustained analysis of the sociopolitical conditions that frame the research question and the research process' (Hale 2008, 13; see also Henwood and Pidgeon 1995, 17). This analysis guards against the false objectivity of positivist research by making explicit the researcher's own positionality, assumptions and political commitments, writing these into the text rather than suppressing them, with the aim of minimising their distorting effect on interpretation and presentation of data (Kincheloe and Mclaren 1994, 140). Such analysis also includes, as described above, an openness and curiosity towards the contradictions and challenges of the research process, and an attentiveness to the 'messy' aspects of engaged research (Cook 2009). Finally, action research holds its own potential for generalisation and theory-building. Writing in the field of nursing research, Jennifer Greenwood argues that even though action research produces insights into local, specific situations, this does not mean these insights have no broader applicability. These situations are '*of a kind*', she writes; 'we might reasonably expect, therefore, that some of the findings will be generalizable to other situations *of like kind*' (Greenwood 1984, 81). While action research does not lay claim to universality, there are nonetheless many ways that research findings can be extended and applied across different contexts.

ii. Locating knowledge about university sexual violence

The methodological commitments outlined above have informed this research project from start to finish, from the development of research questions, to how I conceptualised, planned and carried out the process of gathering evidence, the kinds of knowledges I engaged with and how the results of the research are formulated, presented and distributed. As noted above, I began the project with a particular set of experiences from my own involvement in student activism against sexual violence. I held the belief that young feminist activists in contemporary Australian universities have a situated, partial perspective on the issue of university sexual violence; that,

through the labour of their activism, they produce particular forms of knowledge that are often overlooked or devalued; and that there is value in engaging with this knowledge as a source of insight into the institutional rules and practices underpinning universities' responses to sexual violence and how these rules might be challenged and transformed.

These epistemological considerations inform decisions about the sources from which knowledge is gathered. First, standpoint theory holds that those occupying positions of power in a particular context have a partial perspective on the dynamics of power within this context, a perspective that tends to obscure, rather than illuminate, the real nature and effects of this power. This would suggest that university managers' knowledge of sexual violence in universities is shaped by their social location and the responsibilities they have toward the institution – this is perhaps particularly the case in universities with strongly hierarchical or managerial governance structures or well-established and institutionalised processes of risk management. In contrast, the perspectives of those that have experienced sexual violence within university communities and those who are engaged in collective labour to transform these institutions have partial and privileged knowledge about power dynamics and institutional rules. This methodological orientation shaped where I went looking for knowledge about the nature of sexual violence in contemporary Australian universities and informed my political and epistemological commitment to seek out knowledge 'from the margins', with critical insights into the power dynamics and sexual politics of the neoliberal university. Second, standpoint theory suggests that this knowledge must be analysed and situated within the broader material and institutional contexts within which it is produced. As I outlined in the previous chapter, I seek to situate student activism within its political-economic and institutional context and to illuminate how this context shapes and is shaped by activist practice. I therefore understand the knowledge of student activists as inherently connected to *practice* – the concrete and collective labours of working to transform an institution – as well as the broader political-economic structures in which the institution is embedded. In other words, this knowledge is always *situated* knowledge, knowledge of particular institutional sites, rather than abstract knowledge of the university in general. It is grounded in historically, geographically and culturally specific conditions, and I seek to render these conditions visible in my writing.

However, the task of situating this knowledge within institutional settings also carries with it a range of epistemological challenges. First, institutionalist theorists have pointed to the challenge of identifying and mapping the contours of institutions (conceived as sets of formal and informal rules that shape actors' behaviour) given that these rules tend to be tacit in nature. Asking

individuals within institutional settings about the rules and practices that constitute these settings, then, is unlikely to reveal these rules and practices in full. A key insight of institutionalist theory is that institutions create taken-for-granted and routinised patterns of action and background assumptions; as Fiona Mackay, Surya Monro and Georgina Waylen (2009, 254) write, 'it is recourse to institutionalized repertoires of responses that explains much institutional behaviour, rather than purposive action'. What institutionalists are seeking are phenomena that are patterned, routinised and recurring over time, and the underlying logics and norms that sediment these phenomena as enduring features of the social landscape. This suggests that while the perspectives of actors (and particularly dissident actors) within institutional settings can provide important insights into institutions and their power relations, it is equally important to situate these perspectives within a historical and contextual analysis that can highlight patterns of action within these settings (or lack thereof).

Another epistemological challenge in institutional analysis is to untangle the relationship between formal and informal institutions. Universities are constituted by both formal rules (e.g. codified processes by which decisions are made and rules are determined) and informal rules (e.g. norms of professionalism that are intertwined with gender, race and other forms of power). While informal rules can be more difficult than formal rules to identify, they are no less important in shaping and constraining the behaviour of actors. As Waylen (2014, 213) argues, the informal aspects of institutions 'cannot be looked at in isolation or as separate – they must be analysed alongside any formal institutions that they are linked to and with which they interact'. It is the interaction between formal and informal rules that creates the complex environment which individuals within universities navigate. In the next chapter, I explore these questions in institutionalist theory in greater detail, considering in particular the way in which institutions *constrain* the behaviour of dissident actors through both formal rules and informal practices. I argue that analysing the constraints that institutions place on actors seeking institutional transformation sheds light on the resilience and reproduction of institutional rules and thus the way in which power relations are institutionalised within universities.

3. Approaches to researching campus sexual violence: methods and techniques

The epistemological considerations discussed above flow on to inform the ways in which data is gathered, particularly in the selection of qualitative, quantitative or mixed methods. A lot of research on university sexual violence has usefully utilised quantitative techniques to understand

the extent of sexual violence victimisation (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a), the impacts of sexual violence on students' educational experiences (Huerta et al. 2006) and the efficacy of interventions such as consent education (Borges, Banyard, and Moynihan 2008). However, the focus of this particular project on questions of institutional power, as well as my epistemological position as discussed above, inclined me to use qualitative methods. The qualitative approach taken here is intended to capture the multifaceted, subjective experiences of student activists working within institutions and their knowledge of institutional rules and practices, phenomena which may be obscured in quantitative data. In this section, I explore the specific qualitative methods used in this project: the use of case studies for institutional analysis, semi-structured interviews with student activists, and textual and archival sources.

i. Case studies and institutional analysis

As I will discuss in further depth in the next chapter, this thesis takes an institutionalist approach to analysing campus sexual violence. It situates both the phenomenon of sexual violence as well as feminist resistance to it within a specific institutional setting – that of the contemporary Australian neoliberal university. Using an institutional lens, it asks questions about how the rules that constitute this particular arena shape the institutional politics of sexual violence – how those in power respond to sexual violence, how grassroots movements challenge and contest these responses, and the outcomes of these contestations on the institutional rules. Rather than conducting an analysis encompassing the entire university sector, I chose to focus on two case studies: the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales. The comparative case study approach is well-established in feminist political science (Kenny 2013b, 56) as well as historical institutionalism (Mahoney and Rueschemeyer 2003, 13). Case study comparisons allow for both localised analysis within specific contexts and more generalised observations across different contexts (Mahoney 2007, 124). At each of these universities, I interviewed student activists who had been involved in campaigning against their university's treatment of sexual violence and analysed key policies, documents and media reporting. In my analysis of these various sources of data, I sought to understand the key similarities and differences between the two sites in terms of the institutional rules surrounding the university's treatment of sexual violence and activist responses. For example, why was the tactic of deplatforming adopted by activists at one university and not the other? When activists at both universities engaged in lobbying efforts, why did one group have more success? Why were academic experts involved in institutional responses to sexual violence at one university and sidelined at the other? Considering such questions, the cross-case analysis presented in Chapter 6 provides the basis for more generalised reflections on

Australian universities' responses to sexual violence than would be achievable with just one case study.

These two sites were chosen for a range of reasons. As I will explain in the final section of this chapter, they were not the sites I had originally planned to use. In their review of my ethics application for this project, the ethics committee stipulated that I must gain approval from Deputy Vice Chancellors to interview student activists, and at two sites I had originally chosen this approval was not granted. This led me towards sites where I had pre-existing connections that I could draw on to secure approval for the research to go ahead. As a result, at both universities eventually used as case studies, I had studied, worked and engaged in organising against sexual violence. One benefit of this was that I had personal connections to other activists and had my own experiences inhabiting and navigating these institutional settings. Rather than acting as a detached, neutral researcher, I approached these case studies as an engaged researcher-activist who was enmeshed in the social relations of these sites, able to draw on my own experiences as well as the insights of my participants. This reflects the opportunity, through an action research framework, to draw lived experience into the research process as a source of data, utilising theoretical analysis and critical reflection to turn experience into knowledge. However, there are also drawbacks of the sites that were chosen. Both are urban, Group of Eight universities with relatively similar student demographics. While this provides a good basis for comparison between the sites, the insights produced are not necessarily reflective of regional or rural universities, which have very different campus climates, institutional histories and demographics. Nevertheless, while my interview data and institutional analysis focuses primarily on two universities, I also situate these within the broader context of Australian higher education policy and funding (in Chapter 4) and examine some sector-wide responses to sexual violence, for example the role of the peak body Universities Australia in and after the Australian Human Rights Commission's report (in Chapter 7).

The approach taken in this thesis seeks to connect the macro, meso and micro scales for a holistic analysis of the institutional dynamics of campus sexual violence. As I will explain in the next chapter, I use two key concepts from institutionalist theory to do so: the historical *layering* of institutional rules, and the *constraints* that institutional rules place upon actors within institutional settings. This raises methodological questions about how institutional rules can be identified: how do we know a rule when we see one? Formal rules, on the one hand, are relatively easy to identify. Consulting policies, procedures, guides and other written documents allow one to see what is

expressly permitted and prohibited in a particular institutional setting. However, informal rules can be more elusive. Louise Chappell and Natalie Galea (2017, 69) suggest that the enforcement of informal rules 'can take more subtle forms – such as criticism, surveillance or sarcasm – which can easily be hidden from view'. Chappell also notes that when rules are working to reproduce the status quo, they can cause things *not* to happen, meaning that we need to pay attention 'to absences, inaction, and silences as well as positive action and overt statements' (Chappell 2016, 25). By interviewing activists who sought to transform universities' responses to sexual violence and attending to both their successes and failures, I sought to understand the way in which these activists navigate, challenge and are constrained by the rules that constitute the neoliberal university. In this sense, their points of failure or frustration are as illuminating as the successes they had in changing institutional rules, a point I return to in Chapter 8.

ii. Semi-structured interviews

In this project, I used in-depth, semi-structured interviews with student activists to learn about the dynamics of sexual violence at contemporary Australian universities and explore political contestations over how universities respond to sexual violence. The interview has a rich history in social research as a means of gathering information about subjective experience, life histories, memory and organisational knowledge (Platt 2012), and especially in feminist research, which has used interviewing as a means of centring the voices and experiences of women and other marginalised groups (Reinharz 1992). The *semi-structured* interview lies somewhere between the two poles of structured (Platt 2012) and unstructured (Adorno et al. 1950; Sjoberg and Nett 1968) interviewing: the interviewer still uses an interview guide – that is, a list of themes or broad questions to be covered – but is not constrained by a specific order or wording of questions (Bernard 1988; Borg and Gall 1983; Carruthers 1990). It therefore allows for some comparability of interview data due to the shared themes or questions across interviews while also giving the interviewer and interviewee the freedom and flexibility to go where the conversation leads them.

Altogether, fourteen interviews were conducted – six at the first site and eight at the second. After conducting fourteen interviews, I found that these conversations were becoming somewhat repetitive, and that I was reaching the point of data saturation (Saunders et al. 2018) sufficient to illustrate the key differences between the two sites and to capture the major institutional dynamics of sexual violence and feminist student organising around this issue. The interviews were all one-on-one and mostly face-to-face; some of the final interviews were conducted online, due to restrictions introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviews ranged in duration from 40 minutes to over two hours. All interviews were voice-recorded and transcribed, to enable a

relatively natural style of conversation. I went into each interview with a list of key themes that I wanted to discuss, but apart from these themes I largely let the conversation flow, responding to the participant's ideas and perspectives rather than following a pre-established list of questions. As the interviews progressed, many of these themes would come out in the conversation in a quite organic way, or I would ask more direct questions to steer the conversation towards a particular topic.

The commitment to reciprocity inherent in action research is also found in contemporary approaches to semi-structured interviewing, which frame the interview not as a one-way interrogation, but as a 'mutually created story' in which the researcher and the participant/s both play an active role in creating meaning (Fontana and Frey 2005, 696). Acknowledging that the ideal of total scientific neutrality in interviews is 'largely mythical' (Fontana and Frey 2005, 696) and that interviews are always shaped by their social, cultural and political contexts, feminist and queer theorists have advocated an empathetic approach to interviewing in which the interviewer is free to create and express bonds of friendship and solidarity with their interviewees. Given my pre-existing personal relationships with participants and my historical and current involvement in interlinked movement groups, these bonds inevitably already existed and shaped the conversations I had. The interviews were dialogical, in that at times I articulated my own experiences and perspectives and expressed agreement or disagreement. This informed my presentation of the interview data – rather than erasing my questions and contributions to the interviews, they are included at times, where relevant.

However, being in close social proximity to my participants also came with its challenges and complexities. One issue I encountered during these conversations was that participants would skip over important details or contextual information, assuming that I was already familiar with this information. I would try to pause at these points and ask them to elaborate, to assume that I didn't have any background knowledge of the issue, but there are undoubtedly gaps in my interview data where an 'outside' researcher may have received a more in-depth explanation. Second, the trust that my participants placed in me seemed at times to be grounded in an implicit expectation of reciprocity. For example, when discussing an upcoming protest, one participant asked me to attend and speak at the protest; another asked if I could attend a reading group in which activists were reading a report on colleges that I had co-authored. While I had begun this project with a political commitment to conducting research that contributes usefully to these campaigns, these moments brought to light just how important reciprocity was to the process of ethical and politically

grounded research, a point I return to in the next section. Finally, my entanglement with these social networks of activists inevitably impacted the process of data interpretation, in that my experiences engaging in activism against sexual violence have shaped my own political judgements of this activism and the effectiveness of certain tactics. Yet to be faithful to the data and to the experiences of my participants, I had to ensure that I was representing my participants' perspectives faithfully and fairly, and to endeavour, as much as possible, to be led by the data. Of course, the interpretation and presentation of research data is always shaped by the researcher's positionality. In my presentation of the data, I have tried to navigate this by writing myself into the text, to appear – in the words of Sandra Harding (1987, 9) – 'not as an invisible, anonymous voice of authority, but as a real, historical individual with concrete, specific desires and interests'. This reflects the epistemological commitments of standpoint theory and action research, as discussed above, to a process of critical reflexivity which underpins the 'positioned objectivity' of such research (Hale 2008, 13; Kincheloe and Mclaren 1994, 140), one means of walking the line between commitments to research and action.

The interviews were transcribed manually in full, generating transcripts of around 120,000 words in total. The transcripts were then coded using NVivo 12. The codes used emerged partly from the questions and themes with which I approached the interviews, and partly from the data itself, for example at points where unexpected topics had emerged. These codes ranged from broad ('*colleges*') to specific ('*restructuring of student services*'), from descriptive ('*AHRC survey*') to interpretive ('*collaborative strategy*') (Miles and Huberman 1994, 57). The codes were then grouped into hierarchies under the broadest themes: collective organising, conceptions of sexual violence, experiences of activism, institutional barriers to change, and strategy and tactics. These codes and themes were used to conduct a thematic analysis of the data. Thematic analysis is an interpretive and inductive approach to qualitative data analysis, with the primary concern of 'presenting the stories and experiences voiced by study participants as accurately and comprehensively as possible' (Guest, MacQueen, and Namey 2012, 16). It aims to identify patterns in the data and extrapolate from shared themes to create rich, descriptive evidence in relation to research questions.

During the process of interviewing, transcription and analysis, it was important to ensure that my participants' privacy and anonymity was upheld in my data collection and storage, and in my writings. Action researchers often eschew anonymity in a commitment to openness, transparency and the egalitarian principle that 'the participants are supposed to *own* the findings' (Meyer 1993, 1071, original emphasis; see also Locke, Alcorn, and O'Neill 2013). Practices of anonymity have

also been criticised for enabling misrepresentative and exaggerated depictions of subject matter. As 'militant anthropologist' Nancy Scheper-Hughes (2000, 128) writes:

> I have come to see that the time-honored practice of bestowing anonymity on 'our' communities and informants fools few and protects no-one – save, perhaps, the anthropologist's own skin. And I fear that the practice makes rogues of us all.

However, in the context of my study, including names or other details that would allow participants to be identified would have potentially placed these participants at risk of retaliation (e.g. from Men's Rights Activist groups), which meant I had to weigh up these principles against my commitment not to harm my participants. Janet Finch suggests that the feminist researcher has a 'special responsibility to anticipate whether research findings can be interpreted and used in ways quite different from her own intentions' (cited in Fonow and Cook 1991, 9). There were a number of contextual factors that heightened the risk of my findings being misused, and therefore privacy became a particularly important consideration. Almost all the activists I spoke to had experienced doxxing (the public exposure of their personal details) and/or trolling online, mostly from other students and particularly from conservative groups and Men's Rights Activists. I had also received death and rape threats when speaking publicly about sexual violence, so I knew first-hand the toll that these incidents can take and felt it was imperative to protect participants from further public exposure. The identifiability of participants is also of particular concern in a context where universities' misconduct procedures are increasingly being used to discipline students for political activity that contradicts student codes of conduct, as I will discuss in greater depth in Chapter 8. As a result of these concerns, I ultimately chose to anonymise my data by changing participants' names[15] and omitting any identifiable details.

A further potential pitfall of anonymising participants is that it may obscure aspects of their identity, especially their racial or cultural backgrounds. As social movement scholars have shown, individual and collective identity are inseparable from movement dynamics; indeed, they are of central importance to how activist groups define and organise themselves (Fominaya 2010). Around two-thirds of the students interviewed for this research were white, reflecting the broader dominance of white women in Australian feminist movements. This is of direct relevance to political analysis of these movements – whiteness has shaped the aims, strategies and tactics of Australian feminism, such as its persistent focus on representation and incorporation within state institutions. The mainstreaming of white feminists as the faces of Australian feminism erases the

[15] The pseudonyms used to refer to my participants throughout this thesis are Emily, Charlotte, Olivia, Sophia and Zoe (University of New South Wales); Anika, Ava, Joyce, Kim, Maya, Nat, Valerie and Yasmine (University of Sydney).

long-standing contribution of Aboriginal women and migrant women to the development of feminist and women's liberation movements (this will be discussed further in Chapter 5) as well as the development of feminist politics in marginal spaces, outside the mainstream institutions of Australian feminism. As one small way of mitigating this issue and avoiding whitewashing, I asked participants to choose their own pseudonyms, though of course this does not fully ameliorate the problem. In my analysis, I also sought to attend to the constitutive role that whiteness has historically played within Australian feminist movements, as well as the influence that this tradition has had on the dynamics of campus feminism: namely, the positioning of the university as a potential protector of women, a space that is not currently safe but might become so, if only those in power would enact the right policies.

However, while I felt certain that individual activists' real names should not be used, I grappled with the question of whether to name the two universities that I studied. On the one hand, naming these universities could misconstrue a systemic problem within higher education as a problem peculiar to specific institutions. In her 'composite ethnography' of over a decade's work on sexual violence within universities in the UK and Europe, Alison Phipps deliberately avoids naming any universities, arguing that 'to "name and shame" specific universities might allow others to pretend that they do not have similar problems' (Phipps 2020b, 229). On the other hand, as I argued above, I felt a methodological and theoretical commitment to describe the specific institutional contexts in which student activism takes place, noting that different universities have very different historical, social and cultural dynamics. For this reason, I ultimately chose to identify the two universities, which are the University of New South Wales and the University of Sydney. Identifying these universities enables me to provide a more nuanced and historicised institutional analysis than would be possible if the universities were pseudonymised.

iii. Archival research and textual sources

The decision to name the universities at which I interviewed students also enabled me to triangulate and supplement this interview data with other textual sources of information, such as articles in student media (e.g. Stojanovic-Hill 2019; Ward 2020), writings published by student feminist activists (e.g. Guo 2020), universities' and colleges' own statements about sexual violence (e.g. Erickson 2020) and existing academic research (see Chapter 1). Triangulation of data improves its validity and also allows for a 'multidimensional perspective of the phenomenon' (Thurmond 2001, 253), enabling the construction of a richer portrait of the institutional politics of campus sexual violence than that which might be gained with the use of a single data source such as interviews (Flick 2004). In particular, when seeking out patterns in order to determine the

existence of institutional rules and practices (rather than isolated events), triangulation enables the perspectives of individual activists to be corroborated or challenged by other documentary evidence. Yet it also necessitates particular attention to the divergent contexts in which these texts are produced, their audience and intent. For example, student media is a particularly important source of data for this thesis because it constitutes an archival record of writing about student politics, including the words of student activists themselves. These range from opinion pieces written by activists (e.g. Vimalarajah 2015), to other articles covering protests and events in a more traditional news format (e.g. Abraham 2018a). In contrast, official university or college statements about sexual violence, often emerging during moments of reputational crisis created by student activists or media reporting, provide an insight into how the institution manages the messy issue of sexual violence through its 'official' communications with the public (e.g. Head 2008). Acknowledging that all of these sources provide partial and situated perspectives, drawing on a range of texts allows for a more nuanced understanding of the issue of university sexual violence than could be gained through interviews alone.

This contemporary empirical data is also supplemented with archival data that provides insight into the history of campus feminist organising in Australia. Histories of student feminist activism in Australia are underrepresented in existing research, with this topic attracting only brief attention within broader studies of student activism (e.g. Briedis 2018; Hastings 2003) or literature on Australian feminism (e.g. Lake 1999). However, the current groundswell of student sexual violence activism has not arisen from a vacuum. It is a continuation of decades of feminist labour aimed at politicising the issue of sexual violence and holding institutions accountable for their complicity in perpetuating cultures of sexual violence. In preparing a timeline of hazing and abuse at university residential colleges for *The Red Zone Report* (Funnell and Hush 2018, chapter 3), my co-author and I began to investigate archival student media sources to learn more about the history of students' resistance to rape culture at colleges. We found a critical and fertile resource for understanding the political history of university sexual violence, yet one that has largely been overlooked.

Primary research for Chapter 5 of this thesis was conducted by searching archives of student newspapers (primarily *Tharunka* [University of New South Wales], *Honi Soit* [University of Sydney] and *Woroni* [Australian National University][16]) for key terms including 'rape', 'sexual assault' and

[16] Although the Australian National University (ANU) was initially planned as a case study for this project, institutional ethics approval was not granted for this particular site, as I explain in section 4 of this chapter. I nevertheless decided to incorporate the historical research I had conducted within the archives of the ANU student paper, *Woroni*, as it expanded the scope of this archival research beyond universities in Sydney.

'sexual violence', a process aided greatly by the relatively recent digitisation of these archives. I also identified and surveyed special issues of student newspapers edited by student feminist collectives. Through these searches I produced a database of over one hundred articles, which were then reviewed and analysed using a thematic analysis in order to elucidate how the issue of sexual violence is constructed, the political position of the author/s or groups represented in the article and any political demands being made. It is important to note that the content of these archives is not always complete, and is open to manipulation. For example, in 2015, an editor of the UNSW student newspaper *Tharunka* reportedly deleted a number of historical articles from the paper's website because he believed 'they were biased and criticised his political faction – the right wing of the Labor party' (Faruqi 2015). It is therefore critical to attend to the ways in which these digital archives are living archives, 'enmeshed in histories, politics and power structures', rather than static representations of the past (Dever 2017, 2). Student publications are also not comprehensive documents in the first place – there are many reasons why diverse forms of feminist activism may not be considered 'newsworthy' by newspaper editors. As feminist historiographers have pointed out, gendered relations of power shape 'the production, survival, and selection of historical "evidence"" (Carlton and Russell 2018, 271), making this archival resource inevitably incomplete and partial. For this reason, my analysis of archival sources is supplemented by secondary literature on the development of Australian feminist politics (e.g. Lake 1999; Moreton-Robinson 2000).

4. Ethical considerations: from the institutional to the practical

The concept of research ethics encompasses considerations arising early in the design phases of the research, as well as institutional ethical review processes and the practical ethical questions that arise during fieldwork and in writing and disseminating the results of research. In the final section of this chapter, I explore the practical ethics of action research, with particular attention to the contradictions that emerge between the values and principles of action research and the various constraints on its practice within the institutional context of the neoliberal university. I present a critical reflection on the institutional ethics procedures I went through as part of this research project, suggesting that these procedures provided a further source of insight into the rules and practices through which universities manage the issue of sexual violence.

i. Institutional ethics approval

Early on in the design phase of this research project, I was inspired by participatory action methodologies, as outlined earlier in this chapter. Such approaches seemed a natural fit given my existing involvement in this movement and my personal relationships with many of the

participants. I also felt that adopting a participatory action approach was a good way to ameliorate the power imbalances that permeate academic research and to fulfil my political commitments to the feminist collectives I was researching. However, a genuinely participatory approach to the research project was partially precluded by the nature of the ethics approval process due to the contradictions that emerge between the bureaucratic requirements of ethics approval and the epistemological and political commitments of the participatory action approach. My experience reflected existing research that highlights the politicisation and bureaucratisation of ethics review processes in ways that marginalise counter-hegemonic methodological practices, objectify and patronise research participants, and extend the reach of institutional governance and risk management processes (Blake 2007; Khanlou and Peter 2005; Locke, Alcorn, and O'Neill 2013). Most importantly, in going through the process of securing ethics approval, I realised that this process was not disconnected from the content of my research: rather, it became another source of insight into how universities 'manage' the issue of sexual violence, partially through discouraging the production of knowledge that is critical of how universities have historically managed sexual violence.

The ethics process illuminated how the phenomenon of sexual violence triggers institutional risk management procedures and in doing so mobilises ethics review processes in service of reputational protection. Key to this dynamic is the institutional focus on identifying and mitigating risk. As geographers Deborah Martin and Joshua Inwood (2012, 9) argue, 'the lens of analysis for the IRB [Institutional Review Board] is risk: risk to human subjects, and, by extension, implicitly and sometimes implicitly, risk to the institution of loss of prestige'. After submitting my initial ethics application, the ethics committee returned its review with three pages of questions and requirements. Most significantly, the committee recommended 'that the research team obtains additional ethical approval from *each of the participating universities* to ensure that these plans are managed according to their local governance processes'. This was odd, as no university was 'participating' in the project as such – the research was designed to be conducted with student activists, largely recruited through student unions and personal connections. The committee also requested an outline of 'the potential *reputational, professional, emotional and/or legal risks* that the research will pose […] for each risk outline how the research team plans to minimise the risk of a situation occurring'. It seemed that investigating sexual violence within a specific institutional context and formulating research questions around institutional responses raised concerns about risks, which were to be managed through the rules of 'local governance processes'. Further, it seemed that this requirement was a way of ensuring that my university did not bear full

responsibility for this risk, instead attempting to outsource the risk to any other universities that this project placed under scrutiny. This supports existing research on the 'mission creep' of ethics committees in Western universities, which have moved from narrower reviews of practical ethical considerations to reshaping the design, conception and implementation of entire research projects, even where these projects have received scholarly support from within their disciplines (Guillemin et al. 2012; Lederman 2006).[17] The concept of 'risk' has thus expanded beyond the risk of harm to participants and researchers to encompass broader institutional risks of reputational and legal exposure.

These concerns arise in the context of previous controversy around the Australian Human Rights Commission's 2016 national investigation into sexual violence at universities. The inquiry consisted of a national quantitative survey, which gained over 30,000 responses from students around Australia, as well as a qualitative submission instrument which gathered 1849 written responses about respondents' experiences of sexual assault and sexual harassment (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 3). Unlike the quantitative survey tool, the latter element of the project did not go through any process of institutional ethics review. The Commission received criticism from academic researchers, survivors and advocates for failing to gain ethics approval for the qualitative aspect of the project, as well as for broader issues with the project's methodology and sensitivity (Bagshaw 2017; Fileborn 2017). Professor Jennifer Freyd, a leading trauma researcher from the University of Oregon, commented to the media that the Commission's qualitative survey tool 'doesn't seem to have been done by scientists at all' and that she '[couldn't] see any evidence it has been done by researchers who know how to do a survey' (cited in Funnell 2016a). Advocates and students also raised concerns about the involvement of Universities Australia and Vice Chancellors in the design of the national survey, suggesting that their involvement compromised the independence and rigour of the process (Funnell 2016a).

It is in the wake of this public critique that strengthened protocols around research concerning university sexual violence have emerged. While these strengthened protocols partly serve the important function of protecting research participants from harm, my experience revealed how institutional ethics review processes can also function to reinforce managerial governance regimes. In this instance, the ethics committee effectively deferred the decision to approve or reject the

[17] Research ethics committees in universities in the UK ('URECs') have recently come under scrutiny for suppressing research that threatens the reputation or image of these universities, for instance in the case of research at Kingston University about students engaging in sex work (Hedgecoe 2016).

research proposal to university managers. The committee stated that 'a letter of support from each participating university is to be provided to the HREC [Human Research Ethics Committee] before recruitment commences', suggesting that these letters should be provided by Deputy Vice Chancellors (DVCs) at the respective universities and state that they 'have reviewed/approve of the research activities to be conducted on their campus'. This requirement of the ethics committee reinforced managerial hierarchies of power by positioning senior management staff as gatekeepers, without whose approval the project could not proceed. In the context of a project scrutinising universities' responses to sexual violence, approval from DVCs was not forthcoming – DVCs at two universities which were originally planned as study sites (the Australian National University and the University of Technology Sydney) did not provide approval. The joint deployment of institutional power, through university managements and the ethics committee, had the effect of discouraging critical research from taking place at these sites.

This risk-averse response from the ethics committee might be read in part as an unintended effect of feminist activism in relation to university sexual violence. Queer theorist Jennifer Doyle argues that such activism can, paradoxically, reproduce visions of the university as a space of risk and underpin idealistic expectations of safety and protection. She writes, 'the campus promises safety, security. To see that promise through […] it must establish a procedure and manage its risk' (Doyle 2015, 28). In Australia, feminist student activism has certainly created a reputational problem for universities, which have come into the public spotlight as institutions that have responded inadequately to sexual violence. This reputational problem is managed in various ways, including through heightened attention and hostility toward research that threatens further exposure. The campus can promise safety if knowledge about the many ways in which it is *unsafe* is harder to produce or disseminate. Perhaps, then, the barriers created by ethics committees can be seen as one face of the institutional backlash to sexual violence activism, a theme I will return to Chapters 8 and 9. On a conceptual level, then, this process provided a new source of insight into how ethics review committees are part of the apparatus that the neoliberal university uses to manage its reputation and image, particularly around the issue of sexual violence and feminist critique.

ii. Ethics in the field

In comparison to the issues raised by the ethics committee, I found that the more substantive and pressing ethical questions arose during the process of carrying out fieldwork. First, I was faced with the difficult task of navigating factionalism in the two fieldwork sites I studied. Student politics and student unions are notoriously factional, with bitter divides between different groups.

At Australian universities, though they vary somewhat by campus, these factions tend to mirror those in federal politics, with groups affiliated with the factions of each of the two major political parties (i.e. Labor left and right, and Liberal moderates and conservatives) as well as a range of independent groups. Women's collectives have in recent decades been dominated by women from the Labor left faction (National Labor Students), but recently this dominance has been challenged by students from independent factions, especially Grassroots (a faction that generally tends towards anarchist and socialist politics and is strongly critical of the Australian Labor Party). This tension was illuminated in the two sites I studied, at which I also had different allegiances and personal relationships due to my previous involvement in some of these groups. Kathleen Blee and Verta Taylor (2002, 98) suggest that where it is not possible for the researcher to adopt a neutral stance in relation to different social movement factions, a researcher should be open about being on a particular group's side. I am not a current member of any of these groups, but I was a member of Grassroots when I was a member of student feminist groups. Most of my participants knew this, but when we were discussing factional politics specifically, I made no attempt to conceal this history, despite the fact that I am no longer aligned with any of these groups. My experience will also inevitably influence my evaluation of the strategies and tactics used by different groups, although I aim to evaluate these reflectively within a broader political critique of the neoliberal university and a historical understanding of student feminist activism, rather than a sense of loyalty to any particular group. Triangulation of my interview data with other sources, such as policy documents and media reporting, allowed me to contextualise these perspectives and situate this data within a wider analysis of the institutional politics of sexual violence.

This raises the complicated issue of how to position my critical analysis of these movement groups as a scholar-activist with loyalties both to the integrity of my research and to the broad political aims of the groups I research. 'Insider' researchers face this dilemma when their role as an academic researcher requires adopting a perspective 'outside' of the movement by stepping back to analyse tactics, strategies, successes and failures in a rigorous way. The Autonomous Geographies Collective reflect on this issue in their collaborative research project with autonomous social centres. They recount the organisers of these social centres asking them to support the movement by writing positive magazine articles, rather than critical academic journal articles: 'they needed support, not analysis of their internal dynamics, and yet this critical reflection is a core part of any academic research project' (The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010, 258). Likewise, Don Mitchell argues for the necessity of rigorous critical analysis in studies of social movements. Radical scholarship, he argues, requires a commitment to truth, which in turn entails a commitment to

uncovering exploitation and oppression (Mitchell 2004). This extends to exploring the ways in which progressive social movements can implicitly reproduce forms of domination and exploitation (e.g. the collusion of some neoliberal strains of feminism with imperialist regimes and capitalist exploitation). Critique of social movement groups, in this way, can contribute to an overarching project of emancipation. This perspective is also reflected in the approach of feminist institutionalists Louise Chappell and Fiona Mackay (2020), who position the 'feminist critical friend' as an engaged academic actor who uses research skills and tools to explore critical questions about feminists acting within institutions, while sharing an overarching affinity with these feminists' aims.

As outlined above, reciprocity is both a guiding principle of research in the fields of action research and feminist inquiry more broadly and a core aspect of the methodological approach taken in this project. The principle of reciprocity is intended to counteract the extractive and exploitative tendencies of academic research that often objectifies research participants and benefits from their knowledge and experience in a one-sided manner (Gillan and Pickerill 2012). As such, I tried to use this principle to guide my approach throughout the research process. For example, in many of the interviews, participants raised issues they were facing in their activist work and we deliberated together about strategic responses to those issues. At other points in our interviews, participants asked me to attend events or participate in organising work. While I also gave participants gift vouchers in appreciation of the time they spent on the interview, I felt that a more meaningful and substantive practice of reciprocity required me to share my research and knowledge with participants and movement groups throughout the project, as well as to participate in these groups, for example by attending protests and other events organised by my participants. In 2019, I participated in a student-organised National Week of Action against sexual violence by giving a talk where I shared some initial reflections from my research with a group of students, discussing the connection between sexual violence and neoliberalism in Australian universities and the implications for activist strategy. In 2020, I shared a history of sexual violence activism that I had collated with some activists, who were in the process of collectively reflecting on the trajectory of this activism over the years. My work with End Rape on Campus Australia continued throughout my PhD (though at a somewhat reduced capacity due to the pressures of postgraduate study and casualised work), and my commitment to these groups and activists extends beyond the life of this research project. The principle of reciprocity is central to the action research approaches outlined above, which position the researcher not as 'an invisible, anonymous voice of authority' (Harding 1987, 9) but as someone affected by and engaged in social struggles. By continuing to engage in

this work 'beyond the write-up', I aim to ensure that 'the research is not simply for the academic archives' (Apoifis 2017, 56) but in service of living political struggles.

Finally, I am inspired by the call of The Autonomous Geographies Collective (2010, 262) for activist-scholars to situate their work 'in and against the neoliberal university'. They argue that it is our responsibility to actively resist the neoliberal university as a site of exploitation: 'by only focusing on struggles and activism "out there" and neglecting how the real world is shaped by what goes on "in here", academics become part of the problem, not the solution' (The Autonomous Geographies Collective 2010, 263). Although this project, in its original conception, did not specifically foreground the neoliberal political economy of universities as a major contextual and explanatory feature in universities' responses to sexual violence, it became increasingly clear to me as my research progressed that it was important to analyse sexual violence within this specific context. This was in part due to my waged work in contingent and precarious roles within the university as a graduate student, my growing awareness of the exploitative nature of university labour (as explored in the previous chapter) and my desire to connect the seemingly separate phenomena of sexual violence and neoliberal social relations. This awareness was also heightened by my involvement in the UNSW Casuals Network, a group of casualised workers organising collectively to resist wage theft and job insecurity. In an unexpected way, this activism became another source of insight into the workings of the neoliberal university. Investigating and participating in these sites of resistance and transformation helped me to draw out connections between different forms of exploitation and violence within the university, and to elucidate how the institutional treatment of sexual violence is underpinned by the political-economic conditions of the contemporary university. In this way, this project is shaped by my experiences as a researcher, student, worker and organiser situated 'in and against' the neoliberal university, and builds on a rich tradition of activist-academic research as explored in this chapter. These experiences are written into this thesis at various points in a commitment to reflexivity and to highlight the situated and embodied nature of the knowledge produced in this project.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the development of methodological practices, within the broad and multidisciplinary tradition of action research, that emphasise the importance of reflexive and politically engaged research. Drawing inspiration from this lineage of scholarship, I have outlined the methodological stance at the heart of this project: a commitment not just to analysing the function of sexual violence in contemporary universities, but also to participating in movements that challenge and resist sexual violence and seek to transform universities. I also considered the

contradictions that action researchers face within the specific institutional setting of the contemporary neoliberal university. However, navigating the demands of institutional ethics approval and observing how risk is conceptualised and managed through this specific bureaucratic apparatus provided an unexpected source of insight into how the issue of sexual violence is treated by the university in its neoliberal guise. Sexual violence is seen as the source of, to quote the research ethics committee, 'reputational, professional, emotional and/or legal risks' that must be contained and proactively managed. This conceptualisation of sexual violence is fundamentally at odds with a response that is centred around the needs of survivors, and responsive and accountable to the communities that make up the university. This forms a major point of political conflict between student activists and universities, with student activists demanding a shift away from the bureaucratised, brand-driven management of the issue, and towards a response that meets the educational, emotional and psychological needs of student-survivors (e.g. ANU Women's Department 2021; Haghighi 2021). In a way, then, while the ethics review process disrupted the research project as I had originally planned and conceived it, it also empowered my research. It brought to the surface some aspects of the institutional politics of sexual violence that often remain hidden or latent, making explicit the way that bureaucratic networks surround and contain the issue of sexual violence at universities, and it allowed me to focus in greater depth on the interviews I conducted with key activists. The next chapter turns to the theoretical framework and key concepts that underpin my analysis.

Chapter 3 | Embedded institutionalism: A critique of new and feminist institutionalism

> The very labor of transforming institutions, or at least aiming for transformation, is how we learn about institutions as formations.
> – Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included*

Introduction

This thesis takes an institutionalist approach to analysing the politics of sexual violence in the neoliberal university, drawing on concepts from new and feminist institutionalist theory to explore political contestations over sexual violence within the neoliberal university. Institutionalist theorists conceive of institutions broadly as sets of formal and informal rules that shape and structure human behaviour, with feminist institutionalists drawing particular attention to how these rules (and their effects) are gendered. Institutionalism is therefore primarily a meso-level analytic approach, eschewing both 'grand theories' that overdetermine institutional dynamics and voluntaristic accounts that deny the normative and political force of institutions. This approach has facilitated in-depth analysis of how the various institutions that comprise the state, as well as other social institutions, reinforce gendered relations of power, as well as how institutions represent sites at which these relations of power might be shaken up (Krook and Mackay 2011). However, feminist institutionalism has also faced critique for ambiguities in its conception of the relationship between institutions and their macro-social context, and the role of actors and agency within institutions. Drawing on existing critical analyses of feminist institutionalism, I argue for the need for a more expansive and holistic model that reflects the broader social ecology in which institutions are embedded.

This chapter introduces the key theoretical concepts that underpin my analysis of student feminist activism at Australian universities. In the first section, I introduce the theoretical fields of new and feminist institutionalism, outlining how feminist institutionalist theory developed as a critical intervention in the field of new institutionalism by drawing attention to the gendered nature of institutions. In the second section, I explore critiques of feminist institutionalism. I focus on two areas of ambivalence within FI theory: the relationship of institutions to their macro-social contexts and the role of social movements or collective actors within institutions. I argue that the roles of these two factors in shaping institutional rules require further theoretical attention and nuance. In the third section, I introduce a synthetic model, termed 'embedded institutionalism',

that aims to conceptualise the relationship between macro-level processes, institutional structures, and collective actors within institutionalism. Utilising two key concepts of layering and constraint, this institutionalist approach draws attention to the specific structures and embedded patterns of social relations within two Australian university settings in which student feminist organising has evolved. Finally, I consider how neoliberalism has entailed shifts in the relationship between the market, the state and other social institutions, laying the groundwork for my historical and empirical analysis.

1. Old, new and feminist institutionalist theory

In commencing this discussion, it is important to begin with a deceptively simple question: what is an institution? Defining institutions is a complex and contested task, and different fields define institutions in quite different ways. Against a narrow definition of institutions as formalised structures with explicit rules, there is a general consensus amongst contemporary social scientists that institutions ought to be understood more broadly as sets of rules and norms, both explicit and implicit, that work to structure social interactions and which give rise to normative expectations and patterns of behaviour (Azari and Smith 2012; Crawford and Ostrom 1995; Hodgson 2006). The many and overlapping institutions that populate society shape beliefs, practices and behaviours on both an individual and a collective level. As Geoffrey Hodgson (2006, 2) puts it, 'institutions are the kinds of structures that matter most in the social realm: they make up the stuff of social life'. Working within this framework, institutional theory has proliferated in the past two decades. It takes from critical, psychoanalytic and post-structuralist theories the recognition that social norms and implicit rules have significant effects on human behaviour: such norms work to guide, coordinate, discipline and manage human actions (Helmke and Levitsky 2004). Work on institutions has expanded in scope beyond an initial focus on the institutions of the state to encompass the plural, overlapping and partially informal institutions that shape our lives, including the workplace, the family, gender, race and so on.

The field of political science has a long history of conceptual engagement with institutions, a theoretical legacy that is often referred to as the 'old institutionalism'. B. Guy Peters (1999, 3–11) describes the old institutionalism as heavily focused on describing and understanding the state and institutions of government. This tradition, he argues, suffered from a lack of theoretical development, tended to be highly structuralist in nature, and was narrowly scoped to focus on government and the law. The field of new institutionalism thus emerged against the 'undersocialized', mechanistic and oversimplified theories of old institutionalism (Lowndes and

Roberts 2010, 1). Vivian Lowndes and Mark Roberts (2010, 28–29) argue that the proliferation of new institutionalist theory in the early 1980s was characterised by its focus on power and values, informal conventions and coalitions, and a rejection of the deterministic nature of older theories of institutions. New institutionalism seeks to examine the ways in which a multiplicity of institutions interact to create social norms and patterns of behaviour. Within new institutionalism, there has been a dominant focus on the ways in which formal and informal institutions intersect and the 'socially shared rules, usually unwritten, that are created, communicated, and enforced outside of officially sanctioned channels' (Helmke and Levitsky 2004, 727), often referred to as the 'rules of the game'. New institutionalists' exploration of the informal, normative, tacit and discursive dimensions of institutions has significantly broadened the scope and analytical power of institutional analysis from older state-centric and formalist theories.

Different theoretical strands have emerged within new institutionalism, each with particular foci and diverging methodological and epistemological approaches. Peter Hall and Rosemary Taylor (1996) identify three major analytical approaches within new institutionalism: historical institutionalism, rational choice institutionalism and sociological institutionalism.[18] The first, *historical institutionalism* (HI), is focused on the structural features of institutions, the distribution of power within institutions and the ways in which institutions develop and persist over time (Pierson 2004; Pierson and Skocpol 2002; Steinmo 2008). HI scholars tend to view institutions 'as enduring legacies of largely contingent events and political struggles' (Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010, 575). Influenced by debates over structural functionalism, HI takes a predominantly structuralist approach to understanding institutions, often emphasising the path dependency of institutions once they have been formed (Hall and Taylor 1996, 941). The second approach, *rational choice institutionalism* (RCI), starts from particular assumptions about human behaviour that are not generally shared by other strands of NI theory. RCI takes from other rational choice approaches, particularly those in the field of economics, the assumption that actors are fundamentally rational and will act strategically in their own self-interest to maximise their individual preferences (Weingast 2002). Politics, under this view, becomes a set of 'collective action dilemmas' (Hall and Taylor 1996, 945), and institutions represent potential solutions to these dilemmas, producing equilibria in situations of uncertainty or instability (Ostrom 1990; Shesple 2006, 26). Compared to

[18] Different schemas have been proposed; for example, Lowndes and Roberts (2010, 31) identify nine distinct strands of new institutionalism, and Mackay, Kenny and Chappell (2010) pick out four major strands (the three I discuss above, in addition to discursive or constructivist institutionalism). Peters' (1999, 19–20) model includes international institutionalism, empirical institutionalism and normative institution, in addition to RCI, HI and SI. For the sake of parsimony, I have followed Hall and Taylor's classification here.

HI, RCI takes a decidedly functionalist view of institutions, which are understood to form through the voluntary agreement of certain actors in order to fulfil certain needs or interests. The third major approach, *sociological institutionalism* (SI), explores the social, symbolic and normative dimensions of institutions. Institutional practices, rather than arising solely to meet functional needs, are taken to have social and cultural significance, intersecting with other 'frames of meaning' that guide human behaviour (Hall and Taylor 1996, 946–47; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Scott 2013). Under this view, as Mackay, Kenny and Chappell (2010, 575) note, institutions constrain human agency, but also represent the products of social processes of contestation.

In the mid-2000s, the approach now known as Feminist Institutionalism (FI) began to emerge from the field of new institutionalism, aiming to foreground the role of gender in institutional life. FI has 'critiqued the gender blindness of the existing field, arguing that the application of a gender lens provides fresh insights into the core preoccupations of the field' (Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010, 580). Feminist institutionalists point out that informal rules and norms within institutions are often gendered (Chappell and Waylen 2013), such as the presumption that women will make the tea or take the minutes at a meeting. Chappell (2006, 228) gives the example of norms characterising the ideal public servant as 'a rational, detached, calculating individual' with 'a full-time unbroken work record', unburdened by responsibilities for parenting and other care work – an ideal that is out of reach for many women. Further, even when formal rules appear gender-neutral, they may produce gendered effects (Kenny 2007, 95). For example, while a dress code might stipulate that all employees 'dress professionally', this has quite different implications for men and women. Institutions, then, are not only gendered social spaces, they are critical sites in which gender is produced and reproduced within the social order. While these are not necessarily new insights – Raewyn Connell, for example, has theorised gender regimes within social institutions for decades (R. W. Connell 1987; 1990), and both Joan Acker (1992) and Joni Lovenduski (1998) provided important early explorations of gendered institutions – they do represent an important intervention in a field that has largely failed to consider how gender works within and through institutions.

Feminist institutionalism also promises insight into the nature of institutional change. As Mona Lena Krook and Fiona Mackay (2011, 6) summarise:

> Grasping the ways in which institutions reflect, reinforce, and structure unequal gendered power relations in wider society […] [FI] offers insights into the dynamics of continuity and change – and the means for interrupting them to promote or undermine feminist goals.

FI theorists treat institutions as gendered both nominally (through the predominance of men in positions of power) and substantively (through the anti-feminist nature of decisions and policies) (Chappell and Waylen 2013, 600–01). Therefore processes of pro-feminist institutional change must find ways to change not only the formal rules of institutions, but also the substantive and 'sticky' forms of gender bias that are experienced and reproduced through everyday interactions (Chappell and Waylen 2013, 600). As I will argue in further detail later in this chapter, the FI approach has clear relevance to the analysis of sexual violence at universities because it highlights the ways in which formally gender-neutral organisations like universities operate through formal and informal rules that perpetuate gender inequality, but also the potential for these rules to be challenged so that universities might also become sites of social change. However, as with any theoretical framework, there are limitations to the FI approach, to which I now turn.

2. Limits and critiques of new and feminist institutionalism

The basic epistemological task of institutional theory is to capture, analyse and explain the major features of existing institutions in its theoretical frameworks. As Joni Lovenduski (2011, viii) writes, 'both explanation and prediction require an ability to characterize the institutional context and environment in order to identify their most salient features'. It is on this basis that FI theorists critique NI, pointing out that 'gender-blind' theories of institutions fail to capture some of the most salient features of institutions – that is, the gendered dynamics that shape and reinforce both informal and formal rules (Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010, 579). As a result, FI has sought to foreground the dynamics of gender within institutions, treating gender as its primary analytic category.[19]

FI has also generally focused on the meso-level of institutional analysis, suspicious both of universalising, macro-level concepts that subjugate all actors to inflexible social structures, as well as individualising, micro-level concepts that overlook social structures and afford actors an inflated degree of agency (Chappell 2002, 11–12). This movement away from structuralist and macro-scale accounts by both NI and FI theorists is a deliberate reaction to the undersocialised, mechanistic and simplistic accounts of institutions put forward by older institutionalist theories, and reflects an aversion to 'grand theories' that attempt to explain social phenomena through universalising laws and principles (Allen 1990). As John Campbell and Ove K. Pedersen (2001, 14) write, 'by adopting a middle-range approach to theory, scholars found that institutional analysis offered an escape

[19] For work that aims to utilise intersectional methodologies in feminist institutionalism, see Bassel and Emejulu (2010); Krook and Nugent (2016); Lombardo and Verloo (2009).

from the quagmire of grand theory'. Through this middle-range or meso-level approach, FI theorists have sought to investigate the internal dynamics of institutions in order to understand how gender is both reproduced and transformed by the informal and everyday interactions of gendered subjects within institutions. This follows a deeper commitment in much feminist theory to represent the conditions and experiences of women's lives, and to politicise what might be otherwise deemed merely personal. Overall, then, the institutionalist focus can be seen as an attempt to strike a balance between agency and structure. However, the analytical cost of this focus is that it draws attention away from the broader social ecology in which institutions are situated. In this section, reviewing critiques that have been put forward of NI and FI, I argue for the need for a more expansive and holistic understanding of institutions as embedded in macro-social contexts as well as grassroots social struggles.

i. Power and the macro-social context of institutions

Some of the most insightful critiques of FI are made by feminist institutionalists themselves, such as Meryl Kenny and Fiona Mackay (2009), in their article 'Already Doin' It for Ourselves? Skeptical Notes on Feminism and Institutionalism'. Kenny and Mackay note that while feminist social science has a rich history of thinking about the relationship between gender and institutions, the FI approach is constrained by the underlying limitations and assumptions of NI. A particular area of concern to Kenny and Mackay (2009, 275) is the lack of attention given to power within NI: 'power is still a relatively slippery concept in the new institutionalist literature'. Canadian author Tammy Findlay (2015, 30) takes this argument a step further, arguing that FI – as a result of its lineage within NI – has failed to integrate a substantive theory of power relations, and that 'consequently, much of FI work errs on the side of description over analysis' (the examples given by Findlay include Chappell 2002; Grace 2011; Sawer and Vickers 2010). In making this argument, Findlay compares the theory of gendered power put forward by socialist and radical feminists with that of FI theorists. Where the former 'saw the cause of gender inequality in macro terms, as systemic and structural', the latter moved away from a macro-scale account of patriarchy, seeing it as 'too deterministic and monolithic' (Findlay 2015, 30). While FI theorists are certainly concerned with the nature and effects of gendered power, Findlay claims that FI does not rest on a well-defined or elaborated theory of gendered power.

In her argument for a greater integration between FI and feminist political economy, Findlay (2015, 41) cites approvingly the work of Australian sociologist Raewyn Connell, particularly Connell's (1990) conceptualisation of the state as imbricated with capitalism, colonialism and imperialism, and thus as playing a key role in reinforcing inequality. Connell's approach meets Findlay's criteria

for locating institutions 'in the context of power relations in which they operate' (Findlay 2015, 42). It is curious, then, that many of the theorists that Findlay criticises themselves draw on Connell's work. Connell's (2005) concept of gender regimes has been particularly influential in the field of FI. For example, Chappell and Waylen (2013, 602) write that 'the institutional dominance of particular forms of masculinity has taken us from seeing gender as operating only at an individual level, to viewing it *as a regime*' (emphasis added). Similarly, Meryl Kenny (2007) draws on Connell's work to argue that feminist theory has sophisticated theories of gendered power to offer institutional analysis, an argument that has been borne out by later applications of Connell's work to institutions (see, e.g., Guerrina, Chappell, and Wright 2018; Mackay 2011). Arguably, Connell's theory of gender regimes is a substantive theory of gendered power of the sort that Findlay is calling for: it is structural, encompassing aspects such as the gendered division of labour in production and consumption, and thus recognises the broader power relations in which gendered norms, values and behaviours operate.

However, Findlay is correct in asserting that the analysis of gender in FI is largely detached from the *economic* functions of gendered rules. Returning to Chappell and Waylen (2013), while the authors analyse in detail the function of masculine power within specific institutions, there is no sustained attention given to the specific role that masculine power plays in upholding the gendered division of labour or the wider structures of capitalism. The same is true of other key FI interventions that seek to foreground the gendered dimensions of institutions, but in doing so allow the economic functions of institutions to fall into the background (Kenny 2007; Krook and Mackay 2011). For example, Fiona Mackay's (2014, 552) concept of 'nested newness' provides valuable insights into the ways in which attempts to change institutions are 'embedded in time, sequence and [their] institutional environment' and thus how attempts to shift gender norms within institutions can be eroded by the tendency of actors to fall back on tradition. Yet, once again, this account is focused narrowly on gender, emphasising the cognitive processes by which individual actors uphold gender norms. In this sense, the components of Connell's theory of gender regimes are taken up unevenly by FI theorists, with the symbolic and interpersonal aspects generally prioritised over the material and structural ones. This has important implications for the normative visions of institutions put forward by FI theorists. Focusing primarily on how women may gain representation within existing institutions and use these institutions to promote 'women-friendly' reforms that 'feminise political structures, rules, and norms' (Beckwith 2005, 133), FI theorists generally refrain from any critique of the overall function of social institutions within wider structures of oppression other than gender, such as capitalism, imperialism and colonialism.

It is for this reason that Findlay (2015, 61) calls on FI theorists to engage with concepts from political economy such as structural inequality and social reproduction, which highlight the need for 'radical political change' that goes beyond the narrow liberal aim of representation.

An important exception here, as Findlay does note, are theories within the realm of historical institutionalism (HI). Of the varieties of new institutionalism, HI is most attentive to how macro-social and historical processes act both to stabilise institutions (through mechanisms of path dependency and 'lock-in') and to change institutions (particularly during 'critical junctures' through exogeneous shocks) (Katznelson 2003; Mahoney and Thelen 2009; Pierson 2004). HI tends to emphasise stability over change, treating institutions as relatively enduring legacies of historical and political struggles over power (Mahoney and Thelen 2009) in which change is fairly difficult to enact. This is illuminated in historical analyses of regime transitions which we might expect to be amendable to feminist change, yet in which such change ultimately proved difficult to secure. For example, in her analysis of the outcomes of women's movements in the transition to democracy in a number of countries, Waylen (2007, 199) finds that women's social and economic rights were more difficult to secure than civil and political rights, attributing this to 'the impact of policies of economic and social restructuring and the greater integration into the global economy that has accompanied the political processes of transition'. Similarly, Hašková and Saxonberg (2011) examine developments in family policy in post-communist states and find that the underlying conservatism of family policy prior to the communist period undermined the efforts of communist governments to make this policy more egalitarian, and that this conservatism was carried into family policy in the post-communist Czech and Slovak republics. These analyses provide important exceptions to Findlay's critique, drawing links between the gendered dynamics of institutions and state power and highlighting how the political-economic functions of institutions can make them resistant to change. In this vein, Waylen (2009, 245) advocates for a 'feminist historical institutionalism' that integrates meso-level analysis of the institutional rules of the game with an attention to macro-level social and historical processes.[20]

[20] Interestingly, critiques of HI that parallel Findlay's argument have been put forward by political economists, who have accused HI of failing 'to specify adequately the context that shapes political struggles, producing unsystematic, *ad hoc* accounts' (Hameiri 2020, 637). As Stephen Bell and Hui Feng (2014, 202) write, 'established theory has tended to focus on intermediate institutional dynamics. Wider contexts such as crises, power dynamics or wider ideational or policy contexts have received somewhat less attention'. These theorists thus advocate for a 'meta-institutional' approach that is attentive to the broader setting of political economy as well as the role of the capitalist state in shaping the internal dynamics of institutions, echoing the approach advanced by Waylen (2007).

Drawing on both Findlay's and Waylen's contributions, the approach to feminist institutionalism I adopt in this thesis emphasises the political-economic and historical features of institutions. I explore in detail the history of the Australian neoliberal university in Chapter 4, considering the relationship between government policy, political economy and institutional dynamics. I attend to the transformation of universities over recent decades and how this historical sequence of events shapes the way in which decisions are made, power is distributed and actors behave in contemporary university settings. However, it is important that such an approach does not foreclose the possibility of institutional change or the presence of agency within institutions. In this spirit, I now turn to the role of actors and agency within FI theory to consider how agents can be both constrained by the rules of institutions and also drivers of institutional change.

ii. Actors, agency and social movements

The perils of an overly structuralist approach to institutions are well-established, with institutionalist writing frequently reiterating that institutions are populated by 'real people' (Lovenduski 1998; Schmidt 2010) with subjective experiences, desires and intentions. This impetus to re-centre agents also responds to a static view of institutions, capturing the fact that 'institutions are often populated by resourceful, interpretative agents seeking opportunities for change' (Bell and Feng 2014, 212). Seeking to move away from a rigid structuralist account of institutions in which individuals' behaviour is simply determined by their structural context, institutionalist theorists have instead foregrounded dynamics of contingency, resistance and change, largely driven by dissident actors who seek to challenge existing institutional contexts (Mahoney and Thelen 2009). However, as Vivien Lowndes and Mark Roberts (2010, 77) note, 'while third phase institutionalism agrees that individuals and institutions are mutually constitutive, the role of agency and power remains under-theorized', particularly the relationship between agents and institutional structures. Here, I outline how feminist movements have been conceptualised in existing FI analysis and how this project builds on existing work situated at the interface of institutionalism and social movements.

FI theorists have inquired into the relationship between feminist movements and institutions, reflecting FI's disciplinary lineage in the broader field of gender and politics. In the gender and politics field, the relationship between feminist movements and the state is generally conceived of as mutually constitutive or dialectical (Eisenstein 1989, 54; Watson 1990, 8). The structures of the state shape the priorities and opportunities of feminist movements, and in turn these movements have shaped the structures of the state, in what Chappell (2002, 179) describes as a 'two-way street'. Analysis has focused particularly on women's policy agencies (WPAs) as a bridge between feminist

movements and the state and a major channel through which these movements may exert influence on policy-making (Chappell 2002; Lovenduski 2005; Rankin and Vickers 2001). In the Australian context, the relationship between mainstream feminist movements and the state is often conceptualised through the figure of the 'femocrat' or state feminist, and research has explored the policy achievements of feminists as well as the complexities and tensions of advancing feminist goals within the constraining structures of the state (Eisenstein 1991; Lake 1999; Sawer 1990, 2007; Yeatman 1990). Theorists have also identified the particular challenges that emerge for state feminists within a changing state structure, exploring the impact of privatisation, globalisation and other features of neoliberalism on WPAs (Outshoorn and Kantola 2007; Stetson and Mazur 1995).

Some FI (and FI-adjacent) theorists have engaged with concepts from social movement theory to examine feminist strategies of engagement with the state in closer detail. For example, Chappell (2002, 9) integrates Tarrow's concept of Political Opportunity Structure (POS) with an analysis of gender and institutions to explore 'how political actors can both take advantage of existing opportunities and create new ones'. Chappell shows that POSs are heterogenous across different state institutions and jurisdictions, demonstrating the benefits of contextual and comparative analysis. A similar approach is applied by Waylen (2007) in her comparative analysis of women's movements in transitions to democracy, which sought to understand the mixed successes that these movements had in achieving their aims. In contrast, McBride and Mazur (2010) draw on framing theory, as developed by social movement theorists Robert Benford and David Snow. They argue that 'it is through framing that movements form alliances with women's policy agencies and that agencies in turn influence policy processes and outcomes, thus securing movement failure or success' (McBride and Mazur 2010, 11–12). Finally, challenging a view of women's movements as being 'outside' the state, Lee Banaszak (2010) explores the complex linkages between social movements and the state through the positions of 'movement insiders', drawing on analysis of movement strategy and tactics from social movement studies.

These approaches, however, are the minority in a field that is largely focused on individual actors within institutional settings. This is evident in analyses of 'critical actors' (Thomson 2018) and 'gender equality entrepreneurs' (Chappell 2006) which draw attention to the role of 'key influential individuals within [institutions] who consciously act to encourage gendered change' (Thomson 2018, 181; see also Childs and Krook 2009). As a corrective to overly individualised approaches to institutional actors within FI, and to push the analysis further, the approach taken in this thesis highlights the agency of collective, grassroots movements. I choose to foreground these actors in

line with my methodological commitment, discussed in the previous chapter, to seeking the knowledge of those disempowered by existing structures within universities and to understanding and contributing to processes of institutional change. This approach also balances the structural components of my theoretical framework, acknowledging that student movements have the capacity to enact significant and enduring changes in universities. These movements have shaped the nature of contemporary universities through the creation of what were seen as dissident departments such as Women's Studies and Political Economy (Butler, Jones, and Stilwell 2009; Caine 1998; Curthoys 2000; Jones 1998), the instigation of democratic and representative bodies for students, and more recently forcing universities to divest from fossil fuel industries (Briedis 2018; Hastings 2003; Hush and Mason 2019). This mirrors the mutually constitutive relationship between feminist movements and the state as discussed above – universities both establish constraints and opportunities for student movements, and are in turn shaped by the activities of these movements.

It is worth noting here that my analysis of student feminist movements could proceed through a number of different theoretical approaches and could equally be analysed through the lens of social movement theory. Indeed, social movement theorists have considered the relationship between movements and institutions from another direction, using primarily the tools of social movement theory rather than institutionalism (see Schneiberg and Lounsbury 2017 for a review of such work). However, the hegemonic position of institutional analysis within political science makes it an important object of reflection and critique. FI also offers specific insights into the daily life of institutions and the way in which institutions represent both constraints and opportunities for social change, though as I have argued above, these insights would benefit from being placed within the wider context of political-economic structures. To this end, I have chosen to apply FI to a new topic and in a new manner, to see if it can be stretched to analyse both the complex political-economic environment of the neoliberal university and the political dynamics of grassroots student struggles against sexual violence. The next section outlines the key theoretical concepts from NI and FI that I employ in this task.

3. Embedded institutionalism: a synthetic framework

In this final section of the chapter, I put forward a synthetic theoretical framework, which I term 'embedded institutionalism'. This model aims to respond to the critiques I have explored above and to elaborate the relationships between macro-level contexts, institutions and social movements. Following Lowndes and Roberts (2010), this framework is a pluralist one in that it

integrates concepts from different strands of institutional theory. It analyses institutional politics through three levels of analysis: the macro-level, institutional or meso-level, and the social movement level (Figure 2, below). It aims to explain how the meso-level dynamics of institutions are embedded within broader political dynamics and conflicts, both 'from above' (at the macro-level) and 'from below' (at the social movement level). In this section, I firstly explain the use of the term 'embedded' in naming this framework and its relationship to theories of economic embeddedness in the field of political economy. Second, I consider the relationships between a) macro-social contexts and institutions and b) institutions and social movements, and introduce two key concepts deployed throughout this thesis: layering and constraint. I finally turn to consider, in more specific terms, the application of this theory in this project by beginning to theorise the relationship between the neoliberal political economy, universities and feminist social movements.

i. Why embedded institutionalism?

The term 'embedded institutionalism' is inspired by theories of embedded liberalism and embedded neoliberalism in the field of political economy. 'Embedded liberalism', a term coined by John Gerard Ruggie (1982), is used to describe the global economy between the end of World War II and the ascendance of neoliberalism in the 1970s. Ruggie drew on the work of Karl Polanyi, who argued that markets have historically been embedded within, and under the control of, social processes. However, Polanyi (2001, 74) argues, the nineteenth century saw 'the institutional separation of society into an economic and a political sphere', hinting at the dangers of a disembedded market that was unleashed from political controls and social responsibilities. Ruggie then drew attention to the *re-embedding* that he saw taking place in post-war Keynesian economies. In a critique of the naturalism of this model, Cahill (2018, 978) promotes an understanding of economies as 'always embedded' in institutions. 'Just as the post-war economy was institutionally embedded', Cahill (2018, 981) writes, 'so too is the neoliberal economy embedded within, and crucially dependent on a matrix of institutions.' While these perspectives focus on the embeddedness of the market within institutions, I argue that it is similarly productive, from an institutionalist perspective, to conceive of the reverse – the embeddedness of institutions within economic markets and other macro-social processes. Neither markets nor institutions represent the true or transcendent foundation of social processes and phenomena, and neither should be given causal priority. Rather, institutions and macro-economic processes are mutually constitutive and interact in complex ways.

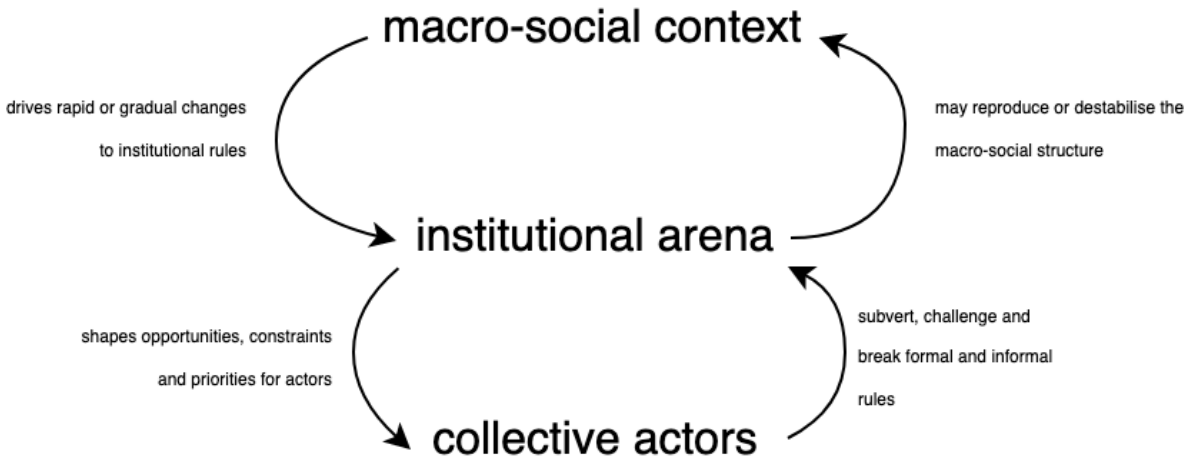

Figure 2: Embedded relationships between macro-social contexts, institutions and social movements.

ii. Institutions and the macro-social context

One major conceptual aim of this embedded approach is to emphasise the macro-level structures in which institutions are embedded and to highlight the significance of this embeddedness for the function of institutional rules – an approach we might call 'bringing the macro back in' (see Skocpol, Evans, and Rueschemeyer 1985). In this thesis, I focus on the political economy of contemporary Australian universities as one aspect of their macro-social context to interrogate the effect that the neoliberalisation of universities has had on their responses to sexual violence and on the dynamics of feminist resistance. There are, of course, other macro-level dynamics in which institutions are embedded, such as imperialism, colonialism and gender regimes. Different aspects of the macro-social context may be salient to analyses of different institutions and may reveal new insights into the relationships of constraint and agency between institutions and their wider contexts.

A major theme of this thesis is how the process of neoliberalisation within the Australian university sector has shaped universities' responses to sexual violence and to student feminist activism. This question touches on persistent debates in the field of institutionalism regarding the mechanisms by which institutional change occurs. As I noted above, the concept of path dependency has been especially influential, highlighting how decisions made early in the life of an institution can lock the institution into a particular trajectory and prove difficult to change down the track (Campbell 2001, 90–91; Peters, Pierre, and King 2005, 1276). Relatedly, the concept of critical junctures has emphasised the importance of moments of crisis in accelerating institutional change. Giovanni Cappocia (2015, 148) writes:

> Critical junctures are cast as moments in which uncertainty as to the future of an institutional arrangement allows for political agency and choice to play a decisive causal role in setting an institution on a certain path of development, a path that then persists over a long period of time.

However, this model of institutional change has also been subject to critique. Streeck and Thelen (2005, 8), for example, argue that 'there are severe limits to models of change that draw a sharp line between institutional stability and institutional change and that see all major changes as exogenously generated'. A number of theorists have called instead for a model of change that accounts for incremental and endogenous changes that accumulate over time and may in some cases have a transformative effect (Hašková and Saxonberg 2011; Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010). In this vein, Mahoney and Thelen (2009, 15–16) propose a 'theory of gradual institutional change' and identify four modes in which gradual change may occur: displacement, layering, drift and conversion. Here, I focus on *layering* as a key concept with which to analyse the development of the Australian neoliberal university.

Mahoney and Thelen (2009, 16–17) write that 'layering occurs when new rules are attached to existing ones, thereby changing the ways in which the original rules structure behaviour […] layering does not introduce wholly new institutions or rules, but rather involves amendments, revisions, or additions to existing ones'. As a result of layering, new and old rules coexist and may be contradictory, which may lessen the impact of new rules or serve as a resource that institutional actors may use to drive change. In a gendered analysis of layering, Waylen (2017, 14) gives the example of women's policy agencies (WPAs) as new institutions that are layered onto existing ones – in this example, established state bureaucracies. Research on the experience of those working within WPAs affirms this analysis of layering as a complex and contradictory process shaped by the relative strength of new and old rules and the creativity with which actors engage with these rules (Chappell 2002; 2006). I continue to develop and apply this concept of layering in Chapter 4, considering the relationship between newer rules in universities (informed by the demands of the neoliberal political economy) and older ones (shaped by the university's colonial and patriarchal histories). I question whether the neoliberal transformation of universities represents a 'critical juncture' and a definitive break with the university's past, or whether this history is better read as a gradual and cumulative process of layering, a point I return to again in Chapter 8.

iii. Institutions and social movements

Drawing on existing literature, I argued above that institutions and social movements stand in a mutually constitutive relationship in which movements are shaped and constrained by their

institutional contexts but also act to reshape and transform institutions. Institutions constrain actors in a number of ways. At the most basic level, if institutions are defined as sets of formal and informal rules, then they represent prescriptions about what institutional actors can and cannot do, with varying sanctions for breaking these rules. Drawing together different strands of NI theory, Vivien Lowndes and Mark Roberts (2010, 51) suggest that institutional constraints fall into three categories: rules, practices and narratives. Rules are the 'formally constructed and recorded' aspects of institutions: constitutions, codes of conduct, policy frameworks or protocols (Lowndes and Roberts 2010, 52). In contrast, Lowndes and Roberts (2010, 52) describe practices as 'demonstrated through conduct'; that is, through the behaviour of actors. Their conception of practices can be read as analogous to informal rules, in that they are usually not made explicit but nevertheless enforce certain patterns of behaviour, for example the performance of gendered styles of dress and speech. Finally, narratives are stories that 'embody values, ideas and power' and communicate institutional histories in ways that empower some actors and constrain others (Lowndes and Roberts 2010, 63). These three modes of constraint interact dynamically to shape the behaviour of institutional actors and the possibilities of resistance and change. Depending on the strength of these constraints, institutions may be more or less hostile environments for social movement mobilisation. This tripartite definition of institutional constraints is a useful way to think about the relationship of student movements to the university as it captures critical aspects of the institutional context in which these movements are organised and differentiates between various ways in which institutions resist or shut down attempts at change.

John Campbell argues that institutionalist theorists are increasingly interested in conflict and power struggles as drivers of institutional change and in exploring 'the strategic framing of issues and interests, mobilization of resources, and coalition building' by dissident institutional actors (Campbell 2001, 98). Such a perspective, he notes, sees 'the processes of institutional reproduction and change [as] mutually constitutive' (Campbell 2001, 98), with both processes driven by attempts at consolidating power by diverse actors. Under this view, institutions are seen as a double-edged sword, both constraining what actors are able to do but also representing resources that actors can draw on to gain power and further their goals. This dual perspective is important, as to focus only on the constraining effects of institutions on social movements is to elide the agency and creativity that these movements exercise even in hostile contexts. This is seen, to give just one example, in the entry of women into the inimical, patriarchal structures of the state through channels such as women's policy agencies, as discussed above. As the literature explored above explains, even in the presence of rules, practices and narratives that reinforce institutionalised power, individual and

collective actors are also capable of finding ways to evade these threats and pursue their own agendas.

What, then, are the mechanisms through which dissident actors subvert, challenge and break formal and informal rules in institutional settings? This question is central to feminist institutionalist work, which has examined the strategies and tactics used by feminists in attempts to transform institutions. While, as I argued above, much FI work has focused on the strategies of *individual* actors (e.g. Staab and Waylen 2020; Thomson 2018), some work has examined the strategies deployed by movements. For example, Chappell (2002, 27–39) explores the influence that the Political Opportunity Structures of two different states have on the strategies adopted by women's movements, including bureaucratic centrism, litigation and lobbying. This work provides a useful backdrop for the current project, which extends this analysis to the context of Australian student feminist movements, inquiring into the particular strategies these movements have engaged in to challenge their universities' responses to sexual violence. In particular, I seek to explore how the layered nature of rules within the neoliberal university may generate strategic openings or heightened constraints for movement actors.

iv. Neoliberalism and the reshaping of institutional relationships

The above discussion has sketched the relationships between social movements, institutions and their social contexts. I now consider in more specific terms the shifting social role of institutions within neoliberal political-economic contexts. I examine how neoliberal shifts in the political economy have transformed relationships between the state and other social institutions, how these political-economic transformations have also involved changes in the social relations of gender, and the shifting role of feminist politics within this social ecology. This forms the basis for my discussion in the next two chapters of the dual histories of the neoliberal university (Chapter 4) and campus feminist politics (Chapter 5).

This task firstly requires a definition of neoliberalism. As many scholars note, neoliberalism is a highly contested term, and one often used as a general pejorative to signify 'things we don't like' (Peck 2018, xxvii; see also Cahill and Konings 2017, 5). Given this confusion, it is important to be clear about what exactly neoliberalism is: is it a theory, an ideology, an economic system or a set of social relations? In his landmark book *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, economic geographer David Harvey (2005, 2) suggests that neoliberalism is:

> In the first instance *a theory of political economic practices* that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an

> institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. (emphasis added)

In this definition, Harvey emphasises the theoretical aspects of neoliberalism – the 'conceptual apparatus' (Harvey 2005, 5) that was developed by economists in the second half of the twentieth century. The Mont Pèlerin Society, founded in 1947 by Friedrich von Hayek and a small, exclusive group of historians, economists and philosophers, was critical in developing the ideological framework that underpinned rolling neoliberal reforms in the last decades of the century. The Mont Pèlerin 'statement of aims' emphasises the classical liberal values of freedom of thought and expression, private property and the competitive market, and the authority of law (Mont Pèlerin Society 2019). The neoclassical approach developed by the Mont Pèlerin Society is only one amongst many strands of neoliberal thought; Dieter Plehwe (2009, 1–2) argues that German ordoliberal thought,[21] as well as Austrian economic theory, had significant influences on what is now known as hegemonic neoliberalism. Regardless of which particular schools of thought are taken to be most influential on neoliberalism, this approach highlights the intellectual and philosophical origins of neoliberalism in the 'neoliberal thought collective' (Plehwe 2009).

However, this understanding of neoliberalism as a unified theoretical project has been challenged more recently, particularly by scholars in the Australian context who argue that Australia's 'road to neoliberalism' took quite a different path to that of European or North American countries. Australian political economists Damien Cahill and Elizabeth Humphrys (2019) critique what they call the 'ideational determinism' of the neoliberal thought collective thesis, arguing that this thesis over-emphasises the role of a small group of neoliberal intellectuals in shaping the roll-out of neoliberalism and neglects the important roles played by states, trade unions and private enterprise. Neoliberalism, Cahill and Humphrys emphasise, is more than just an abstract economic theory or a political ideology – it is a set of material practices and reforms emerging from particular historical circumstances and at the hands of political actors of varying stripes, not solely the conservative right. While the theories of the neoliberal thought collective may *correlate* to these developments, such a correlation is insufficient to prove that these theories played a fundamental causative role (Cahill 2013, 73). In contrast, the materialist approach taken by Cahill and Humphrys stresses that

[21] Ordoliberalism is a German political-economic theory that emerged from the crisis of the Weimar Republic in the late 1920s. Unlike later North American theories of neoliberalism which aspire to some minimal form of the state, ordoliberalism identified neoliberalism 'with a strong state – a state that restrains competition and secures the social and ideological preconditions of economic liberty' (Bonefeld 2012), and rejected the principle of *laissez-faire* that structured nineteenth-century liberalism (Whyte 2019, 61).

'the social relations of production between capital and labour and changing economic circumstances also help explain the context in which neoliberal ideas came to prominence' (Cahill 2013, 81). These circumstances include a major global crisis of capital accumulation in the early 1970s, in which the high rates of growth in post-war economies had slowed markedly, wages were stagnating and unemployment and inflation were rapidly rising (Harvey 2005, 12). In addition, increasing conflict between labour and capital due to the relative strength of trade unions in the 1960s and 1970s motivated active attempts by capital and the state to disorganise labour and defend processes of capital accumulation. For Cahill and Humphrys, these shifts in the social relations of production are foundational in explaining how and why neoliberalism came about in particular places, at particular times. This informs my approach to analysing the neoliberal university in this thesis, foregrounding not merely the ideological tenets of the neoliberal project but the material circumstances that enabled key neoliberal reforms in the higher education sector to be achieved.

Political economists (Albo 2002; Harvey 2005, chapter 3; Konings 2012) have argued that neoliberalism has entailed major changes in the roles of, and relationships between, the state, economic institutions and other social institutions, a point of significant relevance to institutionalists. Although neoliberalism is often understood as a weakening or retreat of state power through the privatisation of services and industries that were formerly publicly managed, Harvey (2005) highlights that the state plays a crucial role in securing and regulating the conditions in which free markets and free trade will flourish. Similarly, Lisa Adkins (2018, 470) argues that 'neoliberalism has been concerned with the making and embedding of a set of powerful institutional linkages in which the state plays – and continues to play – a powerful role'. Neoliberalism, then, 'does not so much involve *deregulation* as *re-regulation*' (Campbell and Pedersen 2001, 3, my emphasis). This process of re-regulation is of critical importance to the study of institutions, generating new relationships between the state and other institutions in what we might consider as a process of layering new rules and regulations onto pre-existing institutions. As Campbell and Pedersen (2001, 5) argue, 'if the new institutionalist paradigms are worthwhile, they should be able to account for the emergence of this very important set of institutions'.

As I have argued above, FI seems particularly distanced from these political-economic concerns and from an analysis of state power in the context of capitalism. FI theorists have primarily sought to illuminate the gendered nature of institutions within and beyond the state and to illuminate gender injustice in supposedly 'private' spheres of life. Tammy Findlay (2015, 23) argues that as a

result, this work is 'fraught with feminist ambivalence about the state', and lacks a general theory of state power. I contend that consideration of the particular relationships between institutions, the state and the market in neoliberal society may help to resolve these tensions and to capture the embeddedness of institutions within their macro-social context. To capture realistically the potential for institutional change requires first grappling with the constraints placed on institutions by virtue of this embeddedness in neoliberal political economies: for example, the influence of the profit motive and marketisation on policy decisions, the role of austerity measures in constraining the resources available to certain institutions, and the broader culture of entrepreneurship, individualism and competition that 'prescribes the citizen-subject of a neoliberal order' (Brown 2005, 43).

This is not to say that analysis of the political-economic context of institutions should displace the gendered analysis that FI scholars have usefully developed. However, any account of the institutional politics of gender that is divorced from an understanding of the gendered *economic* functions of institutions is incomplete. Here, concepts from feminist political economy can usefully contribute to a fuller account of gender, institutions and political economy. Feminist political economists have analysed specifically the gendered dimensions of neoliberal reforms (M. Cooper 2012; Leonard and Fraser 2016; Lewis 2002). These include the commodification and privatisation of social reproduction (Bakker 2007) creating what Nancy Fraser (2016) calls a 'crisis of care', in which our capacities to build, strengthen and sustain social bonds are depleted by the loss of the family wage, the commodification of care and the increase in the amount of waged labour necessary to support a household. Further, the entrance of greater numbers of women into the waged labour market has been accompanied by the rise of 'flexible' labour practices, a dual process that is often referred to as the 'feminisation' of labour (Standing 1989). Although precarious work is a feature of neoliberal industrial relations more broadly, it has pronounced gender discrepancies: women are more likely than men to work under casual or part-time contracts, to report job insecurity and to earn significantly less (Young 2010). These analyses reveal important links between the neoliberal transformation of institutional relationships (through privatisation, commodification and re-regulation) and gender relations, enhancing our understanding of the gendered political economy of institutions.

Paradoxically, the neoliberal era has simultaneously seen the mainstreaming of gender within institutions and the self-conscious adoption of feminist rhetoric and branding by various institutions, particularly those in the private sector. This commodification of feminism has

reinforced particular modes of feminist politics, consolidating what Catherine Rottenberg (2018) terms 'neoliberal feminism'. This is an entrepreneurial, aspirational approach that 'empowers women' to 'do it all', persuading us that we can raise families at the same time as climbing the corporate ladder. As Rottenberg (2018, 20) explains, this form of feminist politics:

> […] forsakes the vast majority of women and facilitates the creation of new and intensified forms of racialized and class-stratified gender exploitation, which increasingly constitutes the invisible yet necessary infrastructure of our neoliberal order.

From the perspective of embedded institutionalism, this is not surprising. My model highlights how social movements and institutions alike are embedded in political-economic contexts that shape and constrain their political dynamics. Feminist movements, then, do not stand apart from the macro-social forces of neoliberal capitalism – they are embedded within these forces in complex ways, capable of both resistance and complicity. A further task for FI is to analyse these complicated entanglements of feminist movements with institutions to understand the rise of neoliberal feminism, and to conceptualise a mode of engagement with institutions that is better able to resist and challenge the neutralising threats that neoliberalised institutions may present.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the theoretical approach and key concepts that underpin my analysis of the institutional politics of sexual violence in contemporary Australian universities. Reviewing key literature from the fields of new and feminist institutionalism (NI and FI), I argued that these theories provide the tools for analysing the enduring force and power of institutions, as well as the mechanisms through which institutions might be transformed in line with feminist goals. Drawing on existing critical analyses of NI and FI, I argued for the need to afford greater attention to the way in which institutional rules are embedded in both macro-social dynamics and grassroots political struggles. In the next two chapters, I begin to apply this approach through analysis of two intertwined histories: that of the Australian neoliberal university (Chapter 4) and campus-based feminist movements (Chapter 5). The historical approach taken in both of these chapters reflects the view of institutions put forward in this chapter: as legacies of political struggle and the accumulation of heterogeneous rules and practices over time. These chapters set the scene for my analysis of contemporary student activism against sexual violence, in Chapters 6–8.

Chapter 4 | The evolution of the neoliberal university in Australia

> The university has no history of its own; its history is the history of capital. Its essential function is the reproduction of the relationship between capital and labor. […] What we are witnessing now is the endgame of this process, whereby the façade of the educational institution gives way altogether to corporate streamlining.
> – Research and Destroy, 'Communiqué from an Absent Future'

Introduction

This chapter presents a historical analysis of the development of the neoliberal university in Australia. I apply the framework of 'embedded institutionalism' presented in the previous chapter by considering how contemporary universities are embedded within the wider context of the Australian capitalist political economy. This context, as I suggested in the previous chapter, is critical in that it shapes and constrains processes of rule-making, both in state and federal higher education policy-making and at the university level. It informs how decisions are made, how power is distributed and thus how actors exercise agency within the institutional arena. Through a detailed analysis of key features of contemporary Australian universities, I develop a historicised analysis of the structures of power that constitute these universities and shape their responses to sexual violence. This chapter sets the scene for my analysis of contemporary student feminist activism in and against the neoliberal university, examining the rules that operate within this setting and the political-economic conditions in which they emerged.

In Australia, the 'neoliberal university' is popularly understood as originating in a set of reforms implemented in the late 1980s by the Minister for Education, Employment and Training, John Dawkins. The Dawkins reforms are often framed as a 'revolution' (Croucher et al. 2013b) that 'changed everything' (Macintyre, Croucher, and Brett 2016). For example, Australian higher education theorist Grant Harman (1989, 3) writes that 'it is no overstatement to refer to recent changes as the Dawkins reconstruction of Australian higher education'. Others suggest that Dawkins single-handedly:

> […] turned colleges into universities, free education into HECS,[22] elite education into mass education, local focuses into international outlooks, vice chancellors into corporate leaders, teachers into teachers and researchers. (Croucher et al. 2013a, 1)

The language generally used to discuss the Dawkins reforms thus suggests a distinct break with the past, a replacement of rules and norms that previously governed Australian universities with a radically new set of economic imperatives.

In the first section of this chapter, I argue that the Dawkins reforms, while undoubtedly significant, are best understood not as a 'revolution' but as set of new rules and imperatives, layered over and reinforcing existing ones. In many cases, these new rules were not radically distinct from higher education policy pre-Dawkins and indeed served to entrench 'old' practices, especially in relation to university responses to sexual violence. To make this argument, I place four key features of the Dawkins reforms within their historical context, demonstrating how these features express pre-existing tendencies within the governance of higher education in Australia. These four features are the instrumental use of higher education policy to produce specific outcomes in the labour force, the globalisation of higher education, the privatisation of university funding and the implementation of managerial practices within university governance. In many cases, pre-existing rules and norms were not disrupted but strengthened by these reforms. This cautions against an understanding of the neoliberalisation of Australian universities as a swift and complete process, suggesting instead that it was gradual, cumulative and marked by internal contradictions. In the second section of this chapter, I consider the political implications of the neoliberalisation of universities for staff and students. I examine the roles that staff and student unions played during the Dawkins period, arguing that responses to the reforms were heterogeneous and involved both resistance (from students and university workers) as well as support for the reforms (from some union officials and Vice Chancellors). I explore the ongoing impacts of the neoliberalisation of Australian universities for students and staff, concluding that this process has produced a depoliticised campus environment in which staff and students have waning power to challenge or resist managerial prerogative.

Background to the Dawkins reforms

In 1987, newly elected Labor Prime Minister Bob Hawke undertook a major revision of the structure of government departments and ministries, reducing the number of departments from

[22] The Higher Education Contribution Scheme, a federal graduate tax introduced in 1989 that marked the end of free higher education for domestic students. I discuss the history of HECS in section 1.3 of this chapter.

28 to 18 through a number of mergers. One of the new 'super departments' created was the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) through the merger of the Department of Education with the Department of Employment and Training. It was the first time in Australian history that education and employment were to coexist in the same department, which Hawke described as a 'logical combination of function' (Pusey 1991, 148).[23] The Minister of the new 'super department' was John Dawkins, an economics graduate from Western Australia. Notably, Dawkins had previously been the Minister for Trade, a role in which 'he had led the early development of full-fee international education' (Marginson 2003, 162). As Minister of DEET, Dawkins was given greater centralised powers over its operations, with the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission, an independent statutory body previously responsible for all post-secondary education, disbanded and its functions transferred to the Department (Smart 1991, 98).

In his role as Minister, Dawkins undertook an ambitious project to transform the Australian higher education system. After releasing a short statement in September 1987 titled 'The Challenge for Higher Education in Australia', he then circulated a Green Paper in December 1987. The central objective of the policy platform proposed in the Dawkins Green Paper was to 'promote growth' in the Australian higher education section through a program of 'modernisation', in order to produce 'a better educated and more highly skilled population [that] will be able to deal more effectively with change' (Dawkins 1987, 1). To achieve this objective, it advocated for a set of reforms, including:

- The reintroduction of student contributions to the cost of higher education for domestic students through an income-contingent public loan scheme;
- The replacement of the binary system of higher education with a Unified National System (through mergers of Colleges of Advanced Education and universities);
- Increased competition between institutions, through mechanisms such as leagues tables and performance-based funding;
- The strengthening of managerial practices within university governance structures;
- Increased marketisation of research and technological innovations;
- The growth of private funding sources to compensate for effective cuts in federal funding;
- The growth of international education as a key national export.[24]

[23] This sentiment was also expressed at the OECD Ministerial Conference the following year, where it was resolved that 'that which is education is becoming less clearly distinct from that which is the economy' (Marginson 1993, 20).
[24] The raft of reforms proposed in the Dawkins Green Paper are summarised usefully by Simon Marginson (2003, table 9.1) with an evaluation of how effectively they were achieved between 1987 and 2003. Marginson concludes that the majority of Dawkins' proposals have been enacted in full or in part.

To achieve these aims, Dawkins said, 'the Government's approach will be to offer financial and other advantages to institutions willing to adopt those principles and practices considered to be for the general community good', and threatened that institutions that were not willing to do so 'will receive less support' (Dawkins 1987, 3).

Dawkins identified 'the challenge for higher education in Australia' as striking a balance between the traditional academic functions of the university – that is, independent research and teaching – and the effective allocation of resources in the higher education sector 'to meet the nation's increasing need for an educated and skilled population' (Dawkins 1987, 5). Dawkins saw these transformations in higher education as the key to keeping pace with changes in the global economy and to addressing the falling rate of profit in Australia's traditional industries, such as manufacturing and agriculture. 'What is important,' he wrote, 'is the flexibility to capitalise on new opportunities as they arise and to accept the need for continuing change and adjustment, largely determined by international forces' (Dawkins 1987, 2). In other words, universities would be required to support the growth of a temporary or peripheral workforce, particularly in service industries central to the post-Fordist economy, as well as to produce and train people in the technologies that would fuel Australia's economic recovery from severe downturns in the early 1980s through productivity gains (Smyth 2018).

A major aspect of the Dawkins Green Paper was the proposal to create a Unified National System (UNS) of higher education which rationalised higher education institutions around the country. Since 1965, Australian higher education had operated under a binary model in which Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) were primarily responsible for teaching (especially in vocational areas) and universities primarily responsible for research. Dawkins sought to integrate CAEs and universities in the Unified National System to create 'greater efficiency' through economies of scale. 'Fewer and larger institutions' were to offer a greater range of courses, with 'diversity among institutions' encouraged (Dawkins 1987, 28). Though it is not considered in this chapter in detail, this aspect of the reforms has had a significant impact on the landscape of Australian higher education, causing a number of institutional mergers as well as closures (for analysis of the impact of the UNS, see Croucher and Woelert (2016) and Macintyre, Brett, and Croucher (2017).

1. Dawkins: revolution or evolution?

International research in the field of higher education, as well as the subfield of critical university studies, has examined the rise of the neoliberal university (sometimes also framed as the 'corporate

university'). Pronouncements of the rise of the neoliberal university tend to be dramatic. Stanley Aronowitz and Henry Giroux (2000, 334), writing in the US context, claim that:

> […] this shift suggests a dangerous turn in US society that threatens both our understanding of democracy as fundamental to our basic rights and freedoms and ways to rethink and reappropriate higher education's meaning and purpose.

In what is perhaps the most widely cited theory of 'academic capitalism', US scholars Sheila Slaughter and Gary Rhoades (2010, 9) 'conceptualize these changes as a shift from a public good knowledge/learning regime to an academic capitalist knowledge/learning regime'. In institutionalist terms, the neoliberal shift is thus presented as a 'critical juncture' (Capoccia 2015; see also Pierson 2004) in which the core values, governance structures and financial imperatives of the university have undergone a fundamental transformation driven by the withdrawal of state funding.

However, other theorists have questioned the idea that the university is, or ever was, 'a good in itself, an institution defined ultimately by the progressive nature at its core' (Boggs and Mitchell 2018, 434). Abigail Boggs and Nick Mitchell (2018, 441) argue that this mode of thought relies on 'the forgetting of dispossession at the university's origins', including the legacies of slavery and land theft that form the conditions of possibility for universities in the US (and many other countries). These scholars, writing from the field of abolitionist university studies, advocate instead for a long-range historical perspective of the university that is able to provide context to neoliberal reforms, suggesting that these reforms are not 'a fundamental divergence from the foundational logics of the public university' (Boggs and Mitchell 2018, 443) but rather expressive of crises and contradictions that run to the university's core. Analysis of the neoliberal university in Australia has largely hewed to the former approach rather than the latter, treating the Dawkins reforms as an exceptional moment of crisis and change (Croucher et al. 2013b; Harman 1989; Macintyre, Croucher, and Brett 2016). From an institutionalist perspective, this raises a question about the nature of institutional change in the Australian tertiary sector: Do the Dawkins reforms represent a 'critical juncture' or rather a slower, continuous process of layering where the old and the new converge? In this section, I analyse the Dawkins reforms through a historical lens, examining the relationship between four key features of these reforms and the history of higher education policy in Australia to consider whether these reforms represent a divergence or continuation of this history, before considering the implications of this analysis for theories of institutional change.

i. Universities and the labour force

The first feature of contemporary Australian universities that is often taken to epitomise the neoliberal university is its relationship to the labour force. Encapsulating this perspective, the Dawkins reforms have been characterised as the genesis of a 'market-driven university sector' (Lafferty and Fleming 2000, 257) in which higher education policy is dictated by the needs of the labour market, with the state encouraging the development of skills in particular industries. Higher education researcher Grant Harman (1991, 182) suggests that in the federal cabinet in the mid-1980s (i.e. just prior to the Dawkins reforms), 'it was believed that higher education had to be made more efficient and flexible, and that it must contribute more in providing well-trained personnel for the labour market'. This idea was indeed at the heart of Dawkins' project. Reflecting on the reforms 25 years on, the former Minister stated that 'the essential component was always the idea of expanding the system greatly so we would have the number of graduates in the fields the economy required' (Dawkins 2013, xii).

The Dawkins reforms were proposed during a period of serious economic crisis. In 1983, Australia was facing the deepest recession since the Second World War, with a negative balance of trade and falling rates of productivity (Macintyre et al. 2013, 10). The major response from the Hawke government was to broker an agreement with the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) in which unions agreed to restrict their wage demands in exchange for tax reform, restrained prices and an increase in the 'social wage' – that is, the provision of key public services. The Accord allowed the Hawke government (nominally social democratic in orientation) to roll out key neoliberal reforms, such as the floating of the dollar in 1983, under the guise of a consensus between labour and the state (Humphrys 2019). It is in this context that Dawkins argued that Australian higher education needed to stimulate high-technology industries as a means of addressing the declining competitiveness of Australian exports (Smyth 2018, 52–53). As the White Paper released by Dawkins in 1988 stated, 'our industry is increasingly faced with rapidly changing international markets in which success depends on, among other things, the conceptual, creative and technical skills of the labour force, and the ability to innovate and be entrepreneurial' (Dawkins 1988, 6).

In the context of major macro-economic reforms, the emphasis placed on entrepreneurialism and improving the 'technical skills of the labour force' might appear to have a distinctly neoliberal bent. Such was the perception of academic staff at the time, who lamented that 'allowing the values of relevance and of vocationalism to dictate to the universities will only result in tragedy' (Watts 1992, 47). However, the history of Australian universities undermines the idea that prior to the 1980s,

universities' primary purpose was (as one academic suggests) a 'disinterested spirit of inquiry' or 'cultural criticism and interpretation' (Watts 1992, 47, 42). Rather, universities had always had a central role in producing skilled labour in a manner that responded to the needs of the labour force. To illustrate this point, I give two examples from the history of universities pre-Dawkins: the creation and purpose of the first universities in the Australian colonies, and higher education policy during the post-war period.

Those who proposed the earliest universities in Australia were explicit about their purpose: producing trained personnel for the colonial administration. The passing of the *New South Wales Act 1823* in the UK Parliament had given the colony of NSW new powers of self-governance, leading to the creation of the NSW Legislative Council and Supreme Court. Educated members of the upper classes were required to run and reproduce these newly established systems of law and governance. However, before the founding of the University of Sydney, this usually required travel to the UK or Europe in order to gain a tertiary education, which was time-consuming and expensive (National Museum Australia n.d.). With a growing colony, the local provision of higher education was clearly of benefit to the operation of colonial governance. In this vein, William Charles Wentworth (a colonist, landholder and member of the NSW Legislative Council) commented that if the only outcome of establishing the University of Sydney was 'the preparation of the youth of the colony for the departments of the Government, the money it asked for would be well applied' (Horne and Sherington 2012, 6). Further, training in the natural sciences was integral in what was referred to as the 'acclimatisation' of colonists to new environments – that is, the development of European techniques of agriculture and botany to ensure their productivity in the colonies (Osborne 2000). British pastoral techniques were deeply unsuited to the Australian climate and ecology, unlike the land management practices that had been developed and refined over tens of thousands of years by Aboriginal peoples (Pascoe 2014). Though the large-scale theft of land provided the foundations for the expansion of a resource-driven colonial economy, the development of relevant local knowledge in the natural and applied sciences was critical to its flourishing. Finally, technical education in disciplines like engineering, medicine, accounting and teaching were means for producing a growing professional class in the late nineteenth century, with students in these disciplines trained to enter a class which was seen by colonists to embody the British colonial values of 'progress and civilization' (Forsyth 2018, 44). In the context of a new colony with growing extractive industries and which sought to establish its professions and systems of governance, universities played a critical role in supplying trained workers.

The constitutive relationship between universities and the labour force can also be seen in the case of post-war higher education policy. In the 1950s, student enrolments were declining, buildings were poorly maintained and university finances were meagre (Forsyth 2014a, 54). The Committee on Australian Universities, chaired by Keith Murray, was appointed in 1957 by Prime Minister Robert Menzies to appraise the state of the Australian university system. While the resulting report, known as the Murray Report, indulges in some elevated rhetoric about the social role of universities in uncovering 'the great secrets of nature' and preparing young people 'for a vigorous life in a free society' (Murray et al. 1957, 9), it also unequivocally states that 'the most urgent demand' facing the universities at the time was an economic one: the provision of sufficient graduates to meet the demands of the growing post-war economy. The committee writes:

> The post-war community calls for more and more highly educated people all along the line […] industry and commerce call for more graduates, government and public administration call for more graduates, and all the services of the welfare state call for more graduates. (Murray et al. 1957, 7)

The committee found that universities were, as they stood, poorly placed to meet this demand, with inadequate funding, staff and facilities. The Menzies government accepted the recommendations of the report and, in one of the most significant shifts in education policy of the twentieth century, took on the responsibility of providing the bulk of funding to Australia's universities, which had previously been borne by the individual states and territories. This funding was largely in the form of capital grants that would allow for expansion and development (Abbott and Doucouliagos 2003, 6). As universities' submissions to the Murray Report illustrate, there was already at this time a feeling of tension between universities acting as 'service stations', providing for the labour force as needed, and as 'ivory towers' for the autonomous pursuit of knowledge (Forsyth 2014a, 56). This tension is an inherent and recurring one, seen both in resistance to the Dawkins reforms, which were perceived as instrumentalising the university, but also much earlier in the Australian university's history. This element of the Dawkins reforms was nothing new: Australian universities have always served a dual purpose of skilling graduates to participate in the labour force as well as producing independent research.

This tension continues to surface in current public discourse about higher education policy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the conservative Liberal government announced a raft of reforms (titled the Job-ready Graduates Package) designed to 'deliver more job-ready graduates in the disciplines and regions where they are needed most and help drive the nation's recovery from the COVID-

19 pandemic' (Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2021a). These reforms included adjustments to the course fees that students pay in various areas of study, raising fees in fields such as arts, law and business, and lowering them in teaching, nursing, science, engineering and IT (Norton 2020). Once again, this package had university leaders wondering:

> Do universities exist to prepare young people for the workforce and the labour needs of the economy, or do they have a grander purpose to serve society and create new knowledge and insight? (Firth 2020)

While the self-image of universities has emphasised the latter, more lofty ambition, it is clear from the history presented above that the former is an integral purpose of universities within a capitalist political-economic structure. This history suggests that claims that universities' primary social role is a moral one, to serve the public good and promote 'the values of justice, freedom, equality, and the rights of citizens as equal and free human beings' (Aronowitz and Giroux 2000, 332), are often overstated and tend to overlook the real economic functions of universities. While many individuals within universities are committed to these values, and universities do have some positive social benefits, an objective analysis of Australian universities in their historical and contemporary forms calls for an exploration of the instrumental role they play in reproducing stratified divisions of labour within the capitalist mode of production. As I will continue to argue throughout this thesis, understanding the economic function and role of universities, rather than resorting to an idealised vision of universities as inherently good or progressive institutions, provides a better basis for analysing the material factors shaping universities' responses to sexual violence as well as strategies for transforming these responses.

ii. Universities, nationalism and globalisation

Dawkins' discussion paper suggested that universities should increase their enrolments of fee-paying international students as an additional funding source. It states that 'there is an international demand for competitively priced, high-quality Australian higher education courses', and that 'there is further scope for Australian institutions to increase their overseas student numbers' (Dawkins 1987, 83). International students are framed primarily as an 'important source of potential revenue growth' (1987, 83), one which has indeed grown significantly in the intervening period (Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2021b). Economist and Vice Chancellor of Monash University Margaret Gardner argues that these reforms are 'the genesis of today's significant international education presence' (Gardner 2013, 267). This aligns with a widespread view of globalisation as a specifically neoliberal phenomenon, despite the fact that national barriers to the movement of goods, labour and capital were largely only created in the mid-twentieth century (Quiggin 1999, 242–43).

Gardner's assertion, however, fails to capture the way in which higher education in Australia has from the beginning been an international endeavour, closely linked to the nationalist ideology and international standing of Australia (and before federation, its colonies). First, the birth of the higher education system in Australia occurred in and through the colonial project, playing both practical and symbolic roles in the functioning and legitimation of the British colonies. The birth of Australian universities was taken by colonists to represent 'a bastion of civilization and a sign that a colony and its settlers had "grown up"' (Smith 2013, 68). The first Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Redmond Barry, stated that the key role of the university was 'to stamp on their future pupils the character of the loyal, well-bred English gentleman' (Baldwin 2019, 23), giving a clear sense of the class and racial character of this educational endeavour. With Australia's first universities modelled on the 'Oxbridge' tradition, universities played a clear role in legitimating colonialism in Australia and perpetuating the hegemony of white European academic knowledge at the expense of Indigenous knowledges and histories.

Australian universities are also constitutively international in the way they have been utilised by the state for various geopolitical aims throughout history. For example, during the Second World War, the government sought to stimulate enrolments in fields directly related to the 'wartime effort', namely science and engineering (Abbott and Doucouliagos 2003, 4). New universities were created during this period, such as the University of New South Wales in 1949. The official history presented on the UNSW website notes that in founding the university, the state government recognised the need for the nation 'to keep abreast of the diversity of challenges associated with the Second World War' (UNSW Sydney 2019). Into the Cold War, universities provided a critical ground for technological and scientific innovation, heralded as a symbol of the superiority of Western democracy and a bulwark against the political threats of communism (Campbell 2010).[25] It is worth noting that universities have at times also constituted important sites of resistance to imperialism, for example during the Vietnam War when students organised resistance to the military draft (Vassiley 2010) and fundraised to send aid to the South Vietnamese National Liberation Front (Hastings 2003, 18–20), as well as in more recent 'Books Not Bombs' campaigns led by students against universities' ties to the military-industrial complex (Armstrong 2018).

[25] This came to the fore in 1951 when James Bryant Conant, president of Harvard University, visited Australia and travelled around universities to argue 'for the strategic importance and positioning of scientists such as himself in the world of the Cold War' (Campbell 2010, 26).

Finally, international education was already a well-established aspect of Australian higher education before the Dawkins reforms. In the 1950s, for example, Australia established scholarships under the Colombo Plan to encourage students from South and Southeast Asia to study in Australia. This plan had clear national aims in improving economic, cultural and social relationships between Australia and neighbouring Asian countries, addressing tensions that had built up during the Cold War (Lowe 2011). As historian Lyndon Megarrity (2007, 93) writes, these scholarships 'became one of the most highly publicised means of expressing White Australia's commitment to friendly and mutually beneficial relations with Asia in the 1950s and 1960s'. By 1966, international students comprised 8.9% of all full-time enrolments in Australian universities (Megarrity 2007, 103). International students have formed an exceptional case in Australia's otherwise strict immigration regimes as sources of revenue for universities, cheap labour for business and a means for improving Australia's international relations, especially within the Asia Pacific region.

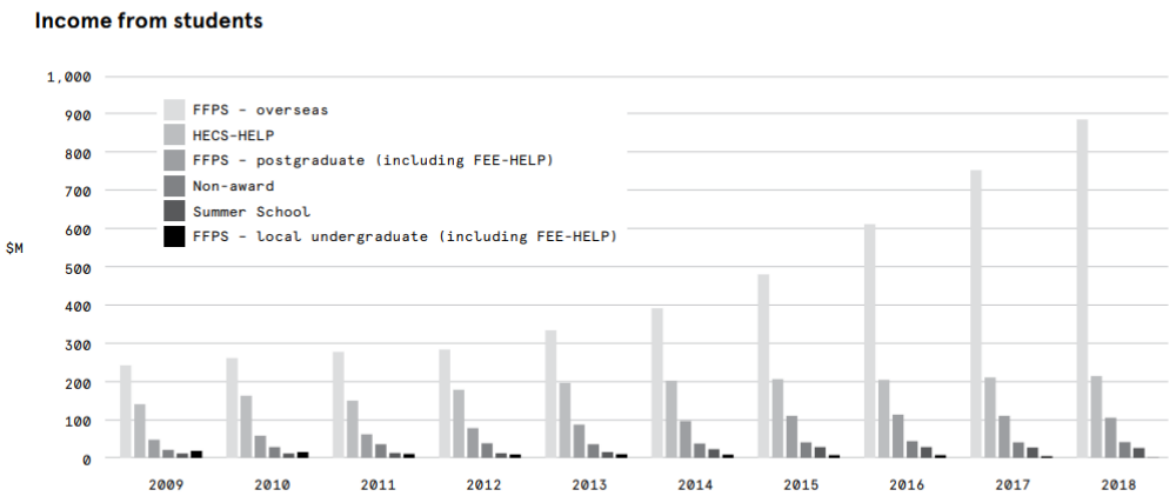

Figure 3: Growth of income from international full-fee-paying students (FFPS) at the University of Sydney between 2009 and 2018. 'HECS-HELP' and 'FEE-HELP' refer to loans offered by the Australian federal government towards tuition fees, which are repaid through an income tax after graduation. Image: University of Sydney 2021, 41.

Universities have thus played an important and shifting role in nation-building and geopolitics since their inception. International education, clearly, did not begin with Dawkins. However, it has certainly grown in importance since the Dawkins reforms, with the ongoing decline of public funding motivating the further expansion of international education. Figure 3 (above) gives an illustrative example from the University of Sydney, the oldest and one of the most prestigious in the country, of how the phenomena of globalisation and privatisation intersect to shape the demographics of the student population. One important outcome of the internationalisation of higher education is that universities are drawn more closely into the securitised border apparatus (Dear 2018; Topping 2014). International student visas are contingent on students' continued enrolment in courses, meaning that students who fail courses – or are disciplined by universities

through suspension or expulsion – are put at risk of deportation. In Australia, international students are frequently deported for exceeding the limit on paid work (Arora 2019), which in many cases is a necessity due to the high cost of living and studying in Australia. In terms of sexual violence, the disciplinary possibilities for universities are heightened in the case of international students who are found to have breached misconduct policies. Not only can universities suspend or expel students, but for those on international student visas, this punishment would also entail deportation. Feminist analysis of sexual violence in universities has yet to grapple with this intersection of university responses to sexual violence and border securitisation in the era of the 'global university' – I will return to this point in Chapter 9.

iii. Privatisation and student fees

Another important feature of the Dawkins reforms was the introduction of the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS). The HECS scheme is a state-mediated, income-contingent loan through which students are able to defer repayment of student fees until they reach a specified income threshold. Meredith Edwards, one of the policy architects of HECS, describes it as 'a product of the 1980s' and a response to the contradiction between growing student numbers and increasing constraints on government spending (Edwards, Howard, and Miller 2001, 99). HECS was introduced in 1989, ending a period of fee-free higher education since 1974, at least for domestic students. Despite the fact that the HECS model represented a shift back to a user-pays system, it was framed by Dawkins as an equity measure. Dawkins' policy paper stated:

> In the past, the benefits of higher education have been enjoyed disproportionately by the more privileged members of the community. Those benefits need to be shared more widely and more equitably in the future. (Dawkins 1988, 6)

Dawkins' argument was that under a system of free higher education, while all taxpayers contributed to the cost of funding universities, it was still predominantly urban, middle-class individuals that benefitted from these institutions. HECS, then, represented an attempt 'to share the cost of tertiary study between society (which benefited from an educated population) and graduates, who benefited professionally and financially from both their learning and their credential' (Forsyth 2014a, 121).

This equity framing hinged on a particular interpretation of human capital theory, which had been highly influential in Australian higher education policy since the early 1960s (Marginson 1993, 31). Developed largely by neoclassical economists in the United States, including Milton Friedman, Theodore Schultz, Gary Becker and Walter Heller, human capital theory considers education as an investment in the skills and talents of future workers, and thus, on a national scale, a driver of

economic productivity (see Becker 1975; Friedman 1962). Human capital theory promotes investment in education on the basis that these investments will be returned in time through their enhancement of human capital on individual and collective scales, though the exact rates of return proved extremely difficult for economists to quantify (Klees 2016, 646–54).

While the Chicago School economists conceived of this investment as private, borne by the individual as costs that would later be recouped through higher earning capacity, the early application of this theory in Australia argued for *public* investment in human capital through federal education funding (Marginson 1993, 40). The influence of this perspective is evident in the Martin Report, commissioned by the conservative Menzies government and released in 1964, which stated:

> Education should be regarded as an investment which yields direct and significant economic benefits through increasing skills of the population and through accelerating technological progress. The Committee believes that economic growth in Australia is dependent on a high and increasing level of education (Martin et al. 1964, 1).[26]

Even more than in the Murray Report (discussed above), the justification for increased federal expenditure on education and the expansion of the tertiary education system in the Martin Report is almost purely economic, framed explicitly as a 'national investment in human capital' (Martin et al. 1964, 4). The report analyses the relationship between enrolment in education and national productivity, the mechanisms through which education fuels economic growth and the particular importance of promulgating 'improved methods of management [of labour]' through higher education (Martin et al. 1964, 6). The most significant recommendation of the report was the creation of a 'binary' higher education system, in which Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) were to carry out the bulk of teaching, and universities left to focus more intensively on research. The motivation for this system, too, was largely economic – it was hoped that 'these colleges would enable higher education to expand while avoiding the high costs of setting up additional universities' (Abbott and Doucouliagos 2003, 8).

However, the HECS scheme differed from previous applications of human capital theory in Australian education policy by embedding the logic of human capital within a free-market philosophy (Marginson 1993, 50). For Dawkins, increases in human capital – and thus increased earnings – justified *individual* investment in education through state-mediated, income-contingent loans. Dawkins framed the provision of free higher education as 'middle-class welfare', with all

[26] For a detailed analysis of the production and implementation of the Martin Report, see Davies 1989.

taxpayers supporting the education of relatively well-off students (Edwards, Howard, and Miller 2001, 111).[27] In this way, HECS was framed as an equity measure which would reduce regressive costs to taxpayers while simultaneously increasing the efficiency of the system (Chapman and Nicholls 2013, 112). This equity framing was key to justifying the scheme in the context of a nominally social democratic party, which had, in its election platform, made vocal commitments to maintaining the provision of free higher education. However, while there was an overall growth in enrolments following the Dawkins reforms, evaluation suggested that HECS had little impact on the demographic composition of university students during this period (Chapman and Nicholls 2013, 10).

It is also not completely accurate to suggest that Dawkins put an end to free tertiary education (Croucher et al. 2013a, 1), as some student fees had already been implemented before his reforms were implemented. The conservative Fraser government (1975–1983) considered introducing fees for students in 1976, but was met with an all-out student strike and eventually dropped the proposal. In 1980, however, they succeeded in introducing fees for international students through the Overseas Student Charge, which amounted to around 40% of course costs (Jackson 2003). Finally, in 1986 (a year before Dawkins put out his discussion paper) the Hawke government allowed universities to introduce full-fee-paying international student places. These policies created 'the thin end of the fees wedge' (Smith et al. 1988, 10; see also Edwards, Howard, and Miller 2001, 98; Meadows 2011, 65–66) that paved the way for the extension of the user-pays model to domestic students by Dawkins.

The effect of these shifts in student fee policies has been to create a hybrid public-private system of higher education in Australia. While the vast majority of Australian universities remain public in name, in reality they function as hybrid institutions, with the proportion of their funding from private sources (such as student fees, industry funding and private research contracts) continually rising, and in many instances outweighing public funding – a phenomenon that could be described as 'privatisation by stealth'. To give one example, in 2019 the University of Melbourne received only 28% of its income from state and federal funding and a further 23% from investment and consultancy, with 49% of its income composed of student fees and HECS-HELP payments (The University of Melbourne 2019, 138). The hybrid public-private nature of Australian universities can be contrasted to the growth of the private university sector in countries like the United States,

[27] Dawkins made frequent reference to a piece of academic research (Anderson and Vervoorn 1983) which found that the diversity of the student population did not directly increase under the Whitlam-era policy of free higher education (Edwards, Howard, and Miller 2001, 113).

where voucher systems have led to the explosion of for-profit higher education institutions – in comparison, attempts at constructing profitable, fully private universities in Australia have tended to fail (Forsyth 2014a, 109–10). The user-pays model introduced by Dawkins, then, was layered onto pre-existing patterns in higher education policy that position universities as a vehicle for producing human capital as well as the earlier introduction of fees for international students. In Chapter 8, I discuss the impact of the privatisation and commodification of higher education on universities' responses to sexual violence, arguing that these shifts have reframed the relationship between students and educational institutions through the imposition of new fee structures and contributed to legalistic, risk-averse responses on the part of universities.

iv. The 'new' managerialism

A final key aspect of the Dawkins reforms was the implementation of specific governance structures within universities. On the grounds of 'quality and productivity', Dawkins advocated for the implementation of performance management practices and other 'effective methods of staff assessment', such as publication metrics and student evaluations of teaching quality, that are now widespread and routine in Australian universities (Dawkins 1987, 58). He also advocated for 'strong managerial modes of operation' and 'streamlined decision-making processes' (Dawkins 1987, 52), essentially consolidating power in the central executive bodies. This managerial or corporate model, characterised by top-down governance structures, is often posited as having displaced 'the time-honoured and proven horizontal university model' in which 'universities are public institutions with public functions, transparently managed by a council accountable to both the university and the broader electorate whose taxes finance the university sector' (Pelizzon, Young, and Joannes-Boyau 2020), with Dawkins reforms often seen as the turning point from the old regime to the new (e.g. Bessant 1992). This raises the question: to what extent were universities prior to the 1980s horizontally structured?

Claims that universities adhered to a 'horizontal model' implicitly suggest the prior presence of structures for democratic and collective participation in decision-making, or at least a university not riven by obvious or severe disparities of power. It is true that universities had, and still have, some mechanisms for democratic representation built into their governance structures, for example dedicated positions for elected students and staff on academic boards and university councils that are written into legislation.[28] Increasingly, though, these positions are being

[28] In their history of the University of Sydney, Julia Horne and Geoffrey Sherrington (2012, 25) recall contestations in the 1930s over the relative number of graduates and academic staff on the university senate. John Anderson, a

outnumbered by external personnel with specialist governance and financial experience. For example, the *University of Wollongong Act* (1989) stipulates that there must be at least one student, one academic staff member and one non-academic staff member on the council, but also that at least two members must have financial expertise ('as demonstrated by relevant qualifications and by experience in financial management at a senior level in the public or private sector') and at least one must have commercial experience. Recent research reveals that across Australia, less than one third of the members of universities' governing bodies have a background in tertiary education (Pelizzon et al. 2021).

However, nostalgia for a previous era in which universities operated 'horizontally' also obscures the disparities of power that have always existed within them. These include, most obviously, the exclusionary dynamics of race and gender, with women not admitted into universities for the first thirty years of their operation (1851–1880) (Booth and Kee 2010, 2). The first Aboriginal matriculant, Bundjalung woman Margaret Williams-Weir, graduated almost eighty years later, in 1959 (Trounson 2015). Universities have also been marked by hierarchical divisions of labour, for example between academic and non-academic staff and tenured and non-tenured staff, as well as a relationship of power between staff and students. These dynamics have continuously shaped not only who is afforded a role in decision-making, but who makes their way into the university in the first place. In this sense, the newer rules of managerialism are layered over pre-existing hierarchies that shape who has access to power within the university. For example, recent research examining the 699 roles on governing councils in Australian universities found that 94% of the incumbents had Caucasian/British backgrounds (Law and Croucher 2020). The patently unrepresentative governing structures of universities also challenge the idea that universities are genuinely accountable to 'the broader electorate' (Pelizzon, Young, and Joannes-Boyau 2020). Despite the rise of mass higher education, universities are still marked by various forms of exclusion and bear the legacy of their history as elite, colonial, patriarchal institutions.

Importantly, democratic structures have been built from below in response to these disparities of power, for example in student unions, staff trade unions and other less institutionalised dissident groups. Student movements, especially in the 1960s and 1970s, posed challenges to anti-democratic structures in universities, including exams (Forsyth 2014a, 73), the policing of protest (Forsyth 2014a, 75; Marks 2018, 143) and the expulsion of gay students from colleges (Burgmann

professor of philosophy, argued in 1935 that a senate with more alumni from non-academic professions and less academic staff participation would lead to a 'business-like university', foreshadowing later concerns about the relationship between university governance and the private sector.

and Burgmann 1998, 141). Staff unions continue to exercise the collective power of university workers to defend working conditions, albeit in increasingly challenging circumstances, as I will discuss in the next section. So while universities are characterised by vertical distributions of power in which managerialism reinforces hierarchies of gender, race and class, these distributions of power are also always contested. The collective organisation of staff and students forms an important counterpoint to managerial power. In the following chapters, I explore the relationship of student movements against sexual violence to managerial power, arguing that these movements have posed challenges to this power, but also that in response to these challenges from below, university managers have moved to consolidate their power with some success.

The layering of rules emerging from the Dawkins reforms has shaped the structure of contemporary universities, producing a system that is i) closely tied to the needs of a casualised labour force, ii) integrated into complex geopolitical processes, iii) primarily funded by private sources but remains publicly subsidised and iv) marked by distinct and intersecting hierarchies of power. I have argued that none of these are radically new phenomena – they have their roots in the foundations of Australian universities, emerging as they did in the context of a patriarchal, colonial, capitalist society. Universities have always had a constitutively economic role in producing a skilled and differentiated labour force; they have also, throughout their history, played a critical role in 'nation-building' (though this concept has been articulated differently over time). Yet these dynamics have also shifted alongside broader changes to the Australian economy, geopolitical relationships, and the social relations of gender and race. The 'neoliberal university', then, can be regarded as the contemporary expression of universities' social and economic function, in which newer rules are layered onto older ones. These layered rules accrete over time to produce the contemporary environment in which student activists find themselves, with both constraints and opportunities for those seeking to contest institutional responses to sexual violence.

2. The political context and impacts of the Dawkins reforms

The theoretical framework I introduced in the previous chapter highlighted two factors that shape how institutional rules are made, enforced and contested: the macro-social structures in which universities are embedded, and political struggles waged by social movements. Having discussed the first of these, I now move on to the second. I explore the political implications of the neoliberalisation of universities for staff and students, arguing that this process has been accompanied by a simultaneous process of depoliticisation. Through the partial participation of staff unions in the Dawkins reforms, as well as attacks on student unions from the 1970s onwards, staff and students now face an environment in which they are increasingly disorganised and

atomised. This context provides the background for my later analysis of student sexual violence movements, contextualising the contemporary political struggles over campus sexual violence that I explore in the remainder of this thesis.

i. University staff and the Dawkins reforms: resistance and complicity

In this section, I examine the role that university staff played in the Dawkins reforms as well as the impact these reforms had on the working conditions and political organisation of staff in the post-Dawkins period. I argue that these measures were not simply imposed on universities unilaterally by the federal government. This is suggested, to give one example, by Raewyn Connell in the idea that the government 'injected neoliberal logic into every sector of the education system' (Connell 2013, 104). However, the internal divisions within universities caution against an understanding of these institutions wholly or simply as victims of neoliberal ideology that was 'injected' from outside. Rather, a number of Vice Chancellors actively participated in the reforms and the campus trade unions were relatively ambivalent, while many university staff actively opposed them.

At the time of the Dawkins reforms, higher education workers were covered by a range of unions, the largest of which were the Federated Australian University Staff Association (FAUSA) and the Union of Australian College Academics (UACA), representing staff in universities and Colleges of Advanced Education (CAEs) respectively. University staff themselves were hostile to the Dawkins reforms, and rightly saw them as undermining their decision-making power, intensifying workloads, eroding the academic norm of collegiality and driving down wages. This hostility was expressed in high levels of industrial action around the restructuring of the higher education awards between 1989 and 1991 (McCulloch 1992, 66). However, the trade unions had somewhat of an ambivalent relationship to the reforms. John Hinkson (2002) suggests that the university and college unions failed to provide any real opposition to the Dawkins project. Analysing *Thinking Ahead*, the 'blueprint for growth' produced jointly by the two unions in 1987, Hinkson argues that the report accepted the basic terms of the Dawkins reforms; that is, the philosophy of economic instrumentalism, and did not engage in any overarching critique of the project. John O'Brien (2015, 31) argues that the ambivalence of the document reflected tensions between the two unions. The university staff union saw the reforms as diluting the traditional standards of universities, whereas the Unified National System would result in greater funding for the CAEs (and likely increased

wages for college union members).[29] This can help us make sense of why union leaders (if not university staff) were not altogether opposed to the Dawkins reforms. Vice Chancellors, too, were generally supportive. A number of Vice Chancellors, sometimes referred to as the 'Purple Circle', had direct input into the Dawkins paper through a series of dinners in Canberra with the Minister (Forsyth 2014a, 114; O'Brien 2015, 27). These Vice Chancellors included Bob Smith (University of Western Australia), Mal Logan (Monash University) and Brian Smith (Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology), as well as Jack Barker, Director of Ballarat CAE. This was, in a sense, a natural alliance, as the Dawkins measures aimed to fuel the continued growth of their institutions and consolidate their managerial power.

The Dawkins reforms took place against a backdrop of major shifts in Australia's industrial relations landscape. As I noted above, a major strategy of the Hawke government to address the economic crisis that struck Australia in the early 1980s was to manufacture an agreement (the Prices and Incomes Accord) with the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) in which unions agreed to limit their wage demands in exchange for an increase in the social wage and dampened inflation. In reality, the Accord did not deliver the benefits that unions had hoped for. Wage indexation failed to keep pace with unrestrained and rising prices and was eventually abandoned, and the moderate gains in the social wage, through the creation of Medicare and the superannuation system, were accompanied by expanded private subsidies which, particularly in the case of superannuation, shifted cost and risk from the state to individuals. The reintroduction of student fees for domestic students, as discussed above, represented an important aspect of the government's retreat from its commitment to increasing the social wage through improved service provision (Humphrys 2019, 146–47). At the same time, formerly militant unions had agreed to give up the tools that had made them powerful enough to become a party to the Accord agreement (i.e. their capacity to take organised industrial action to demand better wages and conditions).

In effect, as political economist Elizabeth Humphrys argues, the Accord drew trade unions into a corporatist social contract that greatly weakened their power and enabled key neoliberal policy measures to be introduced under the guise of a consensus between labour and the state. Greg Albo (2009, 121) argues that 'the "disorganisation" of the working class, particularly through trade unions, was one of the central objectives of neoliberalism', and that this disorganisation created a

[29] O'Brien (2015, 67) also notes that the two unions cooperated with the government to produce a unified salary and classification structure, and that in doing so, 'no concerted attempt was made to oppose the government's agenda, despite profound concern expressed by their members'.

serious impasse for trade union strategy that has not yet been overcome. Statistics of union density in the contemporary Australian workforce reflect this trend: union density in 2016 was 15%, falling to 12% for part-time workers, 7% for people aged 20–24 and 6% for casual employees (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2017; Gilfillan and McGann 2018) compared to 50% of the overall workforce in 1982 (Humphrys 2019, 183). The 'disorganisation of labour' wrought by the Accord contributed to the conditions which the National Tertiary Education Union (now the main union for university workers nationally) would have to navigate when it was created as a national union in 1993.

The neoliberalisation of the university sector has had wide-ranging negative impacts on staff working conditions and the power of academic unions. This is most visible in the casualisation of the university workforce over the past thirty years, which has had an immense impact on staff working conditions as well as union density. The proportion of university teaching delivered by casual employees was around 10 per cent in 1990 (Brown, Goodman, and Yasukawa 2010, 169) and is now a clear majority, with the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) estimating in 2017 that 64.8% of the Australian university workforce was employed on a short-term basis (National Tertiary Education Union 2018). The growth of casualised work at universities has had an immense impact on working conditions across the sector; Tony Brown, James Goodman and Keiko Yasukawa (2010, 170) describe 'a stark divide between a relatively secure manager class and the growing army of casuals'. Workers in the former category have ongoing employment that is relatively well-paid, with high superannuation rates and leave entitlements, and also often control the employment of casual staff, for example in teaching and research assistant roles. Those in the latter category have no promise of ongoing work, little scope for career development, no input into decision-making processes in their workplace and often lack such basic entitlements as a desk or office (Brown, Goodman, and Yasukawa 2010; Ryan et al. 2013; Thomas, Forsyth, and Bonnell 2020). The short-term, sessional nature of university teaching entails serious financial insecurity for many casual teaching staff, especially when compared to salaried academic staff. Importantly, this economic divide is also highly gendered, with women occupying 58.1% of casual positions in Australian universities (National Tertiary Education Union 2019a).

The casualisation of the university workforce creates difficulties for the NTEU and other trade unions in recruitment and retention of members. Casual staff tend to spend little time on campus, are usually not located in physical workplaces, are more likely to move between campuses, and are often employed on-and-off for short periods of time, making long-term union membership less appealing. It has also been suggested that people working in precarious conditions in academia

may be more vulnerable to experiencing sexual harassment and sexual violence than their permanently employed colleagues (Cantrell 2018). A survey of staff conducted by the NTEU found that 18% of respondents who had experienced sexual harassment did not report the incident for fear of losing their job (National Tertiary Education Union 2019b, 20; see also Ellinghaus et al. 2018), a concern which may be heightened for those whose jobs are less secure to begin with. In this sense, the shifting landscape of academic industrial relations in Australia has exacerbated the workplace conditions that enable sexual harassment to occur and at the same time has diminished the organised power of university workers to resist and transform these conditions.

ii. Student unions during and after Dawkins

For student unions, the most significant aspect of the Dawkins reforms was the introduction of the graduate loan tax (HECS). In the mid-1980s, as Tim Briedis (2018, 46) writes, student activism was 'highly fragmented and, despite bases at a few campuses, relatively stagnant' due to the collapse of the Australian Union of Students (AUS) in 1984. However, campaigns against fees re-energised student unions, forming 'the most significant student protest movement since the end of the Vietnam protest movement' (Hastings 2003, 250). Prior to HECS, the Hawke Labor government introduced a Higher Education Administration Charge (HEAC), a $250 fee that was payable by all students upon enrolment. Students organised to boycott the payment of this fee, with six thousand students at the University of Queensland (one in three students) joining the boycott, as well as eight thousand of Curtin University's 15,000 students (Briedis 2018, 51). Student demonstrations had large turnouts, with a 1988 protest in South Australia drawing six thousand students, 20% of the total number of students enrolled in the state (Hastings 2003, 260). When Minister Dawkins visited university campuses, he was frequently chased off campus by students (Briedis 2018, 78). The campaign against fees had significant momentum between 1986 and 1989, mobilising large numbers of students in opposition to the commodification of education. However, the campaign was ultimately unsuccessful and ended in serious divisions amongst students. While 'Labor student activists increasingly saw HECS as a win, the best option available in the circumstances' (Briedis 2018, 67), left-wing groups such as Left Alliance and Resistance saw HECS as a major defeat, and placed the blame with Labor student groups and the National Union of Students due to their attempts to enforce 'respectable' tactics and undermine the more radical elements of the movement.

During this period, just as staff trade unions experienced attacks from federal governments, student unions were also subject to attempts at disorganisation by state and federal governments. In the 1980s, it was legal for student unions to make membership compulsory for all students and

to charge a fee (usually paid each semester) to contribute to student services and amenities. However, in the late 1970s Australian states began to propose legislation to establish Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU), which was widely viewed as a mechanism to repress student unions and the political challenges they had created for successive governments. This purpose was, at times, openly admitted by politicians. The Education Minister for Western Australia, the first state to introduce VSU legislation into parliament in 1994, stated publicly that 'the intention [of the legislation] was to stop guilds [i.e. student unions] contributing to outside causes – specifically the Australian Union of Students which has been associated with left-wing causes' (Hastings 2003, 211). Compulsory student unionism was portrayed in the media as an undemocratic 'closed shop' system, as a partisan ALP training ground, and thus as a '$20 million per annum assault on the Liberal and National parties' (Hastings 2003, 211).

VSU legislation was not passed federally until 2005, but the preceding years saw ongoing attacks on student unions, including a court case by a Monash University student alleging discrimination on the basis that he was forced to pay dues to an organisation that did not share his political beliefs (Hastings 2003, 223–24). Legislation was passed in Victoria and Tasmania that replaced compulsory student unionism with a minimal student services and amenities fee, opening the door to a similar approach federally. These external attacks on student unionism were also accompanied by serious internal tensions in student unions. In 1984, the Australian Union of Students – which had formed a critical site of radical student politics since it was formed in 1970 – collapsed when both ALP and hard-right campus unions voted to secede from the national union, which was seen as 'communist-controlled and too radical' (Briedis 2018, 47). Finally, in 2005, the right-wing Howard government succeeded in enacting federal VSU legislation. The passing of the Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Fees) Bill meant that universities could no longer compel students to pay fees for student organisations, leaving student unions without a guaranteed or reliable source of income (Rochford 2006). In a period where student unions were not particularly militant or powerful, this legislation is perhaps best understood in the context of party-political tensions: Stuart Rosewarne (2005, 187), for example, describes it as a 'Howard-informed ambition to eradicate what is regarded as a critically important training ground for Labor Party cadre'.

The response to this withdrawal of funding from many student unions was to enter into partnerships with private industry in what I have elsewhere called a process of 'neoliberalisation from within' (Hush and Mason 2019, 99). This can be seen in the rapid growth of 'corporate

sponsors' sold advertising space by student unions,[30] the presence of companies marketing to students at orientation weeks, the contracting out of food and beverage services on campus to private companies, and the splitting of student unions into 'political' arms (such as SRCs) and 'services' arms that operate on a for-profit basis. These trends have few tangible benefits to students themselves when compared to the profit potential they offer for private companies. While VSU was somewhat tamed by the Labor government under Prime Minister Julia Gillard (2010–2013), which in 2011 introduced legislation to establish the compulsory Student Services and Amenities Fee, these economic and political threats have had a significant impact on student unions and are still being felt today. The increasing tendency of students to view student organisations as merely service providers, and the self-representation of student organisations in this manner, is one outcome of the Liberal Party's ideological assaults on the value of student unionism and the push for student organisations to be non-partisan and apolitical bodies.

The neoliberalisation of universities has thus taken place in and through processes of depoliticisation, including restrictions on the organising capacity of campus trade unions, the casualisation and disorganisation of the university workforce and the undermining of universal student unionism. These have combined to produce a contemporary campus environment in which student and staff unions have decreased participation, reach and political power. In the coming chapters, I draw on this history to examine the challenging climate that contemporary student feminist activists inhabit. Seeking to transform their universities' responses to sexual violence, these student activists must contend with an environment in which students are largely disorganised and disengaged with student politics and in which managerial power is more centralised and closely protected. The strategies and tactics that students deployed to navigate this context, the efficacy of these strategies and tactics and the shortcomings of student movements are explored in Chapters 6, 7 and 8.

Conclusion

As this chapter has shown, there have been colossal shifts in the size and nature of Australian universities since their emergence over one and a half centuries ago. They began as small, elite institutions with the specific function of producing educated administrators for colonial governance. Having undergone processes of 'massification' (Tight 2019) and globalisation, Australian universities now enrol almost 1.4 million students each year, with international

[30] To give one example, Contiki, a travel tour company, saw a 300% sales increase from an advertising campaign at university campuses delivered through the advertising network 'oOh!' (Baxter 2018). 'oOh! Study' is an advertising initiative targeting students, using 'high-dwell, high reach social hubs' (oOh! Media 2018) through partnerships including the University of Sydney Union, a student-run body.

education comprising the third largest export in the Australian economy (Universities Australia 2019a). There have also been major changes to the structure of the university workforce, which is increasingly casualised and disorganised, as well as to their governance structures. From an institutionalist perspective, how are we best to understand these institutional transformations? As I noted above, the Dawkins reforms are popularly considered a 'revolution' in universities' structure and governance (Croucher et al. 2013b), a concept which might point towards analysis of these reforms as a critical juncture. However, my analysis has sought to show that by and large, universities have changed gradually over time, with new policies and practices layered on top of older ones. Universities have, from their inception, been tethered to the needs of the Australian political economy and seen by governments as vehicles to alter the composition of the workforce through higher education policy. As the needs of the Australian political economy have changed relatively gradually (with the notable exception of the Great War), shifts in higher education policy have also taken place incrementally, facing significant resistance and struggle along the way.

The transformations of Australian higher education that produced the neoliberal university, then, are better understood through the institutionalist concept of layering. Mahoney and Thelen (2009, 16–17) write that:

> Layering occurs when new rules are attached to existing ones, thereby changing the ways in which the original rules structure behaviour […] layering does not introduce wholly new institutions or rules, but rather involves amendments, revisions, or additions to existing ones.

The neoliberal transformations did not displace older power structures in Australian universities, but instead were layered on top of these older rules and in some instances functioned to reinforce them. The traditionally patriarchal character of universities (e.g. the fact that they did not initially accept women students and took almost a century to reach gender parity in enrolments) has not been overturned by the putatively gender-neutral reforms undertaken by Dawkins. Rather, trends in contemporary universities suggest that the latter have served to reinforce the former, as is seen in the enduring concentration of women in precarious and low-wage work and the acceleration of competitive metrics that advantage those without caring responsibilities (Strachan et al. 2013, 2016). Likewise, the colonial legacies of Australian universities persist even in an era where universities position themselves as responsible 'global citizens' with multicultural and diverse constituencies (such proclamations about cultural diversity are showcased on universities' websites; see, e.g., Western Sydney University 2021). These legacies are reflected in the relatively low numbers of Indigenous students and staff at Australian universities and ongoing cuts to Indigenous

education and support programs as part of broader austerity measures (Liddle 2014). From a social justice standpoint, this process of layering – insofar as it reinforces pre-existing inequalities – can represent further constraints on the possibility of progressive and structural transformation.

However, the layering of new rules onto older ones does not always strengthen the force of older rules. These neoliberal reforms have coincided with a period of gender mainstreaming (Walby 2005) in which there is increased public pressure on organisations to advance gender equity through their policies and practices. This is further reinforced by the re-regulation of institutions within neoliberal structures (Cahill and Konings 2017, 3), whereby declining public funding tends to be accompanied by increased state oversight and regulation. In Australia, large workplaces are now required to report on the gender composition of their workforce to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency, a statutory agency under the federal government. Compliance obligations like this one can coexist uneasily with the older patriarchal structures of the university, motivating efforts to improve (at least nominally) the representation of women at different organisational levels. Relics of older rules can also undermine the force of new ones. For example, collegial and democratic structures such as academic boards persist within universities, providing one limit on the consolidation of managerial power. This affirms Waylen's (2017, 14) analysis of how the implementation of newer rules may be more or less successful depending on their interaction with older rules upon which they are layered. It also suggests, as Mackay (2014) has noted, that the contradictions or 'gaps' between rules might provide leverage and opportunities for actors within institutions.

This chapter has explored the political economy of contemporary Australian universities, demarcating particular features that make these universities neoliberal in nature. It also considered the historical, social and economic conditions through which these features emerged, showing that Australian universities are a product of concrete struggles at the level of the campus, the sector and the state. These struggles have shaped the distribution of power in the contemporary university, ultimately drawing power away from students and staff and consolidating it in the hands of the managerial class. It is in this challenging context that contemporary student activism takes place. While this activism is animated by memories of a 'golden age' of student politics in the late 1960s and early 1970s, it operates in a climate with significantly different challenges and barriers to building student power. Just as universities, as I have argued in this chapter, are embedded within the political-economic context of neoliberalism, student movements within universities are similarly embedded in this wider institutional, political and economic setting. This embeddedness

can be both a source of power and opportunity, and of challenges and threats – it is enabling as well as constraining. The following chapter explores campus feminist organising from the 1970s to the present, before turning to my interviews with contemporary student activists.

Chapter 5 | Storming the ivory tower: A contemporary history of campus feminist politics in Australia

> Feminism's own internal ambivalence, its capacity to articulate as easily with meritocratic liberalism as with democratic socialism […] what explains this feminist ambivalence?
>
> — Nancy Fraser, 'Feminism's Two Legacies: A Tale of Ambivalence'

Introduction

In 1978, the body of a young woman, Annette Morgan, was found raped and murdered on the grounds of St Paul's College at the University of Sydney. A short time later, four students from St John's College, also at the University of Sydney, were awarded the 'animal act of the year' award by their peers after allegedly gang-raping a woman (SRC Women's Collective 1978a). In response to this award, the campus Women's Collective argued that the university administration was 'going out of their way to perpetuate a rape mentality within the colleges', that this culture 'blatantly exploits women' and 'reinforces the idea that women are mere sex symbols [and] objects for male pleasure' (SRC Women's Collective 1978a). A short time later, anti-rape slogans were spray-painted across St John's College and a number of cars parked at the college had their tyres slashed. Tony Abbott (1978), an undergraduate economics student who would go on to become the country's 28th Prime Minister,[31] wrote in *Honi Soit* that this 'spectacular transgression' was proof that 'university feminists are violent'. While not explicitly taking ownership of these acts, the Women's Collective asserted in response:

> This is the way we organise to confront the sexism on campus, and in this case the colleges. This is the way that we raise the issue of rape as an assertion of male power, and that as such it is a political device to keep women down. Our struggle against rape is not based on personalised revenge but organised as an important political campaign. (SRC Women's Collective 1978b)

Forty years later, many similar contestations are still playing out. After the *Red Zone Report* – an investigation into sexism and hazing at the USyd colleges, which I co-authored with End Rape on Campus Australia – was released in 2018, the USyd Women's Collective published a response that denounced 'the toxic culture that is rampant in colleges across Australia' and described the colleges as 'a playground for Australia's young elite misogynists' (University of Sydney Women's Collective

[31] Abbott was the leader of the conservative Liberal Party of Australia from 2009 to 2015, and was Prime Minister of Australia from 2013 to 2015.

2018), unfurling banners reading 'dismantle the colleges' and 'red tape won't cover up rape' in the main quadrangle (Thorburn 2018a; see also Figure 4, below). In this chapter, I map out what has happened in the forty-year interim. I argue that despite the apparent continuity of the statements and events described above, organising against sexual violence on university campuses has changed significantly over time in its political focus and strategy, concurrently with wider trends in feminist politics. From initial demands for a revolutionary transformation of society, inflected by the dominance of socialist politics on campus during the late 1960s and early 1970s, over time student feminists shifted to a strategy of working towards more local and modest institutional reforms within their universities. Here, I argue that this shift mirrors the more general institutionalisation of feminism throughout the 1970s and 1980s, as feminists won key victories in legislative reform through engagement with parliamentary politics and began to occupy positions of power within major social institutions. While the institutionalisation of feminism has its benefits, it also comes with significant challenges and contradictions, as I continue to explore throughout this thesis.

Figure 4: Graffiti found at St Andrew's College, University of Sydney, in May 2020, after allegations of hazing, misogyny and white nationalist sentiment at the college emerged. Image: *Honi Soit*.

In the first section of this chapter, I reconstruct a history of feminist activism – with a focus on activism against sexual violence – at universities in Australia between 1970 and 2015. This history is largely drawn from archives of student media, including *Tharunka* (University of New South

Wales), *Woroni* (Australian National University) and *Honi Soit* (University of Sydney). This archival analysis is complemented with written histories of Australian feminist politics, which serve to contextualise historical campus feminisms within broader trends in feminist politics in Australia. In the second section, I examine how feminist activists from 2015 to the present have built on this legacy to successfully make campus sexual violence a public political issue. This contemporary period has been marked by the release of major reports that reveal the extent of sexual violence within university and college communities, as well as heightened backlash from conservative groups inside and outside the university. In the third section, I reflect on historical shifts in mainstream Australian feminism's relationship to institutions – from separatism to infiltration – and begin to consider whether a similar dynamic is identifiable in the relationship between campus feminist movements and the university. Building up to the present, this chapter sets the scene for my later analysis of contemporary campus feminist politics as well as institutional contestations around sexual violence at universities.

1. The rise and decline of feminist politics in late twentieth century Australia

i. 'Liberation on our own terms': revolutionary aspirations

For the purposes of this chapter, my history of campus feminism starts just before 1970, around the time the second wave of feminist politics is considered to have emerged in Australia.[32] In March 1969, a full-page spread in the University of Adelaide student newspaper *On Dit*, titled 'Just About Time for a New Feminism?', reported on the infamous protest that occurred during the 'Miss America 1969' pageant when a group of radical feminists converged to draw attention to the sexist beauty standards embodied by the event (Magarey 2018). The article in *On Dit* argued that 'it is time that *someone* – male or female – began to stick up for women in society, to stick up for genuine sexual freedom' (Osmond 1969, original emphasis). In 1970, inspired by the Miss America protest, students held protests against beauty contests and 'Miss Fresher' events at the University of Adelaide and the University of Sydney, inaugurating a turbulent decade of campus feminist politics. As Anne Curthoys (2000, 19) notes in her history of Women's Studies in Australia:

> When Women's Liberation and then more broadly 'second-wave feminism' emerged in Australia at the end of the 1960s, many of its adherents were undergraduate students, recent graduates, or graduate students.

[32] I use the term 'wave' here cautiously, noting that the history of feminist politics is vast and complex and resists neat division into a handful of discrete 'waves' with distinct political concerns (Fernandes 2010; Laughlin et al. 2010; see also Weeks 2011, 114–18 for an insightful critique of the 'historiographical practices' of mainstream feminism). In the Australian context, for example, Susan Magarey (2008, 186) points out that 'feminists were continuously, if less spectacularly, active throughout the twentieth century' through groups such as the Union of Australian Women (see also Smith 2018, 48), a history that tends to be obscured between the first and second 'waves'.

Campuses formed a critical site of feminist politics, though at the time, campus-based feminist movements were largely focused on issues outside the university. Student feminists formed allegiances with other community activist groups, such as the anti-war collective Women Against Rape (WAR), which staged events to bring attention to the issue of rape in war (Banks 1978; Chapman 1977; O'Sullivan 1979; *Woroni* 1981).[33] Feminist writing in this period is characterised by strident critiques of patriarchal institutions, such as the law (*Tharunka* 1976a), the carceral system (Lawrence 1975), medical institutions (*Woroni* 1974) and indeed universities themselves (Summers 1971). In 1975, which was designated as International Women's Year by the UN, a group of women's liberationists wrote in *Honi Soit* that 'many women already know that their liberation will not come from male dominated committees and organisations' and instead encouraged women 'to act on their own behalf' (*Honi Soit* 1975a). Similarly, an article in a women's liberation newsletter published in 1973 by Sydney postgraduate student Sue Bellamy states:

> This is the beginning of a new school of experience – Liberation On Our Own Terms […] set yourself the goal of liberation, and don't stop – don't stop to play parliamentary games to the point where you lose sight of why you began the fight (Lake 1999, 232).

Reflecting a widespread lack of faith in police and the criminal justice system to respond appropriately to sexual violence, there was an emphasis on self- and community-defence as the central response to sexual violence during this period. As an excerpt from *Our Bodies Ourselves*, reprinted in *Woroni*, puts it: 'it is not the police, the courts or men who will stop rape. Women will stop rape' (*Woroni* 1974). A 1976 article in *Tharunka* advertises a 'demonstration of self defence techniques by women from the Rape Crisis Centre' that took place on the UNSW Library Lawn (*Tharunka* 1976b). The article argues that due to their 'growing independence', women are subjected to more physical violence: 'the stronger we become psychologically and emotionally the more likely it is for men to use physical violence against us'. As this quote shows, the framing of rape, at this time, was a highly gendered one. An article published in *Honi Soit* in 1975 gives the following definition:

> Rape victims are women – any female, including you, is a potential rape victim, anytime, anywhere. Any man – stranger, brother, husband, lover, ex-lover, friend, pack of men, policeman – can rape a woman. (*Honi Soit* 1975b)

This conceptualisation of rape is informed by radical feminist analyses of rape as a tool in the oppression of all women by all men under the totalising structure of patriarchy (Brownmiller 1975; Millett 1970). Such universalistic accounts elided important differences between women, such as

[33] For an illuminating history of the group Women Against Rape, see Elder 2005.

those of race, class and sexuality, that shape their experiences of sexual violence and oppression, as black feminists in particular were already pointing out at the time (see, e.g., Cohambee River Collective 1977; Davis 1983), and was also underpinned by a binary and biologically essentialist understanding of gender.

During the early 1970s, Women's Studies courses were beginning to be established at Australian universities. The first dedicated Women's Studies course was offered at Flinders University in 1973 (Jones 1998, 123). This course was novel (and controversial) in its 'open-door policy' that allowed people who were not enrolled at the university to attend, reflecting a broader trend towards democratic and participatory structures in the university (Hastings 2003, 78). During the same year, students and junior academics established Australia's first feminist philosophy course at the University of Sydney with the support of the Builders Labourers Federation, who threatened a campus-wide strike unless the conservative Philosophy Department approved the course (Burgmann and Burgmann 1998, 101). In 1975, the first Australian Women's Studies conference was held in Adelaide, signifying the establishment of institutionalised feminist scholarship at Australian universities (Jones 1998, 121). Histories of academic feminism are often discussed separately from those of student feminist movements, but the two are arguably connected. Not only were students directly involved in efforts to establish Women's Studies courses and departments, for example by organising petitions in support of feminist philosophy at the University of Sydney (Caine 1998, 100; Hastings 2003, 79), but the success of these campaigns lent strength to student feminist movements and to the broader cultivation of feminist politics on campus. The creation of Women's Studies courses also aligned strongly with the emphasis placed on education and consciousness raising by women's liberation groups at the time. Yet, as Koenpul scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson notes, the establishment of Women's Studies was largely to the benefit of white women, with Indigenous women by and large excluded from academic feminist spaces: 'Indigenous women's subjectivity and experiences are often missing or subsumed within [academic feminist] literature, which tends to speak *for* Indigenous women' (Moreton-Robinson 2000, 109–10).

During this period, feminist politics were also beginning to be institutionalised within student unions. In 1975, the United Nations International Year of Women, the Australian Union of Students (AUS) established its inaugural Women's Department. Yet, as Graham Hastings argues in his political history of Australian student activism, there were political tensions from the start between campus feminists and the AUS:

> Right from the beginning, there were many feminists who rejected any involvement with AUS (and even the Women's Department) both on a national level and in its on-campus activity because they saw student unions as being antithetical to the collective approach of feminist groups, i.e. that the structures of student unions were inherently hierarchical and patriarchal and thus a diversion of feminist time and energy. (Hastings 2003, 149)[34]

This initial hostility to incorporation within the AUS reflects the broader separatist tendencies of the movement at the time. Political organisations like the AUS were largely run by men, and at the time – particularly between 1973 and 1976 – held an explicit commitment to Marxist-Leninist politics (Hastings 2003, 147). While there was certainly a broad affinity with socialist politics amongst many women's liberation groups, these groups also had ongoing conflicts with socialist men who saw feminism as a distraction from the 'real struggle' against capitalism.[35] This tension is expressed forcefully in poet Kate Jennings' (1970) 'Front Lawn Moratorium' poem performed at the University of Sydney, in which she urged the audience: 'Don't start to trust the sympathetic men who want a socialist society. Where will the women be after the revolution?' However, Jennings (1970) at the same time identifies herself and those around her as committed to socialist politics: 'We are all working towards one thing, the liberation of women, and most of us will recognise that this will only happen in a socialist society.' Indeed, such was the perception of the movement's opponents. Tony Abbott (1978), then an economics student at the University of Sydney, wrote in *Honi Soit* in 1978 that 'campus feminism requires the abolition of liberal democracy and its replacement by "socialism"'. Files from the time show that the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) also treated the women's liberation movement, including campus-based groups, as a radical and dangerous force aligned with communist politics, stating that 'from the Women's Liberation social analysis […] it is a short step to the communist analysis of political and social power in capitalist societies' (Smith 2018, 55). ASIO was, at the time, engaged in active surveillance and infiltration of women's liberation movement groups, trade

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[34] A review on the 1979 conference of the AUS reports that the Women's Department had also, by that time, been infiltrated by anti-abortion groups, who called themselves 'moderate feminists', as well as the National Civic Council, a conservative Christian lobby group founded in the 1940s (Brereton and McCormack 1979). However, Hastings (2003, 150) also argues that the political contestations within the AUS Women's Department were productive and influential: 'the culture of vigorous theoretical debate inside the Women's Department played a vital role in the development of Australian feminism in the second half of the seventies and papers produced by the Department were cited at international women's conferences'.

[35] A highly critical review of Susan Brownmiller's *Against Our Will*, published in *Honi Soit* in 1978, encapsulates this perspective. The anonymous author argues that rape 'is *not* the main social mechanism by which women are oppressed. Women are oppressed principally through their isolation from socially productive labour and their relegation to stultifying household drudgery within the confines of the family […] the only solution to sexual and racial oppression is international communist revolution' (*Honi Soit* 1978). The Spartacist League, too, were hostile to the women's liberationists' approach of separatist organising and saw the feminist struggle against rape as a bourgeois distraction from class struggle. Eventually, Sydney and Melbourne Women's Liberation groups voted to expel members of the Spartacist League in 1977 (Meyering 2019, 155; Smith 2018, 56).

unionists and anti-nuclear activists, who were deemed to be 'subversive' and potentially threatening to national security (Smith 2018).

As noted above, there were also major schisms between the largely white women's liberation movement and Aboriginal women. While there is evidence that white women's liberationists in Australia were reading texts from the US Black Power movement that gave complex accounts of racism and anti-racist resistance (Magarey 2008, 190), they failed to develop an adequate analysis of how racism and sexism were related in the colonial and white nationalist context of Australian society. Instead, white women's liberationists tended to deploy racism and slavery as metaphors to describe the oppression that white women experienced. Kate Jennings (1970), in her Front Lawn speech, describes how 'women are conscripted every day into their personalised slave kitchens'. Similarly, feminist philosopher Elizabeth Reid, as the Australian delegate to the 1975 UN International Women's Year conference, would state in her address to the conference that 'women are a colonised sex' (Piccini 2018). Such metaphors conceal the fact that for black women, colonisation and slavery are not merely metaphorical but literal experiences. Liberation in this context, then, cannot simply be achieved by overthrowing male dominance, but must also involve active and interconnected struggles against colonialism and racism. Many Indigenous women distanced themselves from the mainstream women's liberation movement due to its singular focus on sexism or patriarchy as a universal and primary form of domination experienced by all women. As Jackie Huggins (1987) wrote in the Brisbane journal *Hecate*, 'black women seek to raise the life chances of the whole group. They view disadvantages of race and class before disadvantages of sex […] many Black women do not see the women's movement as relevant to their own situation'.[36]

In 1978, the first Australian Reclaim the Night (RTN) marches were held in Sydney and Perth, with Melbourne holding its first rally the following year and over a hundred women marching in Canberra against gendered violence ('Yes means yes, no means no', *Woroni* 1980a). Although RTN marches are now open to people of all genders, the original marches were organised and attended only by women and had strong connections to campus feminist groups. Marina Carman and Jennifer Thompson (1977) argue in their 20-year history of RTN that 'the politics and organisation

[36] These tensions surfaced, to give one example, at the Women and Politics conference in 1975 in debates around reproductive rights. While white women argued for the right to access contraception, Indigenous women pointed out that they had been subjected to forced sterilisation and child removals, and instead demanded 'support for rebuilding family and community life', a more expansive and transformative set of demands than those put forward by white feminists (Lake 1999, 271).

of RTN had their origin in the emerging separatist views, and a division developed with the broader women's liberation movement'. The division referred to here was between reformist, liberal feminists and those advocating for more militant strategies. The authors cite a heated dispute at the 1983 International Women's Day (IWD) march around attempts to place a banner reading 'Dead Men Don't Rape' directly behind the official IWD banner. The RTN marches also brought to the surface conflicts between the largely white, middle-class women who organised the events (through Rape Crisis Centres and university feminist groups) and other groups such as sex workers and black women. Margaret Allan (1999) recalls that 'initially the [Australian RTN] marches had been aimed solely at red light districts, often heckling the sex workers'. Discussing RTN events in Britain, Valerie Amos and Pratibha Parmar (1984, 14) write that

> When women marched through Black inner city areas to 'Reclaim the Night' they played into the hands of the racist media and the fascist organisations, some of whom immediately formed vigilante groups patrolling the streets 'protecting' innocent white women by beating up black men.

While there is no evidence that this happened in Australia, it is nevertheless important to consider how events like RTN can contribute to racialised geographies in which urban areas, largely inhabited by people of colour and the working class, are imagined and produced as dangerous spaces, needing to be 'protected' in order to be reclaimed by and made safe for (white) women (Bumiller 2008, 10). Given that RTN persists as an annual public demonstration against gendered violence with close organisational links to campus feminist politics, this legacy is pertinent to the dominant understanding of how, where and to whom sexual violence happens.

Along with its institutionalisation in academia and in student unions, mainstream feminism during the 1970s turned towards parliamentary politics in search of policy reform. As Marian Sawer and Merrindahl Andrew (2014) note, this marked a turn away from the non-hierarchical approach of women's liberation groups and an acceptance that some representation within traditional political arenas was a justifiable compromise. It also reflects the rising influence of liberal and reformist groups such as the Women's Electoral Lobby, founded in 1972 in Melbourne. The strategy of engagement with electoral politics came to fruition that same year when Labor party social democrat Gough Whitlam was elected as Prime Minister and appointed Elizabeth Reid, a feminist philosopher from Canberra, to be his women's affairs advisor. So-called femocrats in this period oversaw key legislative successes, including sex discrimination legislation and funding for women's health centres, childcare and working women's centres (Lake 1999, 256). During this period, women's liberation groups that had previously been affiliated with the Communist Party of

Australia (CPA) became more closely aligned with the ALP (Allan 1999), and ASIO surveillance of feminist groups decreased in accordance with the decline of explicitly socialist or communist politics amongst these organisations (Smith 2018). Looking back, Moreton-Robinson suggests that because of this turn towards institutions, 'white feminist investment in institutional credibility took precedence over an action agenda' (Moreton-Robinson 2000, 108), especially with regards to any commitments that women's liberation groups had towards anti-colonial politics. This turn towards the state in the early- to mid-1970s, I argue, is an important backdrop that influenced the strategy of campus feminist groups, which similarly demonstrated a decline in militancy and a greater focus on achieving specific institutional reforms rather than wide-ranging social transformation (Chappell 2002).

Figure 5: Photograph of a Sydney women's liberation protest, 1975. Image: *Honi Soit*.

ii. Backlash and institutionalisation

At the very beginning of the 1980s, a men's group called 'Blokes on Campus' emerged at the ANU, claiming that 'sexism is rampant on this campus – not male sexism, but female sexism' (*Woroni* 1980c). Writing in *Woroni* about the group, an anonymous author suggested that:

> These men have felt very threatened by the graffitti [sic] on Rape around Uni; the recent Reclaim the Night march against Rape, and wimmin who refuse to comply with their sexist values and desires […] in real terms, 'Blokes on Campus', should be called Misogynists on Campus; a place where men can come together and share their rape and battery fantasies! (Black Rose 1980)

The emergence of 'Blokes on Campus' could be read as a marker of the rising backlash against feminist politics, which is often taken to characterise the 1980s (Faludi 1991). However, the archive reveals significant backlash to campus feminism throughout the 1970s and earlier, with letters to student newspapers in the 1970s frequently describing feminists as 'the epitome of physical ugliness and sexual frustration' (Kennedy 1978) who 'disport with each other in slovenly embrace'

(Abbott 1978). What did change in the 1980s was the status of student unions, with attacks on their autonomy, funding and political radicalism, as well as the momentous shift from free education under Whitlam to the Higher Education Contribution Scheme (HECS) introduced under the Hawke Labor government in 1989, as I discussed in the previous chapter. The history of Australian campus-based feminist movements in this decade, then, highlights the contradictions of institutionalising what had been a grassroots, non-hierarchical movement within the more centralised bureaucracies of student unions, as well as the broader challenges posed to student and feminist movements throughout a period in which neoliberal ideology was in ascension in Australian politics, leading to sustained attacks on unionism and the New Left.

From the late 1970s to the early 2000s, student unions were the subject of heated political controversy, with repeated proposals at the state and federal levels to abolish compulsory student unionism and introduce Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU; discussed further in the next section). During the 1980s, the Australian Union of Students (AUS) was dissolved by the Council of Australian Labor Party Students, who saw the AUS as too radical (Briedis 2018, 47). In 1987, the successor of the AUS, the National Union of Students (NUS), was founded. The NUS held its first annual conference at Melbourne University in December 1987, with the Women's Department as one of its three founding departments. The same year, at a 'Women on Campus' conference held at the ANU, students established the National Organisation of Women Students Australia (NOWSA). The separate organisations reflected factional tensions within the campus feminist movement, with ALP-aligned students participating in the NUS Women's Department and independent feminists at the ANU conference seeking to distance themselves from ALP groups, which they saw as reformist and bureaucratic (Luvera 1999).

Through the 1980s, attention turned specifically to the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence on campus. Compared to the 1970s, in which campus feminists had largely organised around issues outside the university such as rape in war, the 1980s marked a shift in focus towards on-campus issues, especially that of students being sexually harassed, propositioned or coerced by academic staff. A 1980 article in *Woroni* offers the following definition of 'academic rape':

> Academic rape is a type of severe sexual harassment which is specific to us as students. It is called academic rape because it occurs when a lecturer, tutor, or other academic offers to exchange a 'pass' or higher grading for sexual favours. It's called rape because it involves a demand made by someone in a powerful position of someone in a powerless position. (*Woroni* 1980b)

An article published the next year notes that several women students at UNSW had dropped out of their studies due to sexual harassment, with one particular lecturer responsible for a number of incidents (Williams 1981). In October 1980, the Sydney Rape Crisis Centre held a 'Sexual Harassment on Campus' month at UNSW, under the auspices of the student union's Women's Research Project. Louise Goodchild (1985) reported in *Tharunka* that 'two-thirds of the incidents reported [during this campaign] occurred on campus grounds, and well over half of the people named as harassers were academics – tutors, lecturers, thesis supervisors, and heads of departments'. This article also mentions 'consistent reports of sexual harassment on a college level', as well as 'violent racial harassment' of Asian students; the author concludes that 'little has been done to convincingly combat sexual harassment on this campus' (Goodchild 1985). The demands of students in this campaign were primarily focused around developing clear pathways for reporting sexual violence. In the absence of such channels, Goodchild (1985) advocates for people who have experienced harassment to 'publicly humiliate the sexual harasser; learn self defence and knock them flat'.

Articles throughout the 1980s continue to offer personal solutions for women to prevent sexual violence – for example, self-defence techniques and advice about not walking alone, travelling in well-lit areas and calling the police for assistance (see, e.g., *Tharunka* 1988). However, in contrast to earlier writing which strongly criticised the response of police and the criminal justice system to sexual violence (see, e.g., Lawrence 1975; *Woroni* 1974), by the 1980s the police were more frequently positioned as a potential source of help and support for people who had experienced sexual violence. It is reflective of the movement's racial politics that the police were positioned as allies that would safely assist women, while at the same time the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1998) was putting the spotlight on the systematic racism and sometimes lethal violence of the police towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In the 1990s, new tensions and challenges emerged as a result of feminist groups beginning to engage directly with university administrators about the issue of sexual violence. In 1992, the ANU student union president, Amanda Chadwick, wrote in *Woroni* raising the issue of safety on campus, with a particular focus on poorly lit areas. Two university administrators (the Pro-Vice Chancellor, Planning and Administration, and the Head of Buildings and Grounds) submitted a letter in response, taking issue with what they describe as 'vague rumour' about sexual assaults occurring on campus. This article is notable as one of the earliest direct statements from university administrators on the issue of sexual violence. The authors write,

> We know of only *one* possible attempted sexual assault having occurred this year, [and] a suggestion that there may have been another […] Statements about particular incidents of rape and the number of rapes that have occurred which, when challenged, become vague rumour do little to advance the constructive debate that is necessary if we are to increase safety on campus. (Selth and Hardman 1992, original emphasis)

They argue that they had only just become aware of specific problems relating to safety on campus, as '*no-one* had spoken to either one of us about this issue' (their emphasis), and they adopt a markedly defensive response to students' 'unhelpful' complaints. Though these members of the university administration frame the problem as being one or two instances of 'attempted' sexual assault, and portray it as a new issue not brought to their attention, it is clear that students throughout the 1980s had been raising awareness of sexual violence on campus as a prevalent issue.

Institutional responses to sexual violence at universities and colleges attracted further attention with the publication of Australian author Helen Garner's book *The First Stone* in 1995.[37] *The First Stone* explores allegations that the Master of Ormond College at the University of Melbourne, Alan Gregory, had groped two students at an end-of-year college party. The two students filed a police complaint; at trial, Gregory was found guilty of harassing one of the women, but this decision was later overturned in the Victorian County Court. In *The First Stone*, Garner (1995, 16) criticises what she sees as the 'appallingly destructive, priggish and pitiless' actions of the two students. She is frustrated with their decision to report what she views as a relatively minor incident to police, and wonders why the students didn't just 'deal with it' themselves:

> I was cranky that my friends and sisters and I had got ourselves through decades of being wolf-whistled, propositioned, pestered, insulted, touched, attacked, and worse, without the big guns of sexual harassment legislation to back us up. (Garner 1995, 40)

The debate surrounding the book is most commonly parsed solely in terms of age, with *The First Stone* taken to be emblematic of an 'intergenerational feminist war' in Australia during this period (Shahinyan 2018, 190). These intergenerational conflicts are certainly an important aspect of the narrative that Garner constructs. In the book, Garner interviews the Women's Officer from the Melbourne University Student Union, pseudonymised as 'Christine G'. Garner (1995, 97) portrays

[37] *The First Stone* mirrors the themes of US journalist Katie Roiphe's book *The Morning After* (1994), which '[lamented] college women's demands for the very forms of patriarchal protection that second-wave feminists fought to overturn' (Haaken 2017, 17) and like *The First Stone* sparked debate about the responsibility of universities to address sexual violence.

Christine as severe and impatient, describes feeling 'out of date, irrelevant' and 'afraid' during their conversation, and wonders how feminism has 'mutated into […] these cold-hearted, punitive girls'. However, the issue is not simply one of age; rather, age acts as a cipher for significant political differences between Garner and the young women. Garner's resentment is reflective of a turning point at which feminist politics had begun to demand specific reforms within institutions to address gender inequality, to place this responsibility primarily on powerful social institutions (rather than women as individuals or communities) and to gain some power within these institutions. This stands in contrast to the political philosophy of the campus feminists of Garner's generation, which took a separatist approach to building women's collective power and 'creating revolution' (e.g. *Woroni* 1980b) rather than reforming existing institutions to make them more inclusive or friendly to women.

iii. Neoliberalisation from within and without

By the 1990s, many of the radical campus activists of the 1970s had moved into positions of power in policy, government or feminist NGOs (Lake 1999, 256), using these positions to advance feminist aims from within the structures that had previously been decried as patriarchal and oppressive. Marilyn Lake (1999, 253) describes this as 'state feminism', in which:

> The institutionalisation of feminism reached its apotheosis, with whole programs and complex administrative machinery established by governments – federal and State – to promote the status of women, equal opportunity, non-discrimination and finally, affirmative action.

At the same time, there was a general loss of momentum in Australian feminist movements. Examining the movement in the period from 1996 to 2007, Merrindahl Andrew and Sarah Maddison (2010, 172) argue that 'the ideological dominance of neoliberalism, and related factors, altered the fundamental material and discursive conditions for women's movement activity'. The hostile political conditions during this decade – in particular, the Howard[38] government's aggressive cuts to social services and neoconservative, anti-feminist ideology – saw the movement go into abeyance, with significantly lower visibility and levels of mobilisation. Andrew and Maddison also note that during this time, some aspects of neoliberal political discourses were incorporated into feminist repertoires – for example, framing the provision of childcare as a means for women to participate in the workforce, rather than as a fundamental right or a social good. This was, in part, a deliberate strategy; as Sydney feminist Eva Cox put the point, 'if we didn't use

[38] John Howard was Prime Minister of Australia from 1996 to 2007, the longest consecutive term in the country's history, leading a coalition of the conservative Liberal and National parties.

the language nobody would listen to us' (Andrew and Maddison 2010, 181; see also Burgmann 2020, 130).

The Howard government's policy agenda also included substantial funding cuts to the higher education system, catalysing outrage and mobilisation amongst students. Between 1996 and 2004, the Howard government reduced the total public spending on universities, increased student fee contributions twice and introduced full-fee-paying domestic student places (Ireland 2004). Students actively resisted these changes at both the campus and federal levels. When the ANU introduced fees for postgraduate legal courses in 1994, ANU law students initiated a strike and effectively shut down the faculty in an action that Hastings (2003, 280) describes as 'the spark that galvanized the mid-nineties wave of student activism'. Numbers at higher education demonstrations swelled after 1996, when the Liberal party entered government and made further cuts to higher education funding. Student feminists at the time put forward a gendered analysis of the 'fight against fees', noting that 'women's access to education is still limited […] rape and sexual harassment on campus are occurrences which don't exactly encourage women's participation' (Carman 2005). Feminist groups also mobilised in demonstrations against fee hikes, with 600 women from NOWSA taking to the streets in 1995 (Briedis 2018, 148). However, the momentum of campaigns against fees during this period was not reflected in other feminist campaigns. Andrew and Maddison (2010, 178) report that 'International Women's Day and Reclaim the Night marches shrank dramatically in size in the late 1990s and into the 2000s'.

The political and economic challenges faced by student unions also intensified when federal legislation to introduce Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) was finally passed by the Howard government in 2005, as I outlined in the previous chapter. The Higher Education Support Amendment (Abolition of Compulsory Up-front Student Fees) Bill meant that universities could no longer compel students to pay fees for student organisations, leaving student unions without a guaranteed or reliable source of income (Rochford 2006). The response adopted by many student unions was to enter into partnerships with corporations and private companies, in what I have elsewhere called a process of 'neoliberalisation from within' (Hush and Mason 2019). In 2011, the Gillard government introduced legislation to create the compulsory Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF), which is now used to fund student organisations. Yet even after the introduction of SSAF, the 'depoliticising project' of VSU continues to haunt student unions, motivating the prioritisation of student services and assets over representation and activism (Briedis 2018, 264).

Articles published in student newspapers in the 2000s continue to explore the issue of sexual assault at universities, and particularly in colleges, with an increasing emphasis on the unmet ethical responsibilities of university administrations. In March 2002, *The Canberra Times* reported that a rape had taken place outside Burgmann College. An article in *Woroni* lamented the fact that the university had made 'no official statements […] to either aid ANU students in protecting themselves better around campus, or to absolve students living on campus of any blame' (Jenkins 2002). A letter in response to the article agrees that 'Burgmann College, and the University at large, should be formally made aware' of the incident, and that 'those in the bureaucracy should act now' (Michelson 2002). There is a stark contrast between these appeals to the university bureaucracy for information, protection and absolution, and the strident 'do-it-ourselves' attitude of earlier campus feminists. These later statements position the institution as the problem, but also the solution – feminist movements, then, are relegated to the role of petitioning the university to 'protect students'. Articles from this period also frequently appeal to the role of trained professionals in responding to sexual violence. Writing in *Tharunka*, Shakira Nalder (2006) lists numbers for the police and counselling services: 'all of these people are trained to help you and it's their job to do so'. A large pull-out quote in this article reads: 'If you are sexually assaulted, there are many institutions that can help you.' Similarly, a 2002 article in *Woroni* urges readers to 'use the security guards. They are being paid to protect you from being assaulted on campus […] You pay GSF! [General Services Fee]' (Nicholls 2002). This framing displaces the ethos of community-led support for survivors of sexual violence, and instead appeals to a professionalised workforce to whom it is most appropriate to ask for help because 'it's their job to do so'.

Feminist politics in the 2000s also saw an increasing emphasis on individual narratives. This trend is reflected in student newspapers, which published a number of personal narrative accounts of sexual violence during this decade (see, e.g., *Woroni* 2006). This was by no means a novel development – in her book *Speaking Out: Feminism, Rape and Narrative Politics*, Tanya Serisier (2018) notes that 'experiential storytelling' has a long history in feminist politics. However, she also argues that the emphasis placed on survivor narratives as a means for challenging sexual violence has increased since the 1980s, reaching its zenith in recent hashtag campaigns such as #MeToo. This evokes ongoing contestations within feminist anti-rape politics over the function of individual voices and narratives within collective movements, as well as the relationship of cultural change to structural change. While, as Serisier notes, there have been significant positive shifts in the public reception of stories of sexual violence, this reliance on narrative (in other words, the assumption

that 'breaking the silence' will necessarily 'end the violence') can detract attention from the structural and institutional changes necessary to reduce the prevalence of sexual violence, a tension that came to the surface in later discussions of the #MeToo hashtag (Cox 2018; Hush 2020; Rottenberg 2019).

In 2011, the National Union of Students published the results of the first national survey of university students' experiences of sexual harassment and assault. Their report, *Talk About It*, notes that 'reports of violence against women had been received by the National Union of Students for a series of years in a way that was not easily measured' (National Union of Students 2011). The methodology of this research project was modelled on an earlier project conducted by the UK NUS (Smith 2010). The figures published in the *Talk About It* report were stark, with 67% of respondents stating that they had an unwanted sexual experience while studying (National Union of Students 2011, 5), though the sample size of the NUS survey was relatively small (n=1549) and not necessarily representative of the national student population. The report's recommendations, presented as a 'Safe Universities Blueprint', were endorsed in full by the peak body Universities Australia, although the substantive recommendations of the report were not fully implemented.

2. The contemporary context: 2015–2020

i. The age of reports

The year 2015 marked somewhat of a turning point in this history, one at which Australian universities were forced to publicly reckon with the issue of sexual violence. The period between 2015 and 2018 saw the production of a number of significant reports about sexual violence at Australian universities (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a; Durbach and Keith 2017; Elizabeth Broderick & Co 2017). These were seen as major achievements for feminist groups which, as I have described above, had been pushing to put this issue on the public agenda for many years. However, the production of these reports involved heated controversies between students, universities, regulatory bodies and NGOs over the reports' methodologies, ownership, funding and framing, as I will discuss further in Chapter 7. They also resulted in the creation of new administrative and bureaucratic apparatuses within universities which constrain the opportunities for political contestation, a phenomenon that has created new challenges for student feminist activists in the wake of these reports. This period also saw the rise of a more concerted backlash to campus feminism from conservatives and the far right, with student feminists frequently denounced in the media as 'ideologues and identity warriors' (Bolt 2017). As I argue in this section, the take-up of the issue of campus sexual violence by mainstream political institutions

such as the Australian Human Rights Commission drew student feminists into the maelstrom of the so-called 'culture wars' about gender politics and the status of universities, exposing these feminists to backlash and political attacks that undermined some of the important gains made during this time.

This 'age of reports' emerged in a context where heightened public attention was being afforded to family violence, sexual violence and child abuse, and to the systemic failure of institutions to respond to these issues. In 2009, then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced the creation of a bipartisan *National Plan to Reduce Violence Against Women and Their Children*, a twelve-year framework for government action aimed at a 'significant and sustained reduction in violence against women and their children' by the year 2022 (Council of Australian Governments 2010, 10). Three years later, the Australian government established a Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, which foregrounded how allegations of child sexual abuse – particularly within religious institutions – had been suppressed, and those who had abused children treated with impunity. It was critical that in investigating child sexual abuse, the Royal Commission was impartial and independent and engaged directly with survivors, drawing not only on the opinions of experts but on the testimony of more than 8,000 survivors of child sexual abuse (Wright and Swain 2018, 141). This provided what Michael Salter (2020, 214) terms a 'transitional space […] to bridge the gap between private suffering and public understanding'. Salter also notes, however, that the achievements of the Royal Commission are rare within the structures of the contemporary bureaucratic state, in which legal frameworks can create hierarchical structures that disempower survivors. Salter's analysis foregrounds how feminist demands for the acknowledgement and redress of trauma tend to coexist uneasily with the impersonal structures of bureaucratic institutions, a tension that, I will argue, is also visible in contemporary universities' responses to sexual violence.

ii. The Australian Human Rights Commission investigation

In 2015, a program was launched to screen the US documentary *The Hunting Ground* at Australian campuses. *The Hunting Ground* explores the phenomenon of sexual violence at US colleges through the narratives of student-survivors, and focuses on two women who launched a Title IX complaint against the University of North Carolina and encouraged other students to follow suit at their universities (Dick 2015). The film was released in January 2015 in the US to both acclaim and

controversy (Kennedy and McCann 2020; Taylor 2015; Yoffe 2015).[39] A campus screening program in Australia was coordinated by advocacy organisation The Hunting Ground Australia Project (THGAP) and funded by the philanthropic documentary foundation Good Pitch Australia, with the primary objective of involving 'the whole sector – both staff and students – in a collaborative, comprehensive and unified campaign, around the prevalence of, and responses to, sexual violence on Australian universities' (The Hunting Ground Australia Project 2016, 2). In coordination with Universities Australia,[40] more than 70 campus screenings were held around Australia (The Hunting Ground Australia Project 2017, 6). The issue of campus sexual violence was by that time firmly in the political spotlight in the US, with a wave of Title IX and *Jeanne Clery Act* complaints made against universities after the release of new guidelines by the Obama administration.[41] Screenings of *The Hunting Ground* in Australia leveraged this political momentum to generate debate and publicity about campus sexual violence in Australia. The screenings 'triggered a national conversation about the issue and reframed its focus from individual student misconduct to institutional failure' (Durbach and Grey 2018, 84). Meanwhile the film was also, predictably, lambasted in the Australian conservative media as 'slickly shot propaganda', 'packed with more fiction than Days Of Our Lives' (Roberts 2017). Its relevance to the Australian university context was also the subject of debate, with critics highlighting the distinctness of college sport and fraternities in US colleges (Bingemann 2017; see also Funnell and Hush 2017).

In September 2015, the Australian Human Rights Centre (AHRCentre; now known as the Australian Human Rights Institute) initiated a project titled *Strengthening Australian University Responses to Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment* (Durbach and Keith 2017, 13). As part of this project, AHRCentre and THGAP proposed a national survey of students to obtain data about their experiences of sexual violence and institutional responses to sexual violence, and partnered with the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC or 'the Commission') to develop the survey instrument. This was not the first time such a survey had been proposed. In 2014, the

[39] When the film was released in the US, a group of nineteen Harvard law professors released an open letter stating that the film 'provides a seriously false picture […] of the general sexual assault phenomenon at universities' (New 2015). Others questioned the accuracy of the statistics in the film including the claim that 'less than 8% of college men commit more than 90% of sexual assaults', which was drawn from a 2002 study with dubious inclusion criteria (Singal 2015).

[40] Universities Australia describes itself as the 'peak body for the university sector', with its board comprised of Vice Chancellors from around the country. It was previously known as the Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee until 2007 (Universities Australia n.d.).

[41] The Chronicle of Higher Education has a tracker of Title IX complaints related to sexual violence which shows the number of complaints rising steadily after April 2011, when the Office for Civil Rights published its 'Dear Colleague' letter reminding colleges of their obligations to 'to take immediate and effective steps to end sexual harassment and sexual violence' (The Chronicle of Higher Education 2016).

Commission approached representatives from the Group of Eight universities and their residential colleges about the possibility of undertaking research on sexual violence on campus, following a recommendation of the Commission's 2011 investigation into gendered violence in the Australian Defence Force Academy (Australian Human Rights Commission 2011, xxx; Stanton 2014). However, after only one university (ANU) agreed to participate, the project was deferred. Reflecting on this process, Alex Shehadie, director of the Commission's 2011 project, described the proposal as being 'met with quite a lot of resistance', while Dr Damien Powell from the University of Melbourne stated at the time that the objections of university leaders 'were based on perception of reputational risk' (Stanton 2014). However, by 2015, the climate had changed. After THGAP had secured $150,000 in seed funding for the survey, Universities Australia eventually joined the project, providing $950,000 of primary funding (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 2). Some students and staff saw this as an attempt to overtake and control the process, with advocate Nina Funnell (2016b) reporting that 'the survey's independence and integrity was now in question' after Universities Australia became involved and it emerged that a Vice Chancellor had been granted direct input on the survey's design.

In reaction to the launch of *The Hunting Ground* screening program, the work of the AHRCentre and the heightened public visibility of university sexual violence, in February 2016 Universities Australia launched a campaign called *Respect. Now. Always.* against sexual violence in university communities. While the campaign was touted by Universities Australia (2016a) as a 'major initiative' when it launched, there was little information available as to its substance beyond its stated aims to 'raise awareness' and 'signal a zero tolerance stance'. The Vice Chancellor of University of New South Wales, Ian Jacobs, declared that 'this groundbreaking work appears to be the first in the world where a national university sector has decided to work together on these issues on such a scale' (Universities Australia 2016a).[42] Universities Australia (2016b) also began to claim publicly that they had initiated the national survey, which was commonly referred to by universities as the *Respect. Now. Always.* survey, despite the fact that it was initiated by the AHRCentre, the Commission and THGAP, with support from the National Union of Students, before Universities Australia agreed to participate and indeed before the *Respect. Now. Always.* campaign was launched. Students were immediately critical of the *Respect. Now. Always.* project, with Imogen Grant, 2017 Women's Officer at the University of Sydney, commenting that 'in no

[42] In fact, this was not an accurate statement; for example, Universities UK (2016, 4) had already formed a 'taskforce' the previous year 'to examine violence against women, harassment and hate crime and [make] recommendations in response to that evidence', noting the groundwork that the National Union of Students had done in raising these issues.

simple terms, [Universities Australia] have claimed ownership of the survey' (Truu 2017). At that time, the only substantive output of the *Respect. Now. Always.* campaign was a series of posters featuring slogans such as 'A group of guys took it too far. So here's what I did'. In a submission to the Commission's project, EROC Australia called these posters 'at best, vague and unhelpful', and argued that the *Respect. Now. Always.* campaign 'has failed to move beyond the "awareness raising" and "rape-avoidance" messaging that have plagued the university sector's response to sexual violence for the past four decades' (End Rape on Campus Australia 2017, 26, 29).

While the Commission's report was being developed, the University of Sydney (2016) conducted and released its own brief pilot report titled *Creating a Safer Community for All: Sexual Harassment and Assault on Campus*. This report was notable in that it was the first internal investigation regarding sexual violence to be conducted and published by an Australian university. However, its release was somewhat overshadowed by simultaneous controversy surrounding the University of Sydney colleges. In May 2016, the University of Sydney Vice Chancellor, Michael Spence, announced that former Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick would conduct an investigation into 'college culture' at the university's residential colleges. This announcement came shortly after a number of prominent media stories about hazing and sexual violence at the colleges (Bagshaw 2016a; Balakumar 2016; Whyte 2016), as well as a protest held by the Women's Collective outside Wesley College (Dillon Britton 2016). The review was fraught with conflict over which colleges would participate and whether the findings would be made public. While St Paul's College initially refused to participate (Munro 2016) and the colleges would not agree to publicly release the findings of the investigation (Ryan 2017), these decisions were reversed following outcry by students and in the media.

Around the same time, the National Union of Students Women's Department launched a national campaign called 'Support student safety, stop the war on women'. Its aims were threefold:

1. Raise awareness of the high prevalence of sexual harassment, assault and violence at universities
2. Empower students (particularly those who are survivors) to have their voices heard, and
3. Encourage universities to roll out the national sexual assault survey without delay, and to implement the following:
    - Adequate lighting, 24/7 security, and safe spaces for women
    - Stand alone zero tolerance policies on sexual harassment, assault and violence, with clear repercussions for perpetrators

- Accessible and clear reporting procedures, with effective remedies for survivors
- Sexual assault counsellors on every campus
- Mandatory consent training for all staff and students. (La Paglia 2016)

As part of this campaign, large demonstrations were held around the country, with the support of the National Tertiary Education Union (2016). This campaign's framing of sexual violence as a 'war on women' or as a 'gender war' is a common trope in mainstream feminist discourse. However, as Kristin Bumiller (2008, 19) notes, this rhetoric has the potential to play into 'larger cultural anxieties about security and crime as well as race and class', and to generate securitised and militarised responses to the threat of 'sexual terror'. It is notable that one of the demands of the NUS campaign to 'stop the war on women' is '24/7 security' on campuses; I will return to discussions of securitisation in Chapter 9.

The report resulting from the Commission's survey, *Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities*, was released on 1 August 2017. On the same day, AHRCentre released its accompanying report, *On Safe Ground: Strengthening Australian University Responses to Sexual Assault and Harassment* (Durbach and Keith 2017), as well as a case study titled *Local Perspectives: A Case Study on Responses to Sexual Violence in a University Setting* (Cama and Durbach 2017). Where the Commission's report focused predominantly on the incidence and prevalence of sexual harassment and sexual assault and students' experiences of reporting such incidents to their universities, *On Safe Ground* used this data along with comparative international research to produce a comprehensive framework 'to identify and propose adjustments to some of the institutional responses to the issue that may unintentionally risk entrenching a culture where sexual violence is normalised, silenced or excused' (Durbach and Keith 2017, 14). The *Local Perspectives* case study, in contrast, was carried out:

> […] to allow for an internally directed review of the limitations or barriers that frame or influence a university's response to sexual violence, particularly against the backdrop of the public commitment from UNSW leadership to address and prevent sexual assault and harassment at UNSW. (Cama and Durbach 2017, 6)

The *Local Perspectives* report identified significant deficiencies in the university's policy framework, reporting mechanisms and availability of support services, and made ten recommendations for addressing these issues.

The AHRC report sparked ire from right-wing media, including conservative commentators Andrew Bolt (2017), Janet Albrechtson (2017), Mark Latham (2017) and Bettina Arndt (2017). The

day after the report was released, Arndt (2017) called the results a 'rare good news story', suggesting that the women sharing their stories in the report and in the media 'are accusers whose stories have never been tested in court – mainly date-rape cases, he-said, she-said stories revolving around sexual consent'. Such claims would later form the basis of her 'fake rape crisis' tour of university campuses around the country, which I will discuss further in Chapter 6. These denunciations of the report also followed a wave of conservative criticisms of the Commission, with then President Gillian Triggs coming under fire from Liberal Party ministers for her critical stance on the Liberal Party's refugee policy until the end of her term in July 2017. In a context where the Commission was already being accused of left-wing bias and partisanship (Gordon 2017), the *Change the Course* report was perceived as further evidence of the pernicious influence of identity politics and 'grievance culture' on the Commission. The Commission's report was characterised as an attack on academic freedom, linked to the 'policing' of campuses 'by "no-platforming" of allegedly unacceptably offensive speakers, trigger warnings on contentious material, and challenges to course content held to be sexist, racist and other forms of speech held to be offensive' (Rundle 2017). The report's methodology also received significant criticism from feminist academics and advocates, who argued that the wording of the survey's questions about sexual assault were likely to lead to under-reporting and thus underestimate the actual incidence of sexual violence (Langford 2017a) – this is discussed in greater depth in Chapter 7.

On the one hand, these reports achieved, in part, what feminists had long been calling for – a clear acknowledgement, from universities, that sexual violence was a prevalent and entrenched problem. The data presented in *Change the Course* was politically useful in establishing the scope and scale of the issue and forcing an acknowledgement from universities of the reality of campus sexual violence, with the recommendations contained in the report providing a tangible yardstick by which to judge universities' actions. On the other hand, this acknowledgement inaugurated new problems for feminist activists – in particular, the efforts of universities to contain the problem of sexual violence through practices of risk management and the refinement of institutional narratives that positioned universities as progressive and proactive. In Chapter 7, I will consider the impacts of the *Change the Course* report in greater detail, drawing on my interview data to explore the challenges and constraints that feminist organisers experienced in the wake of the report.

3. Discussion: institutionalisation and neutralisation

The history presented in this chapter demonstrates that campus feminist politics in Australia since the 1970s have not unfolded in a linear manner. The level of mobilisation around feminist issues,

the tactics used and the issues at play – from rape in war, to abortion access, childcare, the criminal justice system and rape on campus – have changed dynamically over time. So far in this chapter, I have related these shifts to broader trajectories in mainstream Australian feminism, particularly in regard to feminist engagement with the state. In this section, I draw out some reflections from this analysis about the relationship of feminist movements to institutions. I argue that the shifting orientation of mainstream feminism in Australia towards the state and other institutions has reshaped feminists' political priorities and strategies, leading to the marginalisation of revolutionary elements of the feminist movement. This is, I suggest, reflective of an ambivalent and paradoxical relationship between feminists and the state in which the various institutions of the state are, on the one hand, central to achieving feminist political demands, but also, on the other, sites at which feminist politics is at risk of being neutralised through compromises made with the countervailing political forces that control these institutions. This raises the question of whether a parallel dynamic is at play in student feminists' engagement with the neoliberal university, a question I continue to pursue throughout this thesis.

Feminist scholars, examining the relationship between feminist movements and institutions, have argued that movement strategy is partially constituted by the institutional and political landscape in which movements are situated. For example, Sophie Watson (1990, 8), in *Playing the State*, writes that feminists' 'interests are actively constructed in the process of the demands being made and the state's response'. The 'femocrat experiment' (Eisenstein 1991) in Australia demonstrates the mixed blessings of engagement with the state for the mainstream feminist movement. While state feminists certainly secured gains in terms of equal opportunity employment, anti-discrimination legislation, no-fault divorce and funding for community services, analysis of the femocrat strategy has also highlighted the demobilising impacts of this strategy on grassroots feminist movements. The constrained position of femocrats within hostile bureaucratic spaces creates professional and political pressures to conform to the norms of these spaces in order to secure their ongoing inclusion. As Anna Yeatman (1990, 65) describes in her book *Bureaucrats, Technocrats, Femocrats*, 'femocrats are viewed as owing their positions to movement pressure but as giving their ultimate loyalties to the employing governing body'. In this vein, as Janet Halley (2018b, 6) argues, 'many legal orders demand a neutrality in exchange for legitimacy', causing feminist analyses and proposals to become degendered and defanged when taken up within the legislative arena. The creation of designated positions and structures within state institutions can also draw feminists away from movement groups and weaken the power and size of these groups. Marilyn Lake (1999, 261) reflects that 'with the proliferation of services and programs for women and the

implementation of equal opportunity measures in the public service, the ranks of femocrats swelled'.

The developments of the 1970s had a profound impact on the nature of feminist politics in Australia. They led to the creation of dedicated women's policy agencies (WPAs) at various levels of government, providing a constant incitement for feminists to engage with the state. In the eyes of some feminist political scientists, the creation of these WPAs represented a key victory, a sign that the state was becoming more democratic through the descriptive and substantive inclusion of women. In many contexts, WPAs are seen as an interface between women's movements and the state and an important channel by which these movements may exercise substantive influence on social policy (Lovenduski 2005; McBride and Mazur 2010). Yet the presence of state feminists within these bodies can also at times be used to provide legitimacy and the appearance of consensus to policies and decisions that are explicitly anti-feminist. Yeatman (1990, 90) closely examines the role that femocrats played in the Hawke Labor government (1983–1991), arguing that they were 'used to rationalise and modernise the Australian residualist system of social security' in a process of reform that narrowed eligibility for social security and shifted the responsibility for welfare away from the state and onto individuals, families and the private sector. Ultimately, she argues, femocrats were 'profoundly implicated' in 'the various and distinctly Labor corporatist strategies of rolling back the welfare state in the 1980s' (Yeatman 1990, 97), reforms which had significant negative impacts on working class women, single mothers and people experiencing family violence. Similarly, the idea of 'gender mainstreaming', initially used to promote specialist women's policy departments, was eventually utilised under the Howard government to justify the removal of these departments, save for a few localised initiatives, with the idea that all areas of government were to be responsible for gender equality (Sawer 2007, 30).

This is the backdrop against which contestations over campus sexual violence take place, one which illuminates the desire as well as the danger involved in feminists' engagements with institutions. These tensions are underpinned by the inherent contradiction between feminists' desire to utilise major social institutions for change and the substantively anti-feminist nature of these institutions (Thornton 2006). In other words, the social and political power of existing institutions (including the state) draws feminists to these institutions as potential sites of social change, yet these institutions remain embedded within a broader (patriarchal, capitalist, colonial) social infrastructure that structurally limits their ability to serve as sites of social transformation (for useful overviews of debates around feminist engagement with the state, see Chappell 2013,

616–21; Waylen 1998). Institutions are therefore not neutral vehicles for advancing the interests of different actors within them: rather, their historical trajectories and the macro-level social dynamics in which they are embedded shape and constrain actors within them in complex ways. Feminist gains within institutions (within and beyond the state), then, are always complicated and partial, shaped by the 'five Cs' that Janet Halley (2018a, xv) identifies as the hallmarks of institutionalised feminism: 'collaboration, compromise, collusion, complicity, and co-optation'. This chapter has begun to show how universities came to co-opt feminist campaigns against sexual violence, for example in Universities Australia's *Respect. Now. Always.* project, as well as how the turn towards institutions in campus feminism coincided with major shifts in the framing and demands of movements against sexual violence in the 1990s and 2000s. Throughout this thesis, I continue to probe the relationship between campus feminist movements and the neoliberal university, considering the enticements as well as the risks involved in feminists' engagement with institutions.

Conclusion

To conclude this chapter, I want to reflect on my own positionality within the dynamics of 'collaboration, compromise, collusion, complicity, and co-optation' that I have described above. In 2018, I co-authored *The Red Zone Report*, an investigation into hazing, sexual violence and abuse at residential colleges in Australian universities. *The Red Zone Report* was, in part, a response to the release of the Broderick review of the University of Sydney colleges (Elizabeth Broderick & Co 2017), which End Rape on Campus Australia felt was an incomplete and inaccurate portrayal of the social, cultural and political dynamics of sexual violence within college culture. In particular, we were concerned with the Broderick report's failure to analyse the prevalence of hazing, the elitism of college culture, and issues of racism, queerphobia and transphobia. In writing *The Red Zone Report*, we wanted to conduct a more expansive and historical analysis of how the problems of hazing and sexual violence are embedded in college culture and the structural features of colleges

Figure 6: Banner at the University of Sydney quadrangle, March 2018, following the release of *The Red Zone Report*. Image: author's own.

that make them so resistant to change. In the end, the report sprawled out over 200 pages, including leaked college 'song books' and O-week magazines full of misogynistic and homophobic material as appendices (Funnell and Hush 2018).

When it was finally ready to launch after many late nights of work, I spent an exhausting two days doing back-to-back interviews with the media, my phone ringing non-stop with more requests for interviews. The publicity our report received was frenzied, yet mixed. Conservative media outlets sought to dismiss and minimise the report: *The Daily Telegraph* published an article interviewing students from St Andrew's College, who argued that there had already been 'drastic changes' to stamp out hazing and described the college processes as 'clear and transparent' (Gleeson and McBeath 2018). Feminists at the University of Sydney staged a protest, dropping a large banner in the quadrangle that read 'Welcome to the red zone/red tape won't cover up rape' (see Figure 6, right). Heads of universities and colleges published their responses to the report, which touted their 'zero tolerance approach' and the 'strong, meaningful steps' they had taken to create an 'inclusive community' (Duncan 2018). In some ways, it felt like a concert that we had all rehearsed before, with everyone playing their part: the activists staging a protest, the advocates speaking to media, the media writing sensationalised stories about the most horrific and bizarre instances of abuse in the report, conservatives ridiculing, downplaying and dismissing the report, and the colleges taking the opportunity to minimise the problem and congratulate themselves for putting an end to hazing, once and for all. While the report did, I think, successfully make the case that hazing and abuse were not relics of college history but rather living traditions that do serious harm, I am not sure that much else really changed. Any institutional changes made in the wake of this event were relatively superficial, such as the renaming of the University of Sydney's O-Week to 'Welcome Week' due to the 'problematic connotations' associated with the prior name (Baker and Keoghan 2019). Colleges successfully pushed through the scandal, using this opportunity in the media spotlight to position themselves as modern, progressive institutions in which hazing had been 'eliminated entirely' (Francis 2018). Media outlets perhaps gained the most from the release of the report, using the evidence in the report to produce splashy and sensationalised headlines about the 'shocking', 'explosive' and 'sickening' nature of hazing rituals (e.g. Pash 2018).

As I will discuss further in Chapter 7, the release of these landmark reports about university sexual violence successfully established the issue as a major political problem. For the first time in Australia, robust empirical data on campus sexual violence was integrated into an analytical frame with concrete recommendations for change, providing the opportunity to benchmark universities'

responses to sexual violence. Yet this cycle also created new challenges for feminist activists at universities. Former University of Sydney Women's Officer Madeline Ward (2020b) argues that feminist groups came to rely on the release of new reports to generate media attention about campus sexual violence, and began to focus their energies on criticising the methodology or framing of reports rather than mobilising students around the issue:

> Campaigns are organised in reaction to these events, rather than sustained to build momentum and respond when they do occur […] I don't believe that this is a particularly effective or strategic method of organising. In relying on the output of institutions such as the AHRC, or the work of Elizabeth Broderick in recommending measures for 'cultural renewal' of the colleges, we ultimately weaken our aims. Our political action should not be relying on the work of agents acting in favour of the University.

The mainstream political attention given to this issue also generated significant backlash from Men's Rights groups, college students, conservative politicians and journalists, creating a hostile climate for feminist activism and drawing student activists unwittingly into the 'culture wars' that played out in the mainstream media. Finally, while these reports triggered a number of new university initiatives in response to sexual violence, as I will show in my data analysis, these initiatives did not always align with the expectations or demands of feminist activists and in some cases contributed to the demobilisation of feminist struggles. The remainder of this thesis explores how contemporary feminist activists inhabit and navigate the historical legacy described above, and the particular constraints that bear upon student political organising within the neoliberal university.

Chapter 6 | The view from below: Collective organising and the institutional politics of sexual violence

> It has become important for institutions to look like they are doing something about sexual harassment and violence. But looking like and doing are not necessarily the same thing – in fact, sometimes the first allows us to escape the second.
> – Alison Phipps, 'Tackling Sexual Harassment and Violence in Universities: Seven Lessons from the UK'

Introduction

This thesis has provided the historical context and institutionalist theoretical approach to conceptualising the neoliberal university and the place of feminist politics within it. This chapter now shifts focus to the contemporary context, presenting insights from interviews with students active in organising against sexual violence at their universities (the University of New South Wales and the University of Sydney) between 2015 and 2020, which will provide data for analysis in Chapter 8. As I argued in the introduction, this five-year period has seen major changes in Australian universities' treatment of sexual violence, moving from suppression and inaction to acknowledgement and action. I have traced the background leading up to these developments and shown how feminist activists, advocacy groups and researchers created sufficient public pressure and reputational damage to force universities to publicly reckon with campus sexual violence. However, this moment of reckoning was not a simple victory for feminist activists in terms of achieving their desired objectives. Rather, as the data in this chapter indicates, many activists experienced this period as a process of narrowing political opportunities. The remainder of this thesis explores the contradictions and limitations of the initiatives adopted by universities in response to sexual violence in the contemporary period and how student activists have organised to challenge institutional rules within this difficult context.

The chapter is divided into two main sections. The first examines the major initiatives adopted by the two universities in response to sexual violence between 2015 and 2020: formal policies, procedures and statements made by universities are contrasted with the perspectives of activists, who reflect on the limitations of these initiatives. This section draws on these multiple sources of data to consider the rules and practices, formal and informal, that underpin universities' responses to sexual violence and the constraints and opportunities these rules create for student feminist activists. In the second section, I examine the strategies and tactics that these activists utilised to

challenge institutional rules, including deplatforming, direct action and engagement with the media, as well as the backlash they experienced, considering how this backlash acts as a means of enforcing and reproducing the rules and can thus be a useful tool for identifying institutional dynamics.

Throughout the chapter, data from fourteen interviews with student activists is supplemented with documentary analysis of key policies, procedures, reports and statements from each university, as well as media reporting, in order to triangulate and contextualise the perspectives of these activists. Key reports drawn on in this chapter include:

- The AHRC *Change the Course* report (2017a), as well as periodic audits carried out by the AHRC of university responses following the release of this report (AHRC 2017b). As I discuss further in the next chapter, these audits were compiled from universities' own reports of the actions they had taken and were not further checked for accuracy by the Commission, underscoring the need for students' evaluations of the measures taken or reported by universities.
- Reports released in 2017 by the Australian Human Rights Centre (based at UNSW): the good-practice framework *On Safe Ground* (Durbach and Keith 2017) and the case study *Local Perspectives* (Cama and Durbach 2017).
- The internal survey conducted by the University of Sydney, *Creating a Safer Community for All* (2016).

I also draw on media reporting from this period, which provides commentary on both universities' responses to sexual violence and the campaigns organised by activists. The multiple sources of data used in this chapter create a multi-layered portrait of the dynamics of sexual violence at two campuses within a five-year time period.

Background: public scrutiny and reputational crises

The archival evidence presented in Chapter 5 demonstrated that campus feminist groups have been active in politicising the issue of campus sexual violence since at least the mid-1970s. This rich legacy has been carried on into the contemporary era, albeit with shifts in political strategy as well as some periods of abeyance and demobilisation. My interview data focuses on the period from 2015 to 2020 during which campus sexual violence was firmly established as a national political issue in part through a number of key incidents reported on in the media. In April 2016, a video of students from Philip Baxter College at the University of New South Wales (UNSW) was leaked to a journalist. The video showed these students on a bus after a 'Boys' Night Out', chanting a song containing the lyrics:

> *I wish that all the ladies/Were little red foxes/And if I were a hunter/I'd shoot them in their boxes*

> *I wish that all the ladies/Were buns in the oven/And if I were a baker/I'd cream them by the dozen*
> *I wish that all the ladies/Were holes in the road/And if I was a dump truck/I'd fill them with my load.*[43] (McKinnon 2016)

This video was reproduced widely in the mainstream media, with the student president of the college, who took part in the chant, stating to a journalist that he had 'no idea why [he] did it' (Bowden 2016; Noyes 2016a; Palin 2016). After students from the UNSW Women's Collective held a snap protest, residents from Baxter College released a public apology, which stated:

> The words pronounced are in no way an indication of the values that Philip Baxter College adheres to, but the mere fact that we have sung them is enough to tarnish the integrity of every student. (Residents of Philip Baxter College 2016)

It was later reported that after an investigation was carried out by UNSW, only two of the students identified in the video received a formal warning from the university. Other students criticised the university's response, stating to the media that 'it hasn't been a strong enough response from a university that says it has zero tolerance of sexual harassment and assault' (Marriner 2016).

The following month, another story about college culture broke in the media, this time surrounding Wesley College at the University of Sydney (USyd). A journal produced by Wesley students in 2014 and leaked to the media included charts identifying hook-ups between students at the college and awards given for 'best ass', 'best cleavage' and 'kinkiest collegian' (Balakumar 2016). The journal reflected clear sexual hierarchies within the college, stating: 'freshers [first year college students] have a willingness to put out for their seniors and for enabling all the hook-ups a sleazy, pussy-hungry adolescent could dream of'. A week later, the student newspaper *Honi Soit* published a feature story about the experience of student Kendra Murphy, who was allegedly assaulted by a fellow student at USyd's St Andrew's College (Bagshaw 2016a; Landis-Hanley 2016). Following these events, USyd announced that it would launch an investigation into the colleges, to be led by former Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick (Bagshaw 2016b). It was then reported in the media that the Vice Chancellor, Dr Michael Spence, was 'considering stripping the colleges of their land if they fail to co-operate with the investigations' (Bagshaw 2016b),[44] though in internal correspondence with the colleges, Spence later denied making such a statement (Funnell and Hush 2018, 23).

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[43] Very similar lyrics were also published in a 'songbook' produced and published by students at St Andrew's College, USyd, in 1993 (Funnell and Hush 2018, 85–87).

[44] In Australia, many residential colleges exist as separate legal entities to universities. Some colleges (especially at older universities, including the University of Sydney) are governed by state or territory statutes, which set out the colleges' constitutions and the governance obligations and procedures of their councils or boards. At these

At the same time, the Hunting Ground Australia Project (THGAP) was screening the US documentary *The Hunting Ground* at campuses around the country. Andrea Durbach and Rosemary Grey (2018, 84) argue that this screening program 'triggered a national conversation about the issue and reframed its focus from individual student misconduct to institutional failure'. The Australian Human Rights Centre (a research centre at UNSW) also initiated a major project titled *Strengthening Australian University Responses to Sexual Assault and Harassment*, which led to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)'s national investigation into the issue. As a result of this investigation, it was clear to university managers that their responses to sexual violence would continue to face public scrutiny when the report was released. The AHRC investigation thus created some time pressure for universities to reform their institutional responses to, and prevention of, sexual violence, as well as a window of opportunity for student activists to leverage this public attention in order to secure key institutional changes (the role of the AHRC investigation is discussed further in the next chapter).

Notably, this period also saw major structural upheavals at both UNSW and USyd as well as in the higher education sector more broadly. In 2015, UNSW released its 'UNSW2025' strategy, which was framed as 'an ambitious and altruistic pathway to guide the University towards greater global impact and future success' (University of New South Wales 2021, 3). A major aspect of this strategy was shifting from a two-term semester model to a three-term trimester model, a proposal which was implemented despite being widely protested by students (Baker 2019). The five-year update on the UNSW2025 strategy boasts that the university has 'invested record amounts of capital in infrastructure' and 'increased Knowledge Exchange revenue' (UNSW Sydney 2020b, 6). At the University of Sydney in 2016, an extensive restructure was passed through the university Senate to reduce the number of faculties from sixteen to six, cut elected positions from the Senate and reduce the number of undergraduate courses on offer (Lavoipierre 2016). At the same time, the federal government sought to deregulate university fees by removing caps on the cost of degrees, a proposal that had been on the table for several years. The government cited 'flexibility and competition' as the benefits of such a model (Hunter 2016), though this proposal was eventually dropped before the 2016 federal budget. This period was thus marked by rapid structural transformation at these two university campuses, in line with the broader trajectory of the neoliberalisation of Australian universities discussed in Chapter 4. In Chapter 8, I analyse the data presented in this chapter in light of these macro-scale shifts and seek to explain how these trends have shaped institutional and activist responses to sexual violence.

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universities, there is a complex power dynamic between colleges and universities: while colleges have independent legal standing and traditions of autonomy, university managers nevertheless exert influence over college governance, as seen in the case above. At newer universities (including the University of New South Wales), some colleges are directly connected to the university and accountable to its governance mechanisms.

1. A seat at the table? contesting institutional responses to sexual violence

In the context of the events outlined above, student feminist groups at both UNSW and USyd focused their energies on transforming institutional responses to sexual violence. In 2016, Women's Collectives at both universities released open letters containing lists of demands addressed to their universities. These demands were broadly similar and included the following:

- Standalone, university-wide sexual assault policies that are legally accurate, accessible and widely publicised;
- More transparent and trauma-sensitive procedures for the investigation of complaints in regards to sexual violence;
- Implementation of online modules to educate students and staff about sexual assault and harassment as well as resourcing for ongoing education and prevention programs;
- Improved funding and specialised training for campus counselling and healthcare services (University of Sydney Women's Collective 2016; UNSW Women's Collective 2016).[45]

This section analyses feminist student activists' advocacy for these key aims within the setting of the neoliberal university. It focuses on three aspects of universities' responses to sexual violence that were most prominent in my discussions with student representatives: the creation of advisory bodies or consultation groups to guide institutional responses to sexual violence, the development of primary prevention initiatives, and the improvement of reporting processes. In each case, the initiatives taken by each university are explored through analysis of key documents as well as the perspectives of student activists in order to illuminate the limitations of these initiatives as well as the challenges that student activists faced in their attempts to influence university policy-making. These interviews bring to the surface the rules, both formal and informal, that operate to shape how universities respond to sexual violence and the constraints and opportunities these rules create for student activists.

i. Advisory bodies and student consultation

After the series of events that unfolded in 2016, one of the initial responses taken by both UNSW and USyd was to establish university-run working groups with the stated aim of improving each institution's prevention of, and response to, sexual violence.[46] At USyd, the Safer Communities

[45] More recently, the University of Sydney Women's Collective has made concerted demands for the residential colleges to be dismantled and replaced with affordable student housing (Tandan, Wang, and Sonnenschein 2020). This demand is not discussed in detail in this chapter, but I return to it in Chapter 9.

[46] The first recommendation of the AHRC's *Change the Course* report was the creation of advisory bodies with 'responsibility for guiding the implementation of the recommendations made'. The AHRC advised that such bodies

Advisory Group (SCAG) was established in September 2016 (Spence 2020; this group is still operational, yet less active, at the time of writing). At UNSW, a working party had already been established by the Australian Human Rights Centre to guide their project *Strengthening Australian University Responses to Sexual Assault and Harassment* (Durbach and Keith 2017, 15). In February 2017, this group was replaced with the Sexual Misconduct Implementation Working Group (SMIWG), which was convened and managed by the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Board, bringing it under the control of the university executive (University of New South Wales 2020, 1). This group was disestablished at the end of 2019 and replaced with the smaller Sexual Misconduct Risk and Review Group (SMRRG), which does not include any student representation and focuses more narrowly on reports of sexual violence made through the sexual misconduct online reporting portal (UNSW Sydney 2020a, 8). Both SMIWG and SCAG included, in their membership, representatives from university management, colleges, student groups, student services and campus security.

The students I interviewed at the two universities had relatively similar attitudes to the value of their university's sexual violence working group. The majority of UNSW student interviewees were critical of the SMIWG, suggesting that the ideas proposed by students gained little traction on the committee, with students' proposals stalled within the university bureaucracy and only acted upon when they aligned with the interests of university managers. This was highlighted in my interview with Zoe:

> It became apparent that we were discussing our ideas and putting forward our ideas, but they weren't really being taken on board by the university. And there were senior members of management that would block everything we put forward, and progress was sort of going nowhere.

Zoe thus described the feeling of 'the bureaucracy just slowing down until nothing happened at all'. This was echoed by a number of participants from UNSW, who described these groups as 'slow' and 'tokenistic'. Students were also critical of the way in which sexual violence was discussed within the working group, with Charlotte highlighting a focus on risk management within the SWIMG:

> I remember being so shocked for the first time, because I got in the room and it was quite a large meeting, big long table full of people, and everyone was talking about risk. And at

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'should involve broad and extensive consultation with all relevant stakeholders' and should 'seek independent expertise where relevant and draw on existing research and best practice' (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 10). The AHRCentre's report *On Safe Ground* also recommended that all advisory bodies 'ensure student representation on relevant committees to enable consistent and substantive student engagement', noting that 'student participation should reflect the diversity and distinct needs of the student population' (Durbach and Keith 2017, 120).

> first I thought, okay, risk to students is so important to talk about. And then I realised it was HR talking about risk, and, you know, the university's media department talking about risk, and it was all about reputational risk to the university. And they did not care at all about risks to students.

Feminist activists at UNSW identified several influential allies within the SMIWG who were able to lend support to the proposals and demands made by students. In particular, they identified the Gendered Violence Research Network (GVRN), a well-respected site of research on gendered violence at UNSW, as a source of support and epistemic legitimacy within the SMIWG:

> They give us a lot of legitimacy because they back what we're saying, but in a tone that is a lot more academic. They have PhDs and expertise that we can't necessarily claim to have. (Emily)

In contrast, students at USyd noted the exclusion of academics with expertise in the area of sexual violence from the SCAG as a major limitation of this working group:

> The thing that really angered me when I was on those committees was that there were no academics who specialised in any field around sexual violence sitting on those committees […] they would have been incredible sources of knowledge for activists. (Ava)

Ava felt frustrated that she spent a lot of time familiarising herself with relevant academic research – including the research of academics at USyd – to back up the demands that her collective was making, when this expertise could have been provided directly to the working group. In the absence of support from academic staff, student activists sometimes felt as though they were perceived as 'annoying, whiny students that are just yelling for the sake of it' (Emily), rather than sources of legitimate expertise in their own right.

Students at USyd were also highly critical of the lack of substantive decision-making power vested in the SCAG, suggesting that the proposals brought to the SCAG had often already been finalised and that the process of consultation was therefore quite superficial. Ava suggested that this group was 'really about filtering down decisions that have already been made for student approval, to then relay it back to the student body.' An example of this lack of decision-making power was provided by Maya:

> They had this survey […] you had to choose what sexuality you identified with. And they didn't have anything broader than like, gay, lesbian or bisexual. And I said, 'Well, that doesn't quite cut it.' And they said, 'Well, we can't change it now. It's too late.' […] What's

> the point of this committee if you can't change things that you're showing to us for feedback?

Students also noted that the process of consultation with students was not accompanied by any material resourcing for the initiatives they proposed on the committee, even when the resources required were relatively minimal. Zoe recalled:

> We asked for funding for cards with details of hotlines you can call, and support services for sexual assault, and they just said, we don't have the money […] it's just a couple of cards, but they literally just said no […] You can afford to put rainbow steps on Manning House, but you can't afford to give us 500 business cards with details about how to support survivors?

Finally, some students reflected on the disparities of power within these working groups and the way in which these spaces were shaped by norms of respectability. Yasmine, a Muslim woman, reflected on her experience at USyd:

> It's very different when you look like me or Maya, who had really short hair at the time, and looks like this angry queer lady […] versus when it's nice, pretty Georgina[47] with her long hair and her Ralph Lauren polo.

Participants suggested that their engagement in these groups was shaped by a logic of respectability by which some students (especially college students) were afforded a greater degree of legitimacy by institutional power-holders. In a space underpinned by bureaucratic norms of professionality, students felt reticent to express emotional responses for fear of being seen as irrational or unprofessional.

At both UNSW and USyd, however, students continued to engage with the working groups, despite their reservations about the effectiveness of the groups in providing a genuine voice for students. Anika described attendance at these meetings as 'a chore', something necessary for student representatives to do even though it might not achieve all their aims. Charlotte from UNSW agreed, stating:

> We didn't get everything we wanted out of the policy that was developed, and other things. But I think at a very basic level, it was important […] to have a student voice there, to help say, that's not realistic, or that's not what we want.

However, participation in these groups at times contributed to burnout amongst students (a theme discussed further in the conclusion of this thesis), and produced a feeling of frustration and the sense that the time and energy contributed by students was wasted:

[47] Name changed.

> It could get really heated and hot. I remember one meeting […] going into the kitchenette and just crying. We're trying so hard to do these things, and management is just constantly pushing back. They don't care. They don't want to do these things. And the Safer Communities group is just a tick the box, we have consulted with students. That's all it is. (Joyce)

This dynamic was exacerbated by the move from semesters to trimesters at UNSW, which heightened the time pressures faced by students. With these added pressures, students felt particularly angry when their input was not taken on board. Sophia reflected:

> I just find that I get invited to so many equity and diversity department meetings, and different advisory groups, and the gender champions, and the queer champions, and stuff like that. But sometimes the meeting documents are 200 pages, so I'm wasting my time in fucking trimester, working three jobs, trying to do all this shit […] and then nothing coming from that.

These groups, then, provided a constant incitement for students to participate and to exercise influence within university decision-making structures, yet this ambition was repeatedly thwarted by the lack of power vested in these groups and the underlying hierarchy of power between university managers and students, especially in the absence of academic staff willing to advocate alongside students.

ii. Primary prevention

The primary prevention of sexual violence refers to 'activities which take place *before* sexual violence has occurred to prevent initial perpetration or victimisation' (Carmody et al. 2009, 16, original emphasis). The institutionalisation of primary prevention efforts within universities has been a key demand of contemporary student activists, as seen in the 2016 NUS 'Support student safety, stop the war on women' campaign (La Paglia 2016), the recommendations of both the 2011 and 2015 NUS *Talk About It* reports (National Union of Students 2011, 2015), and the open letters released by UNSW and USyd Women's Collectives in 2016 (above). The importance of primary prevention was also echoed in key reports released in 2017. The authors of *On Safe Ground* recommended the implementation of sexual violence prevention education programs, noting that such programs should meet best-practice standards including having an explicit theory of change, be delivered by trained and sufficiently resourced staff and be properly evaluated (Durbach and Keith 2017, 107). The report stated that:

> Universities should carefully assess and evaluate programs and trainers to ensure that they are appropriately endorsed and effective, that they reflect the needs of participants […]

> and ultimately contribute to changing harmful behavioural attitudes and patterns. (Durbach and Keith 2017, 108).

Similarly, *Change the Course* recommended that universities develop education programs that are expertise- and evidence-based, address the drivers of sexual assault and sexual harassment, are ongoing, target all levels of the university and are evaluated (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 173–75).

In December 2017, the University of Sydney reported to the Australian Human Rights Commission that it had purchased an online education module called *Consent Matters* from Epigeum, a UK-based software company, stating that the module 'will be compulsory for all commencing students from Semester 1, 2018' (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017b, 36). In the same audit, a further fourteen universities reported that they had purchased the same module. USyd had previously rejected demands from students for an online consent module, with a university spokesperson stating to the student newspaper that:

> In reviewing the expert evidence and seeking advice from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Education) […] it has become clear that this is not the most appropriate mechanism for achieving a well-informed student body on these issues. (Landis-Hanley 2017)

However, by the end of 2017, this stance had been overturned. *Consent Matters* received public criticism from academics (Fileborn 2018) and advocates (Funnell 2018) for lacking an evidentiary basis and being tokenistic and ineffective, with these criticisms echoed by students interviewed at USyd. Ava emphasised that there should be 'academic input into what a primary prevention program would look like at the university':

> That should be step one for an academic institution! [*laughs*] But that was a really challenging debate […] Putting such a program together would be a really long-term process. And the long-term aspect of it was very off-putting for the university. It's a lot nicer to have something done within the calendar year, so you can have a press release, you can reassure alumni, prospective students, that everything's all right. […] But instead, they would push for something that would divert resources away from something that would actually work. What's the point in having a primary prevention program that doesn't work?

Maya believed that the University of Sydney's decision to purchase *Consent Matters* was driven by a desire to tick the box and move on – 'the university's way of saying, look, we've done it, we've done something, can you just shut up about it now, this isn't our problem anymore'. USyd activists

also suggested that once *Consent Matters* had been purchased and adopted by the university, it became more difficult to advocate for a more effective primary prevention program:

> It crowds out space for actual, real solutions, because you can always renew an online contract forever. So it's difficult to justify spending more money into researching something new. (Ava)

> Within the Women's Collective […] we were like, we need something much better than this. But the vibe I got [from the university] was like, we're not touching this. We've got this and we're not changing it. (Maya)

Finally, the activists noted the need for primary prevention education to be delivered in a range of languages to reflect the cultural and linguistic diversity of the USyd student population. When they made this demand on the SCAG, it received little traction:

> We said, hey, can you translate this *Consent Matters* module into a language other than English? They'd be like, that's a very good point! Then – crickets [i.e. silence]. (Yasmine)

For Yasmine, the university's resistance to providing resources in a range of languages reflected a broader unwillingness to respond to the needs of international students who had experienced sexual violence, which she described as 'a whole major part of our community that is just left in the dark'. International students have made similar comments to the media describing the isolation and shame they felt following experiences of sexual violence, and the inaccessibility of universities' prevention and response mechanisms for students whose first language is not English (Drevikovsky 2019; Kale 2019).

At UNSW, some content in relation to sexual assault and sexual harassment was initially incorporated into an online module called ELISE ('Enabling Library and Information Skills for Everyone') in Semester 1, 2017. However, students noted that this was an odd place for this information, given the broad remit of the ELISE module (which covered topics such as using the library, time management and plagiarism) and the limitations of online quiz questions in producing substantive cultural change (Breen 2017). Management at UNSW then considered purchasing the *Consent Matters* module, but eventually abandoned this plan following pushback from key academic staff. Subsequently, an educational module was developed in-house by the Gendered Violence Research Network, which was first rolled out to students in the UNSW colleges in 2017. UNSW reported to the Australian Human Rights Commission, in the AHRC's December 2017 audit, that 300 staff and students had received this training (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017b, 27). The students I interviewed from UNSW were cautiously optimistic about this module, noting

that they trusted the expertise of GVRN in producing this resource, despite the difficulties of creating an effective online tool. Sophia reflected:

> They enlisted GVRN to create a module, which has been really good […] I think it's just obviously very difficult to create a generic module that's compulsory for 20,000 people, you're always going to have blowback, but they tried to make it as considered as they could.

Charlotte noted that there are inherent limitations to such education programs:

> I think it's one of those things where they might not take it seriously – they probably don't take it seriously. But as long as all those guys are being forced to sit and go through this module, I'm happy that that's happening.

The UNSW Women's Collective promoted this training in their publications and on their social media pages, calling it a 'ground-breaking' development (Butterworth 2017) and encouraging students to participate.

One key difference in the roll-out of prevention education at the two universities was thus the involvement of academic experts in the design and implementation of this education. As demonstrated in the quotes from students above, this had important implications for the trust placed in the universities' respective programs. In its Good Practice Responses for the prevention of sexual violence, the *On Safe Ground* report argued that in the case of consent education programs, 'student support for, and participation in, these courses is critical to their utility' (Durbach and Keith 2017, 105). UNSW student activists felt quite positively about the module that had been developed by the GVRN and publicly supported this initiative. In contrast, in the case of the University of Sydney's *Consent Matters* module there was little buy-in from student representatives, who spoke publicly about their concerns with the module given its lack of academic credibility and evidentiary basis (Landis-Hanley 2017). Yet lacking support from academics inside the institution with relevant expertise, USyd students were unsuccessful in advocating for the replacement of *Consent Matters* with a more effective alternative.

iii. Reporting processes

As I noted in the introduction, the absence of accessible procedures for reporting sexual violence emerged as a major issue in the Australian Human Rights Commission's report. This report found that 94% of students who experienced sexual harassment and 87% of students who experienced sexual assault did not make a formal complaint to their university (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 118). The AHRC also found that the majority of students surveyed (62%) had little or no knowledge about how to make a formal report or complaint about sexual assault (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 134). Further, the AHRC found that students who

do report their experiences often have negative experiences of the reporting process; almost half (45%) of the students who made a formal report or complaint to their university following an experience of sexual assault felt dissatisfied, very dissatisfied or neutral about the process (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 136). A critical aim of student campaigns was therefore to improve the accessibility, transparency and sensitivity of reporting procedures and the capacity for these procedures to meet the needs of student-survivors (University of Sydney Women's Collective 2016; UNSW Women's Collective 2016).

At UNSW, the absence of clear and centralised reporting procedures was identified as a significant issue in the *Local Perspectives* case study (Cama and Durbach 2017, 8; 14–15). Zoe recalled raising the importance of having a specialised reporting mechanism for survivors of sexual violence around 2016: 'they workshopped a few ideas with us, and then stalled it for at least six months, because they felt it was too risky'. She felt that 'they saw that as – in my opinion, probably opening channels to reporting, and it seemed like they wanted to shut them down at that time'. In the absence of any clear institutional reporting mechanisms, the Women's Collective created their own informal channels for students to share their experiences and supported students to share their stories in the media:

> If people wanted to go to the media, I created ways for them to do so anonymously […] a number of people just contacted me personally, a number of people at the colleges did especially, I think because of the environment that they're in, where it's sort of inescapable from the people you live with. They had a unique risk in speaking out. (Zoe)

A new online reporting portal was launched by the university in July 2017, one week before the launch of the AHRC report. Students I spoke to recalled 'really good student consultation around the reporting portal' (Charlotte). However, Charlotte also perceived the creation of the portal as partially motivated by competitiveness and reputational concerns:

> I think part of that risk averse nature meant that they were one step ahead of other universities. So, I mean, the general idea was, we don't want to be like USyd, so get a portal out quickly, get a policy out before other universities do, be seen as a bit more of an exemplar.

The new portal created a range of new options for reporting, including for making anonymous reports and making a report on someone else's behalf. The students interviewed generally viewed this portal favourably, noting that the portal gave complainants choices about how they reported their experiences and were triaged with the help of UNSW's GVRN:

> That came out just before the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Change the Course* came out, which was really great […] it was done well, whereas I know with other universities, it's been done really badly. (Sophia)

> We were able to release the reporting portal on the week that the AHRC report came out, which was so vital because I know [student representatives] got a lot of really heavy-duty disclosures […] and they were able to report them quickly and easily. (Emily)

Charlotte also highlighted that the data from the portal, provided to students through advisory meetings, gave credibility to claims made by students that were previously treated by the university as hearsay:

> The reporting portal was really fantastic, because it meant that you suddenly had deidentified disclosures that you could use as examples for things.

However, students also believed that awareness of the reporting portal amongst the broader university community remained low. Emily reflected:

> I do think the portal is very robust […] but students don't really know about it. And that's where we're failing […] there's this attitude of, tick, done. But it's no good if people don't actually know that it exists.

Emily's perception was borne out by a survey of 4460 UNSW students two years after the release of the portal, which found that only 38% of respondents were aware that the portal existed (University of New South Wales 2019).

At the University of Sydney reporting procedures came into the spotlight in July 2016, after a Freedom of Information investigation conducted by a journalist at the student newspaper *Honi Soit* revealed that seventeen incidents of 'sexual assault, indecent assault, and acts of indecency' had been reported to the university between 2011 and 2016 (Joyner 2016a). However, as *Honi Soit* noted, an internal investigation conducted by the university in 2016 estimated that only 1% of incidents of 'sexual assault or unacceptable behaviour' were officially reported to the university (The University of Sydney 2016, 6), indicating that reporting mechanisms were significantly under-utilised. In the December 2017 audit of universities' responses to *Change the Course*, USyd stated that its policies and procedures around reporting had been 'compassionately updated' but did not provide further explanation or evidence in support of this claim (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017b, 35). Finally, USyd released a new reporting portal on 1 August 2018, the first anniversary of the release of *Change the Course.* Before it was released, the portal underwent a trial process, in which student representatives noticed a number of issues and argued that the release

of the portal should be delayed until these issues were fixed. In Anika's words, 'it just didn't work […] they were so insistent on putting it out against our advice'.

When the portal was released, it was immediately criticised for having a number of technical issues. Firstly, when students tried to access the portal, many were redirected to an 'Error' page; and those who were able to access it were directed to the staff view of the portal, which only allowed staff to make an informal 'disclosure', not a formal report (Abraham 2018b). Students also noted that there were no clear guidelines around who would be able to access the data from the portal or how securely it would be stored, and that the portal did not provide respondents with the details of any on-campus support services (Costello 2018). Ava expressed further concerns about the nature of the data gathered through the portal:

> It was asking students about their sexuality, their residency status, and a whole heap of other things so they university could look at it and go: out of the students who have reported, this is how many are gay, this is how many are straight. Which is potentially useful information for a university to have, but a reporting portal is not the survey instrument through which to find information […] it was essentially data mining.

Students at the University of Sydney felt that the creation of the reporting portal was rushed, and that a slower, better planned roll-out of the portal would have ameliorated some of the technical and ethical issues:

> I think that's a pretty perfect example of the way in which universities can respond to a sexual assault crisis to benefit their reputation, because it was all about having something in for the anniversary deadline [of *Change the Course*], and having something to email alumni and students about. (Ava)

As in the case of primary prevention (discussed above), students at UNSW felt more positively about the reporting portal developed at their university than did those at USyd, with Charlotte stating that she was 'quite proud of what we managed to achieve that year, in terms of the portal'. In contrast, USyd students felt as though their feedback on the portal had been ignored, and that the portal was 'rushed out' in order to meet the deadline of the *Change the Course* report's anniversary. They also suggested that in the absence of trusted institutional reporting procedures, student representatives were likely to receive an increased number of disclosures of experiences of sexual violence from other students, which in some instances contributed to burnout.

Overall, the analysis of three key institutional initiatives presented above shows that feminist collectives had mixed results in seeking to achieve their key objectives within the university

bureaucracy. A theme arising throughout these interviews was the constraining effect of managerialism on student activism. This was seen in the case of advisory and consultation bodies, in which students felt they had little power to influence the decisions that were made, or the actions taken. The norm of managerial prerogative meant that students were at best treated as stakeholders to consult, and at worst a group that merely had to be informed of actions that had already been determined by university managers. An opportunity in challenging managerial power arose in the involvement of key academic staff at UNSW, where these staff shared the perspectives and values of student activists and were able to leverage their expertise to advocate in students' interests, for example in promoting and implementing an evidence-based education module as well as improved reporting procedures. Conversely, at USyd the exclusion of academic staff from decision-making processes led to the further marginalisation of students' perspectives on advisory groups and the implementation of initiatives that were unsupported by academic evidence. Finally, another theme running throughout these interviews was university managers' concern with reputational risk. This was evident in students' experience on advisory groups, in which they felt this was a major factor leading universities to prioritise visible, marketable and quick initiatives. Students suggested that aversion to reputational risk motivated universities to respond to sexual violence in order to 'be seen as a bit more of an exemplar' (in Charlotte's words), yet deprioritised responses which would take more time or resources to develop and thus ultimately undermined the efficacy of universities' initiatives. These constraints will be discussed further in Chapter 8.

2. Re-working the rules: collective organising and feminist strategy

Where the previous section examined the rules and practices underlying universities' responses to sexual violence and the constraints and opportunities these created for student activists, this section considers the tactics and strategies that students used to challenge these rules. This follows the concern within institutionalist theory around the nature of agency within institutional settings and, as I outlined in Chapter 3, the need for an enhanced conception of how collective actors can challenge and transform institutional rules 'from below'. As Lowndes and Roberts (2010, 90) argue:

> Understanding the significance and dynamics of political institutions requires that we look beyond the structures and sensibilities of elites; we need also to consider how 'ordinary people' can develop capacities and seize opportunities to change the rules of the game, albeit with the constant threat of the re-imposition of dominant institutional constraints.

Institutional settings, these theorists remind us, are always inhabited by dissident actors who are constrained by the rules at the same time as they seek to challenge them, in doing so highlighting the 'inherent openness and under-definition' of rules (Streeck and Thelen 2005, 15). In this vein, this section asks the following questions: what were the strategies that students adopted to

challenge the institutional rules, and how were the rules enforced when students chose to subvert or break them? This section begins with a discussion of how these feminist collectives are organised and their overarching strategies, before moving on to specific tactics they used (deplatforming, direct action and strategic engagement with the media) and how these groups navigated the various forms of backlash that arose within this institutional context.

i. Campus collectives' organising structure

This section begins with an overview of the institutional structures within which campus feminist collectives are located, considering how these structures inform the strategic orientations of each collective. At both UNSW and USyd, student feminist organising collectives are situated within the respective Students' Representative Councils (SRCs). Both SRCs are independent, student-run bodies that provide student representation, legal services, casework services and publications to their undergraduate student bodies. However, the structure and culture of these organisations differs significantly, a legacy of the differential effects of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU; see Chapter 4.2 for further discussion) at each university. Student unions at USyd have a dual structure in which the SRC is organisationally separate from the University of Sydney Union, the latter of which is responsible for overseeing commercial services such as food and beverage outlets. The USyd SRC has a strong focus on supporting collective activism, with its website stating that the SRC 'stand[s] for a free, fair and funded education, universal student unionism and a society free of discrimination and oppression' (SRC USyd n.d.).

In contrast, at UNSW, the Students' Representative Council is subsumed under Arc, a not-for-profit public company created in 2005 through a merger of three existing student organisations in order to compensate for the loss of income resulting from VSU. Arc is governed by a board composed partially of student representatives and partially of executive staff, and provides services, amenities and events in addition to student representation. The role of Arc as a commercial service provider gives the organisation somewhat of a corporate tenor when compared to the USyd SRC. The Arc strategic plan, for example, emphasises the importance of 'innovative business plans' and 'the pursuit of new commercial and investment opportunities' (Arc UNSW 2021). The Arc website also promotes its 'strong, multifaceted and cooperative relationship with UNSW', under the heading 'Arc and UNSW: A true partnership' (Arc UNSW 2021). As Cameron McPhedran (2011) wrote in the UNSW student paper *Tharunka* reflecting on five years of VSU, the loss of an independent student organisation that is representative of the entire student body significantly eroded the political authority of the UNSW SRC and its ability to contest or resist major changes such as shorter semesters and larger tutorials. Though the policy of VSU was formally repealed in

2013 and students now pay a mandatory Student Services and Amenities Fee (SSAF), the effects of VSU continue to shape both the UNSW and USyd SRCs, which suffer from low levels of engagement from their respective student bodies and chronically strained funding (*Times Higher Education* 2019; University of Sydney Students' Representative Council 2020a).

The USyd and UNSW Women's Collectives form the most active and visible sites of campus sexual violence organising at their respective universities and are thus the focus of my analysis of campus sexual violence activism. The University of Sydney Women's Collective (2021) describes itself as 'a horizontal autonomous organising space for radically left-wing feminist activism' and 'an unapologetically abolitionist and anti-capitalist collective that fights for true liberation from police, prisons, and capitalist exploitation'. The UNSW Women's Collective (2021) describes itself as 'an autonomous intersectional-feminist collective focused on activism, education and community organisation' and 'an inclusive and welcoming space working in an anti-hierarchical way to fight for feminist change on campus and larger society'. At both universities, a Women's Officer is elected annually through student elections, serves as the convenor and representative of the group, and is granted a modest stipend[48] and access to other resources through the respective Students' Representative Councils.

My interviews revealed important strategic differences between the two collectives – in particular, around whether to focus primarily on lobbying and negotiation with the university through the committees discussed above, or to build towards a broad-based student movement and to engage in more radical tactics that may risk their representatives' inclusion within formal committees. Students at UNSW took an approach to activism which focused on working within the rules to influence power-holders within the university, an approach Olivia described as 'more administrative' in nature. Charlotte described the benefits of this approach as 'being allowed onto all the committees, being allowed into the policy-making areas'. Olivia further described what she saw as the need for university decision-makers to take the lead on implementing changes:

> I think for culture [in relation to sexual violence] to change – and I've said this time and time again – for a culture to change it needs to change at an administration level […] It's not gonna happen from the ground up, it's got to come from the top down.

[48] At the University of Sydney, each Women's Officer is generally paid one third of the federal minimum wage: in 2021, this equated to around $13,000 per annum (University of Sydney Students' Representative Council 2020b). The University of New South Wales Students' Representative Council does not publicly disclose the stipends paid to student representatives, but one student I spoke to recalled being paid 'around $9000' for their role as Women's Officer. In both instances, these stipends are funded by the Student Services and Amenities Fee paid by all students and partially allocated to student unions.

This strategy is informed by the perception that there are key allies within their university administration that are 'pushing the issue' (Sophia), and that student activists stand to benefit from forming and maintaining relationships with these figures, who in some instances had taken personal risks within the university bureaucracy to 'advocate for the wellbeing of students' (Emily). As a result of this, students at UNSW generally shared a conviction that there were key decision-makers at their university that were 'pretty on board' with the issue of sexual violence (Olivia) and were actively working to advance the issue from within the bureaucracy. Students at UNSW saw this internal commitment as a key difference between their university and USyd, describing UNSW as 'ahead of other universities […] but still behind the times' (Olivia).

In contrast to their UNSW counterparts, student activists at USyd were critical of the strategy of negotiating with power-holders to secure key reforms and more open to breaking institutional rules as a means of challenging these rules. For these students, internal reforms could only ever be of very limited effectiveness in the face of the systemic and ingrained nature of sexual violence. Many students I interviewed from USyd emphasised the need for a wholesale transformation of the university, as well as broader social structures, in order for sexual violence to be properly addressed. For example, Anika stated:

> You would need a structural overhaul of the whole world to fix the colleges, because I don't think it stops there. I don't think it's contained within there […] we need to look at bigger structures that have upheld that hierarchy.

They were also sceptical of the efficacy of forming relationships with figures within the university executive, as they viewed these power-holders as having fundamentally different interests to their own. Ava reflected:

> Fundamentally it goes down to where one's politics are, about where power resides [in] the university […] When you start to think about who your allies are within the university, you absolutely don't think it's going to be head of student services […] or any of those posh university executive roles. […] for change to occur at the university, it needs to be a collaboration between both the student movement and the union movement.

These strategic differences also impacted the relationship between the two collectives. Charlotte, from the UNSW collective, described a shift in their strategy around 2017, from more visible campaign work to behind-the-scenes lobbying:

> I think that we were always very careful not to make universities think that we didn't have the capacity to be angry any more […] It was really useful to always be able to point out

> that we could do the same [as USyd organisers], if we wanted to, and we would be able to create more reputational damage.

However, organisers at USyd felt as though they had been burdened with the responsibility of carrying out the public-facing mobilisation work that enabled other collectives' lobbying efforts. Yasmine pointed out that this was perhaps a result of their lack of political affiliation (compared to the UNSW Women's Collective, which is often dominated by members of Labor factions) and thus their relative freedom to engage in more antagonistic tactics:

> The most frustrating thing is […] when you're trying to work with women's officers [from other universities], who are kind of bound because they are affiliated with political parties, and they won't often do things that they wanted to do. They relied on us to do it.

As the next section will explore, these strategic differences became apparent in contestations around Bettina Arndt's 'fake rape crisis tour' of campuses, and in particular around the tactical value of deplatforming and direct action in challenging institutional rules.

ii. Deplatforming and direct action

In late 2018, conservative commentator and former sex therapist Bettina Arndt announced that she would tour Australian university campuses to deliver talks to students about the 'rape crisis scare campaign' that was, in her view, led by feminists and the Australian Human Rights Commission in a concerted attack on men (Maley 2019). As part of this tour, Arndt held events at the University of Sydney in September 2018 (hosted by the Sydney University Liberal Club) and at the University of New South Wales in September 2019 (hosted by the UNSW Conservatives). These events raised strategic questions for campus women's collectives, particularly around the tactic of deplatforming (also commonly called 'no-platforming'). This tactic involves 'the denial of a platform for those deemed to be espousing hateful or harmful speech' through protest and disruption (Smith 2020, 3), and, as historian Evan Smith notes, has been consistently deployed by student unions since the 1970s as a means of combating far-right and fascist groups. The use of the tactic has continually evolved, and has, in the contemporary era, been more frequently used against sexist, homophobic and transphobic speakers (Smith 2020, 200–204). My interviews with students involved in organising protests against Arndt revealed differences between the two collectives in their perception of the risks and benefits involved in deplatforming and the broader utility of breaking universities' rules in order to challenge them.

On the evening when Arndt was due to talk at the University of Sydney, a protest was staged by the Women's Collective who formed a human barricade in an attempt to block attendees from entering the room where Arndt's talk was to take place. As Nat described the event, 'it got very

rowdy, very quickly'. Amidst the fracas, Arndt 'requested for the event to be cancelled twice, before changing her mind and instead calling the police' (Roberts 2018). Just before the talk was scheduled to commence, an emergency alarm rang and a squad of riot police arrived and began dragging protesters out of the hallway. Student organisers I interviewed at the University of Sydney believed that the tactic of deplatforming was critical to demonstrate the collective's support for and solidarity with survivors of sexual violence. Anika, for example, suggested:

> I think the notion of people going out there and making her feel unwelcome is, in a way, an abstract form of supporting people who are harmed by the ideas that she's propagating.

They also saw the protest as an important way to combat the growing influence of conservative groups on campus:

> I think a lot of the clashes during that protest were between left activists […] and members of the Liberal Club on campus, as opposed to Bettina herself. And maybe there's something to be said about, maybe that's where the battle should be taking place. (Anika)

Finally, Nat saw Arndt's event as 'an incredible moment of potential' to draw public attention to the issue of sexual violence on campus through agitation and confrontation. Even though the protest did not prevent Arndt's talk from going ahead, the protest achieved the organisers' other goals of demonstrating their support for survivors, publicly opposing Arndt and the Liberal Club and dramatising and publicising the issue, with one organiser describing it as 'probably the best protest we had on campus that year'.

However, the fall-out from the protest was significant. It was reported in News Corp paper *The Australian* that Arndt had made a formal complaint against the organisers, alleging that they 'broke the university code of conduct and its bullying and harassment policy' (Ferguson 2018). An investigation conducted by the university later found that Madeline Ward, the 2018 Women's Officer, had breached the student code of conduct by 'unreasonably impeding access to a lecture theatre' and failing to treat members of the public with 'respect, dignity, impartiality, courtesy and sensitivity' (Urban 2019). This led to Ward's suspension from the university for one semester. Arndt also published a video naming and shaming key figures at the counter-protest. This incident became embroiled in a growing debate around freedom of speech at Australian universities, with right-wing commentators (including Arndt herself) alleging that by engaging in deplatforming, student protesters were suppressing freedom of speech, censoring their opponents and undermining the very purpose of universities (Fordham 2019; Lesh 2019). In response, students pointed out that the politicised use of misconduct procedures to punish students for protesting

was itself an impediment to freedom of speech and political expression (Ward 2019; the debate around free speech is discussed further in the next chapter).

Against this backdrop, the Women's Collective at the University of New South Wales were hesitant to stage a repeat of the event when Arndt was due to visit their campus the following year. In principle, feminist organisers at UNSW supported the tactic of deplatforming. However, they also saw the use of deplatforming in this particular instance as playing into Arndt's hands, creating a moment of controversy that was to the benefit of Arndt:

> What she wants is that fight. She wants that counter-protest then and there. And so I don't want to give it to her. Because what happened at USyd, that was dangerous for us, like for the activists […] she's used it to her advantage. (Sophia)

Sophia emphasised the risk of harm that Arndt and right-wing students pose to survivors of sexual violence as well as to student activists. This was echoed by Emily, who saw the role of feminist collectives as protecting survivors:

> People too often forget that this campus isn't just a place for free discussion of ideas […] People live on this campus. And there are survivors who live on this campus […] women's collectives should be organising and trying to show survivors that they're not alone. We will protect you during this time.

Therefore, instead of a directly confrontational counter-protest, the UNSW organisers decided to hold a smaller event in the days preceding Arndt's talk. As Olivia reflected:

> There's going to be a police presence – none of us wanted to be involved in that, so we thought we'd do a nice little protest a couple of days before, outside the library.

Despite this decision by the Women's Collective, other students (including many from campus socialist factions) went ahead with a protest on the day of Arndt's talk and were met with twenty to thirty NSW Police officers, who prevented them from entering or blockading the talk (O'Grady and Syed 2019). Even at the smaller event held by the Women's Collective which was intended to be non-confrontational, students from right-wing groups on campus arrived to challenge the student feminists. Olivia recalled that they 'were standing there and filming, and it was just awful, really really uncomfortable […] what if I get doxxed, like all the other girls have?'. The students also felt particularly exposed due to a lack of support from key allies in the university, who they had invited to attend the rally and speak. Sophia recounted, 'They said, "It's too political, we can't speak". And that is just really disappointing […] 21 year olds are putting themselves on the line.'

These events highlight some important political and tactical differences between the two feminist collectives. Where USyd organisers were willing to break certain rules (e.g. the student misconduct code) in order to draw attention to the issue of sexual violence, feminist organisers from UNSW saw these tactics as 'dangerous' and wanted to avoid confrontations with the far right and with police. Nat, from USyd, reflected on this political divide:

> I'm sympathetic to their concerns. I understand that you don't want to go through a misconduct process, it's very stressful, that makes a lot of sense to me. But […] if you're actually going to be involved in organising, how serious are you about it? How seriously do you take these things? And how much are you willing to put on the line for it?

Present within these contestations over the value of deplatforming are echoes of the historical debates discussed in the previous chapter, in which feminist groups split over the question of whether to engage in antagonistic tactics that would risk their positions within structures of power, or refrain from these tactics and maintain respectability in order to successfully inhabit and navigate these structures. USyd activists sought to use protests and direct action to increase the engagement, mobilisation and 'radicalisation' of the student base, while UNSW activists generally took an approach that was less confrontational and more focused on collaboration with key allies inside the institution.

Despite their different perspectives on deplatforming, members of both collectives agreed that public demonstrations were a critical part of their campaigns to transform universities' responses to sexual violence. Both collectives regularly participated in the annual National Day of Action (NDA) held on August 1, the anniversary of the release of the AHRC's *Change the Course* report. For each NDA, local rallies would be held on different university campuses and would often march and converge together in a central location. Valerie argued that the main value of these protests was their ability to 'disrupt the public image' of the 'neoliberal corporate university' by highlighting students' experiences of sexual violence and the flaws in institutional responses, making otherwise hidden phenomena visible. Other students reflected on how these annual events played an important role in sustaining mobilisation, creating a 'standard of action' for collectives to organise towards each year (Maya) as well as generating a 'feeling of elation and empowerment in being part of a broader movement of survivors and students' (Ava).

iii. The media and reputational damage

Students from both UNSW and USyd expressed a strong belief that universities' responses to sexual violence were largely driven by fear of reputational risk. As Zoe summarised:

> Universities were far more responsive to their reputations being called into question in the media than us in there, sitting in meetings with them […] they cared that there were politicians who were becoming aware and asking questions, and the prospective parents of students who are going to enrol. So it was a very powerful tool for us.

The institutional norm of reputational protection, then, created a tactical opportunity for students, who attempted to harness and leverage this fear of reputational risk by working with journalists to publicise survivors' experiences of sexual violence and their universities' inadequate responses. This tactic certainly had its benefits – Nat described how, after stories of campus sexual violence gained traction in the media, they gained access to particular power-holders:

> We'd asked Michael Spence [USyd Vice Chancellor] for this meeting, he'd said no, the *Red Zone Report* came out, then all of a sudden, we were allowed a meeting […] it was a really interesting insight into the way that the university works because all of a sudden we had this direct access to Spence.

Journalists have also conducted important investigations into the issue of sexual violence at universities which have contributed to the momentum and publicity of student campaigns. For example, in 2016, Channel 7 conducted the largest Freedom of Information request in Australian history, seeking details of the reports of sexual misconduct that had been made to universities (Funnell 2016b). The results of this investigation were aired on a special episode of current affairs program *Sunday Night*, which also featured footage of a protest staged by the University of Sydney Women's Collective at the 2016 USyd Open Day (Madam, McWhirter, and Funnell 2016). Student activists' connections to key journalists with genuine interest in the issue of campus sexual violence opened opportunities for the strategic use of the media within their campaigns.

However, students also identified a number of risks associated with working with the media. These risks are conditioned by structural trends in the mainstream media in Australia, including significant and increasing corporate ownership (Evershed 2020) and thus a strong profit motive, as well as rapid news cycles, driven in part by the temporality of online media. Together, these trends underpin a sensationalist approach to reporting on sexual violence. Alison Phipps argues that sensationalist coverage of sexual violence is common in contemporary corporate media due to the fact that 'generating outrage is an excellent way of generating clicks, likes and shares' (Phipps 2020a, 90). This approach is largely focused on individual incidents rather than social context: empirical analysis of media coverage of gendered violence in Australia found that 'explicitly situating violent experiences for women within a broader social context was infrequent' (Sutherland et al. 2019, 502). Anika reflected,

> The media […] even student media at the time, have had a very voyeuristic approach to protests, and very – I wouldn't go so far as to say trauma porn, but very much interested in the aesthetics of the protests, not really functionally engaging with the issues that the protest brings up.

The media's tendency to sensationalise the issue of campus sexual violence is reflected in rhetoric used in coverage of the issue, such as describing sexual violence as a 'dirty little secret' (Chang 2017) and those who have experienced sexual violence as 'broken and afraid' (Madam, McWhirter, and Funnell 2016) or promising to reveal 'the most sexually predatory campus' (Farr 2016). It is also reflected, in some coverage, in the heavy focus on the explicit details of survivors' personal experiences of sexual violence, over and above analysis of institutional responses to sexual violence. Correspondingly, student organisers told me they were regularly contacted by journalists asking or demanding to be put in contact with survivors, especially around times that major reports (e.g. *Change the Course*) were due to be released. Looking back, Joyce recalled:

> That happened so much […] so often, you'd get this call being like, 'Hi, is the petting zoo open? Can I pick up a survivor please?'

Joyce, who had experienced sexual violence herself, decided to speak publicly about her experiences on a major national TV show, hoping this would increase the pressure on universities to take action. However, the experience was ultimately a negative one – it was retraumatising for her and did not bring any clear benefit to the campaign. Joyce reflected, 'that was deeply personal […] and it was awful. I knew what I was getting into in some ways, but then I didn't'.

Phipps further points out that 'the media using sexual violence as clickbait does not imply support for feminist goals' (Phipps 2020a, 92–93). In other words, journalists may have their own agendas in coverage of the issue of sexual violence, and these agendas are not always apparent to student organisers and survivors. Students I spoke to described at times being misquoted or blindsided by journalists. Charlotte recalled speaking to a journalist whom she trusted to write sensitively about the issue, who 'twisted my words quite badly […] shows I was a bit naive. Since then, working in politics, I know a bit more about how carefully to give quotes'. Yasmine highlighted the importance of 'working out who you could trust in the media', through a process of trial and error as well as word-of-mouth. The power imbalance between media outlets and student organisers played out at a student protest at the University of Sydney, at which the organisers recalled being approached by a journalist from *Al Jazeera* who was making a documentary about campus sexual violence. The journalist criticised the banner the Women's Collective had made, telling them it wouldn't look good on camera. One of the organisers, Anika, reflected on this exchange:

> It was such a slap in the face. And then we just realised, like, we're not doing this for you anyway, like, I don't care about your documentary. Fuck off, basically.

Students also noted that they had little media training, another factor that may have amplified the risk of engaging with media. Zoe stated:

> It was something I didn't have a lot of experience in, the SRC that I was a part of didn't really have the resources to give us advice on how to go about talking to the media. And the lawyers that we had in the student organisation were already incredibly overburdened and under-resourced. So it was a very difficult environment to work in, a personally challenging environment.

Media coverage of sexual violence has also tended to focus disproportionately on the experiences of young, white women, in line with long-standing racialised stereotypes about the 'ideal victim' (and 'ideal offender') of sexual violence (Bumiller 2008, 22). In Australia, media reporting of campus sexual violence is generally framed around the experiences of domestic students, with stories about international students comparatively rare. Similarly, the centrality of residential colleges in media reporting on campus sexual violence is disproportionate to the small fraction of Australian university students who attend residential colleges.[49] This produces a further challenge for students who seek to utilise media as a means to galvanise action by universities: if the media does not accurately reflect the phenomenon of campus sexual violence and disregards the experiences of marginalised groups of students, then universities' responses – insofar as they respond to the reputational risks posed by this reporting – are also likely to fall short. As my participant Yasmine noted, this media reporting can reinforce university managers' perceptions of the 'ideal victim' as a 'straight, cis, white woman' and produce institutional responses that do not meet the needs of diverse groups of students.

As a result of these negative experiences, student organisers developed critical and limited tactics for engagement with the media: refusing to let journalists exert control over events like protests, only providing interviews to trusted allies in the media, and only putting survivors of sexual violence into contact with journalists who they trusted to treat their stories with care and sensitivity. Student organisers have also turned to social media to publish statements in order to ensure that their voices and stories are not filtered through media outlets. However, as I discuss in the next

[49] In 2014, there were 74,482 places in university colleges, halls of residence and large private student accommodation providers (McDonald et al. 2015, 12) compared to a total of 1,373,230 students enrolled at Australian universities (Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2015), suggesting that the proportion of students living in these types of housing was under 6%.

section, the visibility of feminist campaigns on social media came along with its own risks, as social media formed a key site of backlash and resistance to feminist activism. Nevertheless, the media represented an important site in which students were able to leverage universities' norm of reputational risk aversion to their own advantage, utilising the threat of public outrage in an effort to challenge the rules governing universities' treatment of sexual violence.

iv. Navigating backlash

A final aspect of student feminist activism that illuminates the rules underlying universities' responses to sexual violence is the prevalence of backlash, as experienced by student activists, which functions to enforce institutional rules. Chappell and Galea (2017, 68) argue that enforcement – that is, punishment, disapproval or other negative consequences of rules being broken – 'is a critical distinguishing feature of all institutions, whether formal or informal'. Enforcement thus provides a tool for identifying and analysing institutions: by looking at what happens when rules are broken, we can more easily 'see' the way rules function in practice. One important mechanism of enforcement, particularly in the case of feminist attempts to transform institutions, is backlash. In her study of how masculine privilege is reproduced in the Australian construction industry, Natalie Galea (2018, 284) notes that 'at an institutional level, backlash can operate as a form of sanction that holds people to the "rules-in-use"'. In other words, by ridiculing, resisting or marginalising feminist attempts at institutional transformation, backlash in its diverse forms can act to ensure that existing rules and practices remain firmly in place.

Student activists firstly described significant resistance to their activism from members of the university executive. Olivia perceived the resistance as coming primarily from the upper echelons of her university's management: 'the higher up you go, the more conservative it gets'. This resistance at times took the form of direct threats. Zoe described how she was actively discouraged by members of the UNSW university administration from speaking to the media:

> They called me and they walked into the women's collective room […] and they were really aggressive, demanding answers as to why we were doing that [speaking to media]. And when I kept having discussions with the media, they… [pauses]. I was lucky that they didn't take any sort of action against me. But I could tell they were very unhappy.

In my own role as Women's Officer at the University of Sydney in 2016, I experienced similar incidents of backlash from university management. One of the first times I went on the record in the media criticising my university's response to sexual violence, I received a call from a fairly senior member of the university administration. Shouting down the phone line, she told me that the comments I had made in the media were destructive and unproductive. She threatened that if

I continued to speak to journalists, the university would 'never cooperate with students again'. I was relatively new to student organising, but this seemed, even to me, to be an overblown and hollow threat. However, these threats may have the effect of discouraging some students from being involved in activism. As Zoe reflected, 'there were other members of my SRC and fellow activists who kind of caved into that […] many of them form the view, "we should just wait for [the university] to act and be cooperative"'.

Backlash also arose from other groups who sought to uphold the status quo and shut down feminists' challenges to the rules. These included student societies such as the USyd Liberal Club and the UNSW Conservatives (who hosted Bettina Arndt's campus talks), libertarian groups like Students for Liberty and, at USyd, a group called BROSoc ('Brotherhood, Recreation and Outreach Society'). The hostility of these groups to student feminist politics came to a head at USyd in 2017, when a trio of conservative student groups hosted a screening of the anti-feminist documentary *The Red Pill*.[50] Around fifty students from feminist and socialist groups turned up to protest the screening and draw attention to the rising influence of far-right and fascist groups on campus, with one student arrested during the demonstration (Faruqi 2017). A similar confrontation occurred in Melbourne the following year when Men's Rights Activists and members of neo-Nazi groups such as The Proud Boys came together at an event titled 'March for Men', at which the National Union of Students Women's Department staged a counter-protest 'against racism and fascism' and attempted to drown out the speakers (*SBS The Feed* 2018; Sparrow 2018). The confidence of these men's groups has been bolstered by their allegiances to right-wing journalists and prominent media figures such as Bettina Arndt, Mark Latham, Alan Jones and Andrew Bolt, who have increasingly put forward narratives in the mainstream media questioning the integrity of the AHRC's *Change the Course* report, highlighting the prevalence of false rape allegations and claiming that men are the 'real victims' of the growth of feminist politics.

The main forum in which student activists experienced backlash from these groups was online. Bettina Arndt's YouTube channel, for instance, has just under 50,000 followers at the time of writing, and publishes videos titled 'Why I Fight Feminism', 'Challenge the feminists' rape crisis campaign' and 'Sexual consent laws spell trouble for men', as well as interviews with prominent

[50] *The Red Pill* is a 2016 documentary released directed by Cassie Jaye. Jaye, a self-described feminist, interviews fourty-four Men's Rights Activists and in the process 'begins to question her own beliefs' and 'learns the various ways men are disadvantaged and discriminated against', sympathising with their perspectives and criticising mainstream feminism (Jaye Bird Productions 2018). Screenings of the film in Australia were met with controversy: a planned screening at Palace Kino Cinema in Melbourne was cancelled after a public petition calling the film 'misogynistic propaganda' attracted 2,370 signatures (Noyes 2016b).

Men's Rights figures such as Jordan Peterson, Lauren Southern and Milo Yiannopoulos (Arndt 2022). As noted above, Arndt has also published videos about individual student feminists which share their names and some personal details, videos which have been circulated on servers populated by neo-Nazis (Jha, O'Grady, and Syed 2019). These videos have attracted hundreds of comments from YouTube users, many of which contain misogynistic, queerphobic and/or racist remarks, allusions to violence, more explicit death and rape threats or further personal details. Nat described the messages and comments sent to her after she was named in one of Arndt's videos:

> I was getting rape and death threats and stuff. One of the comments that has stuck with me, which is probably my own internalised misogyny, is – there was a comment that was like, 'Oh, she's got a nice pair of tits on her, I'd rape her.' […] That has seared in my brain. And I knew it was USyd students doing it, and I probably could have worked out who they were.

Sophia described coming across a video which a comedian on YouTube had made about her:

> He was […] ripping apart everything I said. And then the comments were like, a lot of women saying misogynistic things. And then a couple of them were like, 'people like her should die'. And I thought, okay, I'm going to stop reading the comments now.

At times, this backlash also occurred on campus, demonstrating the connection between online spaces and the physical space of the campus itself. Zoe recalled:

> There was a time when I felt really unsafe walking through campus because I would have people verbally attacking me, just as I was walking around campus, or sending threatening and harassing messages.

A further form of backlash that feminist student activists face is the use of misconduct and disciplinary procedures against them as a result of complaints lodged by conservative student groups. A number of students I interviewed at USyd, but none at UNSW, had been the subject of such complaints.[51] Nat reflected on the irony of the fact that student feminists had originally championed the expansion of misconduct policies and procedures as a means for students to make

[51] These complaints include one made by the Australian Union of Jewish Students (AUJS) regarding an issue of the student newspaper *Honi Soit* published by the Women's Collective. This issue depicted on its cover Arab Ba'ath Party member Hamida Mustafa al-Tahir, who in 1985 conducted a suicide bombing at an Israeli military base in Lebanon. The editors of the publication stated their intention 'to shed light on the unceasing Israeli settler colonialism faced by Palestinian people' (Syed and Ward 2018); AUJS called the cover anti-Semitic and an endorsement of violence, and stated that Jewish students were feeling 'acute distress' as a result of its publication (Rahman 2018). Another complaint was initiated by NSW Labor MP Greg Donnelly about a protest the Women's Collective staged against 'LifeChoice', an anti-abortion club affiliated with the University of Sydney Union – this complaint alleged that activists 'made faces', 'shook their backsides', 'exposed their chests' and gave LifeChoice members 'dirty looks' (Rushton 2018).

complaints about sexual violence, but that the same procedures are increasingly being used against activists themselves:

> I think that some of the reforms of these rules have now been used to persecute left-wing activists, so on a very personal level I have seen what they can be used for […] I generally don't think we should be putting that power in the hands of university administrators, just because there's so many loopholes in it.

Another student, Anika, told me that she felt she had narrowly avoided similar complaints being made against her. She later found out that her planned career in law may have been impacted by misconduct complaints:

> If you go through misconduct, when you apply to be admitted as a lawyer, they can look at that and strike you off […] I didn't know that at the time. As someone who's studying to become a lawyer, I just feel like I avoided something that could have jeopardised my career.[52]

These experiences point to the way in which seemingly neutral policies and procedures can be weaponised by anti-feminist actors to limit the power of organised feminist groups, a point I return to in Chapter 8. These formal rules were utilised as a means of reinforcing the informal rules that operate within universities, such as the norm that campus sexual violence should not be openly discussed. When students broke these informal rules they were subjected to backlash by means of disciplinary procedures, which had significant personal consequences for individual activists.

The question of whether student misconduct rules should be strengthened or challenged formed a point of disagreement amongst participants. Some students sought to advocate for stronger disciplinary measures for students who had sexually assaulted other students, and saw universities' use of these procedures as a sign of their commitment to tackling sexual violence. As Olivia put it, 'actually enforce it and police it […] expel students who do the wrong thing, instead of just letting them off with a warning'. On the other hand, some students (like Nat and Anika, above) also saw these same disciplinary procedures being used to punish activists and organisers for their political activity, expressing discomfort about the potential consequences of strengthening universities' ability to discipline and punish students. Some students, including Nat, also felt a principled opposition to punitive responses to sexual violence, suggesting that transformative justice responses offered a more promising basis for responses to harm: 'I just don't think that I can, in

[52] The Legal Profession Admission Board of NSW (2020, 31–32) states that applicants for admission to practice as a lawyer 'must provide relevant official reports *if you have ever been the subject of disciplinary action* in relation to your student conduct […] student conduct includes both academic conduct as well as general conduct (i.e. your personal behaviour)' (original emphasis).

good conscience, be a prison abolitionist […] but then also support this process within the structure of the university' (Nat).

The above discussion explored how student activists challenged, subverted and broke institutional rules to pursue their objectives in relation to campus sexual violence. My interviews revealed a range of tactics utilised by these activists, from working strategically within the rules (e.g. in university-run committees) to deplatforming and protesting, even when these activities contravened the university's formal rules such as student codes of conduct. However, my interviews also revealed the resilience of both formal and informal institutional rules in the face of these challenges, in part through the backlash that students faced. I suggested that this backlash can be thought of as a means of enforcement that acts to shut down challenges to the rules and reinforce the operation of informal rules in particular.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored the contradictions and limitations of universities' responses to sexual violence between 2015 and 2020, drawing on the insights of students who sought to challenge and transform these responses. These students succeeded in drawing national attention to the issue of campus sexual violence and galvanising a range of institutional actions. However, while they were proud of the differences they managed to make to certain university policies and procedures as well as the support they were able to provide to individual survivors, many of these activists expressed the overall sense that their major objectives had, at best, only been partially achieved. When I asked them to reflect on the big-picture changes that have occurred in recent years on an institutional level, almost every student activist I spoke to responded that 'nothing's changed'. Activists from UNSW, even though they felt positively about specific initiatives at their university, felt that these initiatives had not done enough to substantially shift an entrenched culture of misogyny. As Sophia put it, 'We've been talking about changing the culture for like, 50 years. And nothing's changed.' Similarly, students at USyd felt that the actions taken by their university had ultimately been ineffective, and that the most significant impact these actions had was not on the prevalence of sexual violence but on the reputation of their universities. Joyce summarised:

> What the fuck's changed […] the consent module is nothing, it doesn't do anything, it doesn't change behaviours, it's like all the rest of it, they've just saved face. They've just pushed through another scandal and yeah, nothing's changed.

This interview data therefore reveals the enduring power of the institutional rules, both formal and informal, that shape the dynamics of campus sexual violence, as well as the many difficulties that

arise when attempting to shift these deeply entrenched rules. In Chapter 8, I analyse this data through the lens of embedded institutionalism to understand the specific mechanisms that operate in this context to constrain the possibility of institutional change. I also consider, through the institutionalist concept of layering, how these institutional rules are embedded in a broader social and historical context that contributes to the difficulty of transforming them at a local level. Before doing so, the next brief chapter considers the function of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Change the Course* report, moving from the two campus case studies to the level of the Australian higher education sector as a whole.

Chapter 7 | Reports, public exposure, and the proliferation of institutional constraints

This short chapter examines the production of official reports about university sexual violence and the subsequent take-up of this issue into university bureaucracies to examine how, paradoxically, this take-up can create further limitations on the capacity of feminists to advocate for transformative responses to sexual violence. While the previous chapter focused on the institutional politics of sexual violence at two universities, this chapter explores sector-wide dynamics following the release of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Change the Course* report in August 2017, reflecting my theoretical commitment to widening the lens of analysis beyond the meso-level of institutions. The *Change the Course* report can be seen as a key achievement of student feminists who had laboured for decades to establish campus sexual violence as a real and urgent political issue, as is acknowledged in the foreword to the report (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 1). The release of this report was seen by many as a positive sign that universities were finally treating the issue of sexual violence with the seriousness it deserves. However, the actions taken by universities during the production of the report and in its wake created new challenges for students to contend with and, arguably, ultimately had a demobilising effect on student activism. This section thus focuses on the production of reports about university sexual violence and the subsequent growth of bureaucratic machinery around university responses to sexual violence as a case in point about the possibilities and pitfalls of using universities as sites of feminist political change in a neoliberal era. Examining the process through which the report was produced, the recommendations made by the AHRC and universities' responses to these recommendations, I conclude that the release of the report is best understood not as a huge step forward but as a moment in an ongoing process of struggle between university managers, staff and students, one that was mobilised opportunistically by university managers to further the appearance of progress and action in the absence of any transformative change.

i. Production of the report

Challenges began to arise for student activists during the report's production. As I outlined in detail in Chapter 5, when a similar project had been proposed in 2014 universities were reluctant to participate, and all but one (the Australian National University) had refused to take part (Stanton 2014). In 2016, the Australian Human Rights Centre, led by Professor Andrea Durbach, had initiated a project titled *Strengthening Australian University Responses to Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment*. As part of this project, Durbach approached the Australian Human Rights Commission to undertake a comprehensive national student survey on sexual violence.

Universities Australia then agreed to fund this survey and became closely involved in the project. The funding provided by Universities Australia (almost $1 million) afforded them significant influence within the project, with reports that one Vice Chancellor had been given direct input on the survey questions (Funnell 2016b). Universities Australia quickly began to refer to the project as the '*Respect. Now. Always.* survey' (Universities Australia 2016b) and to state that they had 'commissioned' the survey (Universities Australia 2021), despite the fact that the survey tool had largely been developed by the Australian Human Rights Centre (AHRCentre) and the Australian Human Rights Commission prior to Universities Australia joining the project. These attempts to rebrand the project and gain control over its direction represent a significant shift from resisting acknowledgement of sexual violence to the active co-option of the issue. The activists I interviewed were highly critical of Universities Australia's role in commandeering the AHRC's survey and rebranding it as their own initiative, describing *Respect. Now. Always.* as a carefully constructed 'PR campaign' (Charlotte, UNSW) designed to produce 'the illusion that they were taking action, and that they had integrity and cared about students' (Zoe, UNSW). Referring to the aesthetics used by universities in these campaigns, Anika reflected that universities are 'trying to toe a very fine line, between acknowledging student demands […] but on the other hand, how can we make that look cool, and still keep people coming in.'

While representatives from the National Union of Students and End Rape on Campus Australia were included in the steering committee for this project established by the AHRCentre, the committee was fraught with tensions between the Australian Human Rights Commission ('the Commission'), Universities Australia, student representatives and advocacy groups. For example, while Vice Chancellors were provided with embargoed copies of the report one week ahead of the launch and given time to prepare their responses, student representatives and advocacy groups were not; the Commission stated that the survey results should not be provided to 'third parties' prior to being made public (Truu and Chrysanthos 2017). Universities also initially refused to commit to releasing the individual reports that were to be provided to each institution, a stance that was eventually overturned following students' and advocates' criticisms about the lack of accountability and transparency that such a refusal displayed (Abraham and Ryan 2017; Bagshaw 2017). The experiences of feminist advocates during this process demonstrate how universities' managerial power was exercised during the production of the report through attempts to co-opt and control this process, constraining the scope for student input into and ownership over the project.

Another major point of tension arose around the report's methodology and the role of methodological expertise. Only a small proportion of the people in the Commission's working group were academics with specific expertise in conducting rigorous and sensitive research on gendered violence, foreshadowing the later marginalisation of academic experts in some university-level working groups (see Chapter 6.1). While the Australian Human Rights Centre at UNSW initially developed the national student survey in close collaboration with students, feminist and human rights academics and representatives from relevant community services, when the survey was taken over by the Australian Human Rights Commission and Universities Australia the composition of the working group shifted away from academic expertise. Significant controversy then emerged around elements of the survey's methodology, including the framing of questions around sexual assault (Fileborn 2017; Funnell 2016b). As a consequence of tensions between the Australian Human Rights Centre, the Commission and Universities Australia in the formulation of the survey, the Australian Human Rights Centre withdrew as chief co-investigator on the application for survey ethics approval, citing concerns about the framing of the survey questions, the influence of Universities Australia on the project and thus its integrity and independence. When the survey was released, there was significant disagreement around how accurately the statistics represented the real prevalence of sexual violence. Feminist advocates argued that due to flaws in the questionnaire, the figures would be an underestimation of the actual occurrence of sexual violence (Wahlquist 2017a; 2017b), whereas conservative commentators ridiculed the inclusion of acts such as 'inappropriate staring' in the category of sexual harassment and argued that the figures would therefore be inflated (see, e.g., Bolt 2017).

The production of the report thus raised deep and thorny questions about the role of data in political change. On the one hand, the data in the report affirmed what students had been claiming for decades – that substantial numbers of students experience sexual harassment and assault while studying at university, that very few of these students ever formally report their experiences, and that those who do report are often disappointed, frustrated or retraumatised by their university's response. On the other hand, the reduction of experiences of sexual violence to quantitative data[53] will always be fraught with problems. Looking at the global context of quantitative research on violence against women, Sally Engle Merry (2016, 45) argues that 'violence against women is a

[53] Though *Change the Course* also included qualitative data obtained through a separate instrument, it was the quantitative figures that were foregrounded in the report itself as well as media reporting. The qualitative instrument received relatively few submissions compared to the quantitative survey (1849 compared to 30,930) and for this reason was considered to be 'not necessarily representative of the Australian university student population as a whole', while the quantitative figures were considered by the AHRC to be nationally representative (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 22–24).

phenomenon that has moved from being the subject of political mobilization to a site of technical knowledge'. This movement towards technical knowledge has, Merry argues, generally excluded those who experience such violence in favour of professional 'experts', and produces knowledge that often fails to capture the nuance and specificity of lived experiences and their socio-political context. Merry's analysis reveals how the production of data about sexual violence may act to shore up managerial regimes by vesting managers with the power to define the scope of the problem and how it is to be counted. Implicit in the counting, Merry (2016, 45) reminds us, is always a *theory* about the problem, and 'each theory implies a particular mode of responding to the problem'. In this light, it is telling that the joint power-holders in this project – the Australian Human Rights Commission and Universities Australia – proposed a mode of response that was to be 'led by Vice Chancellors' (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 169) and to involve the expansion of universities' administrative powers surrounding sexual violence. Although the report did recommend a 'whole-of-organisation' approach that includes 'engagement and advice' from students (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 170), its focus on Vice Chancellors' leadership reflects and reinforces the hierarchies of power that exist in universities. In the next section, I will examine how the specific recommendations made in the report reveal the report's theory of change, and how this theory of change posed new challenges for student activists to contend with.

ii. Recommendations and universities' responses

The final report published by the Commission in August 2017 provided a list of nine recommendations for action. The recommendations called for 'swift and decisive action' (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 168) to be taken by universities, including:

- Developing a plan for addressing the drivers of sexual assault and harassment through evidence-based education programs and communications;
- Ensuring that reporting procedures and policies are effective, accessible and well-publicised;
- Providing specialist training for staff and students who are likely to receive disclosures of sexual violence;
- Auditing university counselling services to assess their capacity to meet demand;
- Repeating the national survey at three-year intervals. (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 168–86)

The report thus set out a clear set of priorities for universities to act upon, many of which aligned with the demands that student groups had been making for years prior. A number of universities also agreed to implement the recommendations made in the companion report produced by the

AHRCentre, *On Safe Ground* (Durbach and Keith 2017), which provided more detail in outlining a best-practice policy and procedure framework. However, as my interview data in Chapter 6 revealed, universities' responses to these recommendations were in many cases reactive, rushed and ineffective, suggesting that these recommendations were treated as a 'tick-the-box' list rather than as a basis for carefully planned and contextually appropriate initiatives.

This approach was reinforced by the auditing process carried out by the Australian Human Rights Commission, through which universities were asked to report on their progress to the Commission in December 2017 and again in August 2018. While this process was intended to produce a mechanism for transparency and oversight of universities' responses to the report, there were important flaws in the auditing process. The AHRC did not independently verify or investigate the lists of actions submitted by universities, and simply republished these lists on a website and in compiled 'snapshot' documents (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017b; 2018). As such, there was no attention given to whether or not these actions aligned with the specific guidance provided by the report. For example, while many universities reported that they had adopted the *Consent Matters* module[54] in response to the AHRC's recommendation for primary prevention, this module did not meet any of the five criteria for education programs set out in the *Change the Course* report.[55] The auditing process therefore provided an opportunity for universities to publicise how many actions they had taken, without any scrutiny of the effectiveness of these actions in achieving their stated goals.[56]

The AHRC's auditing process demonstrates how the bureaucratisation of the issue of sexual violence within universities creates a climate in which universities' actions may be motivated by an imperative to undertake *more*, but not necessarily more *effective*, actions. A good example of this is the press release put out by Universities Australia on the one-year anniversary of the *Change the Course* report, titled triumphantly '800 major strides forward and more to come'. This press release stated that:

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[54] TEQSA (2019, 7) reported in January 2019 that 26 universities (62% of all Australian universities) had rolled out the *Consent Matters* module to their students.

[55] These criteria stipulated that education programs should 'target all levels of the organisation', 'be based on best practice and research', 'be developed and delivered by individuals and/or organisations with expertise in sexual violence prevention', 'be developed in consultation with university students' and 'include measures for evaluating and refining the actions taken' (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 177).

[56] In some instances, student groups have conducted independent evaluations of their universities' progress on sexual violence. See, for example, *Broken Promises: An ANU Women's Department, ANUSA and PARSA Report into the State of SASH Progress at the ANU,* which gives detailed examples of how stated commitments made by the Australian National University were never translated into practice (ANU Women's Department, ANU Students' Association, and ANU Postgraduate and Research Students' Association 2021).

> Another 800 major actions and initiatives have been instigated by Australian universities over the past year to contribute to a society-wide push against sexual violence. (Universities Australia 2018b)

Such statements have the effect of closing down opportunities for political contention: one might ask, how could universities be doing a bad job when they have undertaken 800 major actions? This trend is expressive of what Merry (2016, 9) calls 'indicator culture', in which value is placed upon numerical data as indicators of compliance with particular standards. Merry (2016, 5) writes that 'beneath the "truth" of quantified knowledge, indicators are part of a regime of power based on the collection and analysis of data and their representation'. In this case, the collection of audit data by the AHRC allowed university managers to produce data that verified their own narratives of universities as proactive and committed to tackling sexual violence, relying on a quantified and hollowed-out conception of 'action' to do so.

The recommendations made in the report were also underpinned by a focus on 'leadership and governance' which dovetailed conveniently with universities' managerial approach to the issue of sexual violence. The AHRC identified 'core principles' to underpin universities' responses, arguing that 'it is important that action is led by Vice Chancellors' and that 'the message conveyed should be that these behaviours will not be tolerated' (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 169, 170).[57] While the intent of these core principles is to ensure a whole-of-institution response to sexual violence, this 'zero tolerance' messaging – as I argued above – is problematic in that it functions to conceal the flaws or limitations of universities' responses to sexual violence. Further, while the AHRC also acknowledged that statements by university leaders must be 'accompanied by a clear and transparent implementation of these recommendations' (Australian Human Rights Commission 2017a, 169), the AHRC did little to ensure the clarity or transparency of universities' actions, due to the insufficiency of the audit process. This lack of transparency was also reinforced by the absence of effective oversight from other regulatory bodies in the sector, such as the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). As researcher and former Campaign Director of THGAP Allison Henry (2019, 32) noted in 2019, 'in the absence of any coherent enforcement or assessment framework we are currently unable to make an assessment against […] good practice benchmarks'. Without such oversight, it became easier for universities to make grand statements about their 'major strides forward' with little scrutiny or accountability other than that provided

[57] This focus on the leadership of Vice Chancellors is in contrast to the recommendations in the AHRCentre's report *On Safe Ground*, which call for 'comprehensive student engagement' across the design, implementation and evaluation of policies and practices directed at addressing and preventing sexual violence (Durbach and Keith 2017, 118).

by the voices of student activists and advocacy groups, despite the lack of formal role they were afforded in the enforcement of the report's recommendations. This aligns with insights produced by feminist institutionalists as to the lack of enforcement that tends to accompany, and also to undermine, efforts at feminist institutional transformation (Chappell and Mackay 2017; Kenny 2013b).

iii. Reports as reputational management

Further examples make clear how reports can be used to 'clean up' the reputation of institutions and generate evidence that they are taking the issue very seriously. In 2020, the South Australian Independent Commissioner Against Corruption (ICAC) released findings that the former Vice Chancellor of the University of Adelaide, Peter Rathjen, had sexually harassed two staff members after a university function and had subsequently lied to the Chancellor when questioned about these claims (Siebert and Brice 2020). In response, the University of Adelaide engaged consultancy firm KPMG to produce a report titled *Towards a Safer and More Inclusive Culture* (KPMG 2021). As in *Change the Course*, the first recommendation of the KPMG report is to develop leadership capabilities to lead change, through processes of 'capability uplift' and 'Values and Behaviours' workshops for the Vice Chancellor's Executive (KPMG 2021, 58). Releasing this report, the University of Adelaide endorsed the report's recommendations, stating that 'the implementation of all recommendations from the report will be linked to the Vice-Chancellor's KPIs' (Ellis 2021). Speaking to the media, the chair of the university's ICAC Response Steering Committee further emphasised that the university 'asked KPMG Australia to go beyond the scope of what ICAC had recommended'. In this way, the commissioning of a report is used as evidence of the university's courage and transparency, despite the fact that there have been no updates provided to date on the implementation of these recommendations by the 'Transforming Culture' team tasked with this responsibility in the wake of these reports.

Similarly, after a wave of negative media attention surrounding the University of Sydney colleges in 2016, the Vice Chancellor and college leaders engaged Elizabeth Broderick & Co (which advertises itself as a 'boutique consultancy firm') to conduct an independent investigation into college culture; it was reported in *The Daily Telegraph* in 2016 that Broderick & Co were to be paid over $1 million for this project (Devine 2016). In the introduction to the overarching report that her organisation produced, Broderick stated that:

> The findings in this report should in no way reduce the confidence of the community in the residential colleges. Rather this and the individual Colleges' reports *serve as a record that*

> *the Colleges are genuinely committed to cultural renewal* and to ensuring that these institutions are places where all students can thrive. (Elizabeth Broderick & Co 2017, 4, emphasis added)

Once again, the first recommendation of the report was for 'strong and courageous leadership', alongside a commendation for these leaders for 'taking proactive action in advance of the report' (Elizabeth Broderick & Co 2017, 64, 63).

While the KPMG report was substantially more critical of the University of Adelaide than the Broderick & Co report was of the USyd colleges, both reports ultimately served a similar function in providing documentary evidence of these institutions' commitment to 'cultural renewal' (Elizabeth Broderick & Co 2017, 4) or building 'a stronger, more supportive culture' (Ellis 2021). In the words of Phipps and McDonnell (2021, 9), 'a report highlighting problems becomes their resolution'. As noted above, the involvement of consultancy firms in universities' responses to sexual violence can work to strengthen the practices of risk management and managerialism; the examples provided here demonstrate how this involvement can also work to legitimise universities' narratives about taking the issue 'very seriously' and being 'committed to change'. As the expertise of professional consultants becomes increasingly central to the measurement of universities' progress around sexual violence, the space for students' voices closes. At the same time, the issue of campus sexual violence becomes a lucrative site of accumulation for private consultancy bodies and research firms such as KPMG and Elizabeth Broderick & Co. While there are clear differences between these reports and the Australian Human Rights Commission's investigation, I am arguing that these reports were nevertheless mobilised in similar ways by universities, in a manner that shores up the rules, practices and narratives that constrain feminist student activism.

iv. Demobilisation

All in all, the recommendations made in the AHRC report and the specific nature of their uptake by universities created significant challenges for the ongoing mobilisation of student feminists. One of the participants, Ava, noted that while the report was a 'touchstone moment' for student activists, it created a split between activists who thought 'we should be tougher on the university, and those who thought the university was making progress'. Ava noted that universities' self-congratulatory statements were 'the challenging bit, because that's where you get activists sort of feeling cornered by the university, not wanting to appear belligerent'. In other words, those who remained critical of universities' actions following the report risked being perceived as unreasonable or not acting in good faith in a context where universities had successfully positioned themselves as benevolent, committed and proactive. As I argued above, the reports and the ensuing audit process provided an opportunity for universities to strengthen and refine their

institutional narratives about sexual violence, which had the simultaneous effect of closing down the space of feminist contention.

While the AHRC report generated significant publicity around sexual violence around the time of its release, student activists experienced difficulties in drawing the same level of attention to their own campaigns and demands in the wake of this report. Madeline Ward (2020a), 2018 Women's Officer at the University of Sydney, reflected in *Honi Soit*:

> In recent years, collectives have relied on the release of a report or event, such as the 2017 AHRC Change the Course report, to mobilise […] Campaigns are organised in reaction to these events, rather than sustained to build momentum and respond when they do occur.

This dynamic identified by Ward was reflected in my interviews with student feminists who have campaigned around sexual violence in more recent years and have faced challenges in finding effective tactics to sustain the momentum of this campaign. One student, Kim, acknowledged that 'it's been a bit difficult to do much without new information to go off', and suggested that the collective was waiting for a point when 'reviews come out, and surveys come out', to re-mobilise around the issue of sexual violence. This tactical impasse is produced by the problems I have identified in this and the previous chapter. As argued in the previous chapter, the media is most responsive to sensational events, including individual experiences of sexual violence and key milestones such as the release of major reports. The mundane spadework of ongoing campaigns is rarely treated as newsworthy – thus campaigns that rely on public outrage for leverage are likely to falter in these interim periods unless they can create their own sense of spectacle. As one of the participants, Anika, reflected: 'it's an unfortunate thing that something bad needs to happen for people to be mobilised around the issue of sexual violence, as opposed to the issue itself being something that moves people.' Secondly, some of the activists I spoke to suggested that 'the issue became tired' (Anika) and that the attention student campaigns had initially garnered, in the media, the student body and the public eye, had waned. It may be the case that universities' statements about the actions they had taken in response to the AHRC report successfully deflected attention away from the finer details of these actions, in doing so pacifying public outrage. Finally, after the release of the AHRC report and the creation of university-led committees, taskforces and working groups, universities' responses to sexual violence increasingly became enclosed within the opaque structures of the university bureaucracy, making it more difficult for students to gain information or leverage within these structures.

Conclusion

In launching the reports produced by the UNSW Australian Human Rights Centre (*On Safe Ground* and *Local Perspectives*), Andrea Durbach, then Director of the Centre, suggested that the progress made in regards to campus sexual violence is not always linear. She noted that while the release of these reports, along with *Change the Course*, was a significant milestone, it could equally signal:

> The beginning of a whole new layer of struggle against mindsets and structural barriers that may have opened in response to a massive disruptor (the release of the documentary, *The Hunting Ground* in Australia two years ago), only to slowly close when the push for change may ultimately be seen as counter to the preservation of key interests. (Durbach 2017)

My analysis affirms Durbach's view that the release of the AHRC report was not simply the beginning of a genuine commitment by universities to transform their responses to sexual violence. Rather, it was a moment in an ongoing process of political struggle between students, advocacy groups and university managers, as seen in contestations over the report's methodology, the nature and meaning of the data that was produced, and the shape of universities' responses to the report's recommendations. I have suggested here that in some respects universities benefitted substantially from this report, using the heightened media attention around its release as an opportunity to advance their narratives of progress. At the same time, these responses created tactical difficulties for student groups, who found the space for transformative change and political contestation narrowing. This section has thus analysed how what might appear as a huge step forward on the part of universities may in fact signify the production of further constraints on feminist activism, as universities moved to co-opt and control the issue of sexual violence. Looking back on universities' responses to the AHRC report in 2021, Durbach (2021) wrote that these responses 'while laudatory, are essentially reactive', and that 'while these reports led to several practical changes (necessary as they are), what is now called for is transformative change'. The next chapter returns more directly to the theoretical aspects of the thesis to consider how the layering of rules within the neoliberal university has constrained the possibility of transformative change, as well as how students exercise agency within this constrained context to challenge their universities' reactive responses to sexual violence.

Chapter 8 | Discussion: Struggles for power in the contemporary neoliberal university

> Perhaps the habits of the institutions are not revealed unless you come up against them.
> – Sara Ahmed, *On Being Included*

Introduction

Chapter 6 presented the qualitative data produced by my interviews with key activists involved in organising against sexual violence at two Australian universities and considered the effect of this activism in securing key changes at an institutional level. This empirical data revealed that contemporary student activists confront a challenging institutional climate, one with a range of barriers that contain and undermine the possibility of feminist transformation. These barriers included the aversion to risk that dominates institutional responses to sexual violence, the concentration of power in centralised managerial bodies, the narrow focus of universities on compliance obligations and the strategic use of rhetoric (such as statements about universities' 'zero tolerance' for sexual violence) to defuse political pressure. In short, students' sexual violence activism involved a continuous struggle for power within an institutional arena where students are afforded little formal power. In this context, student feminist campaigns against sexual violence had mixed successes: they were highly effective at raising the stakes and building public political consciousness around the issue of campus sexual violence, but far less successful at translating this momentum into the specific institutional changes sought by students (see Chapter 6.1 for an outline of these changes).

This chapter returns to the central research questions of this thesis, weaving together my historical analysis, empirical data and conceptual framework to address the two guiding research questions:

1. How are Australian universities' responses to sexual violence conditioned by the ongoing neoliberalisation of the Australian university sector?
2. How have student feminist organisers challenged and contested Australian universities' institutional responses to sexual violence since 2015, and how effective have their strategies been?

In doing so, I return to the theoretical questions posed earlier in this thesis; namely, how might more sustained attention to i) the macro-social context of institutions, and ii) social movements as collective actors within institutions, enable a more holistic understanding of institutional dynamics than theories that focus narrowly on the meso-level of institutions? I seek to demonstrate how paying closer attention to the political-economic context of the neoliberal university as well as to

grassroots feminist movements within the university has facilitated a more systematic understanding of the institutional politics of sexual violence, one that is able to account for the historical and material forces that both motivate and mitigate processes of institutional change.

In the first section of this chapter, I consider how the layering of newer rules over older ones within the neoliberal university has shaped the nature of universities' responses to sexual violence in the contemporary period, giving five examples of this. I argue that not only are these responses underpinned by the marketised and risk-averse nature of universities within a competitive, private market, they continue to be informed by gendered and racialised logics that have pervaded universities from their creation. In the second section of this chapter, I return to the sense of frustration and failure that emerged amongst the students I interviewed, considering how these moments of impasse might hold potential for an enhanced understanding of the entrenched relations of power within the neoliberal university. In this section, I seek to conceptualise the specific constraints the neoliberal university places upon oppositional political movements, following the work of institutionalist theorists Vivien Lowndes and Mark Roberts (2010) in considering three forms that these constraints take. In the third section, I turn to the question of agency, examining the strategies and tactics students deployed to pursue their aims in this constrained institutional setting and evaluating their success.

While Chapter 6 explored how student feminist collectives seek to transform the institutional structures of the university and identified key tactics and strategies used in this task, this chapter takes a critical distance from the perspectives of movement actors to consider the limitations and omissions of this activism. In this analysis, I start with Canadian sexual assault survivor and feminist researcher Mandi Gray's (2019, 199) provocation that 'there needs to be an acknowledgement that not all student and activist work around sexual assault is actually beneficial to those who experience sexual violence'. In Section 2, I argue that demands made by student feminist groups – particularly for the strengthening of misconduct and disciplinary procedures – risk the consolidation of neoliberal modes of governance and discipline and may pose a threat to feminist collectives themselves by expanding the opportunities for these procedures to be used to discipline and delimit student activism. In other words, playing by the rules of the neoliberal university may strengthen the force of these rules and inhibit students' ability to challenge or transform them, ultimately working against students' own objectives.

1. Layered rules in the contemporary neoliberal university

In Chapter 3, I revisited debates within the field of institutionalist theory around the question of institutional change, which has been conceptualised in different ways. Some historical institutionalists have focused their attention on the enduring features of institutions and the phenomenon of path dependency, whereby institutions tend to adhere to a particular trajectory once established (Campbell 2001; Capoccia 2015; Peters, Pierre, and King 2005). Other historical institutionalists, along with many feminist institutionalists, have instead pointed to processes of gradual and endogenous change that can nevertheless accumulate to transform institutions in the long run (Mackay, Kenny, and Chappell 2010; Mahoney and Thelen 2009). Ultimately, no one concept of institutional change can realistically capture the changes that take place in diverse institutions within vastly different social contexts; rather, institutionalist theorists need a toolbox of concepts that can be applied to the analysis of specific institutional settings and to account for the conditions in which particular modes of institutional change are likely to occur. In Chapter 4, analysing the development of the neoliberal university over time, I took up the work of Mahoney and Thelen (2009, 16–17) to argue that this development is best understood as a process of *layering* whereby newer rules are layered on top of older ones, in some cases strengthening older rules and in some cases contradicting or undermining them. In this section, drawing together this historical analysis with my contemporary empirical data, I consider how the layered rules operating within the contemporary neoliberal university – including past legacies and newer neoliberal reforms – have shaped and limited universities' responses to sexual violence.

i. Privatisation and marketisation

In line with the broader neoliberal theme of privatisation, the Australian federal government has gradually withdrawn public funding from Australian universities over recent decades, with the level of public funding falling from over 80% of universities' operating costs in 1989 to less than 40% now (Horne 2020). This shift has reconfigured the economic imperatives underpinning the governance of universities as well as the relationship between universities and students. With fee-paying students constituting an increasingly vital revenue base, universities are now firmly positioned within a market in which they must compete for student enrolments. This was facilitated by policy reforms in the 1980s, as outlined in Chapter 4, that introduced full-fee-paying places for international students, removed public subsidies for international students and lifted price controls on domestic postgraduate coursework places (Norton and Cherastidtham 2015, 35). Universities' reputation and brand image, in this policy climate, are of increasing importance to their financial security: writing in *The Conversation* in 2015, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor of

Melbourne's Victoria University described reputation as 'the major driver of distinction and competition for universities' (Bentley 2015).

This search for 'distinction', and the desire to stand out from other universities in a relatively homogenous field, underpins universities' aversion to negative publicity relating to sexual violence and their inaction on sexual violence over many decades, as demonstrated in my historical analysis in Chapter 5. However, these tendencies coexist uneasily with earlier norms governing the relationship between universities and students, particularly the principle of *in loco parentis*, which framed universities as having a degree of moral responsibility for students' wellbeing, safety and personal development (Forsyth 2012, 153). In other words, there is a tension between the privatisation of higher educational institutions, which increasingly positions students in narrow economic terms as consumers or clients, and the moral responsibilities expressed in the principle of *in loco parentis*. Seeking to leverage these contradictions, students have argued that universities have a duty of care to provide a safe environment (including one without pervasive sexual violence) for students (see, e.g., ANU Women's Department, ANU Students' Association, and ANU Postgraduate and Research Students' Association 2021, 24). This responsibility has also been affirmed by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA) (2020, 20), which promotes the principle that 'a safe environment should be provided for every member of the educational community'. This concept also continues to carry some legal weight. A 2020 case in the Australian Supreme Court found that John XXIII College at the Australian National University had breached its duty of care to a student who was sexually assaulted, on the grounds that the college failed to address ritualised drinking and did not properly handle the formal complaint that this student made after her assault (*SMA v John XXIII College (No 2)*).[58] Despite this, as Andrea Durbach and Kirsten Keith (2017, 48) observe, 'the Australian legal framework has been largely untested and undeveloped in relation to enforcing universities' obligations to their students within the context of responding to sexual assault and harassment'.

Clearly, the residual concept of universities having a duty of care towards students still holds some power in both a legal and normative sense. However, its force is weakened by the consumer relationship that now exists between universities and students because of neoliberal reforms which reshape the expectations of both university managers and students. As in the UK, Australian

[58] Political economist Melinda Cooper (2017, 254) has suggested that the phenomenon of students and their parents bringing private tort suits against universities for failing to protect students from sexual violence represents a peculiar blending of the two paradigms of university-as-company and university-as-surrogate-parent: '*in loco parentis*, it seems, now speaks the language of personal injury rather than institutional paternalism and disciplinary norms'.

students increasingly see themselves as consumers or 'paying customers' of higher education (Nixon, Scullion, and Hearn 2018, 933), as is evident in numerous cases brought against the University of Sydney in 2016 for breaching Australian Consumer Law after it announced changes to the Bachelor of Visual Arts degree (Joyner 2016b). In such a relationship, the responsibilities of both universities and students are narrowed to parameters that are primarily economic, reframing perceptions of the duties owed by universities to students. If universities are merely providing a good or service to paying consumers, their duty of care is much narrower in scope than the broader moral duty expressed in the principle of *in loco parentis*. Nevertheless, these parameters are continually being contested by student movements that seek to challenge this market subjectivity and emphasise the social and ethical obligations of universities, as seen in the case studies outlined in Chapter 6 in which student groups sought to hold their universities responsible for the prevalence of sexual violence.

ii. Managerialism and hierarchies of power

My analysis in Chapter 4 showed how as part of the 1980s Dawkins reforms, the Hawke government used the coercive threat of withdrawal of funding to implement more centralised governance structures within Australian universities. These reforms are popularly understood as the genesis of the 'new managerialism' within Australian higher education (see, e.g., Bessant 1992). This phenomenon is visible in the increasing separation between managerial roles (now often held by specialised managers with little or no prior experience working in higher education) and academic and professional roles, as well as widening disparities in pay between managerial and non-managerial staff, with Australian Vice Chancellors' salaries now averaging $1 million (and $1.2 million at Group of Eight universities, including UNSW and USyd) (Rowlands and Boden 2020). Managerialism is often conceptualised as a new phenomenon that has 'completely reversed' older structures of power in universities (Saunders 2006, 11), with university managers having 'replaced the professoriate as the university elite' (Thornton 2020). This conceptualisation relies on an understanding of universities pre-1980s as fundamentally democratic places, where the loyalty of managers 'was given to those below rather than those above them on the academic hierarchy' (Saunders 2006, 10) and collegiality was the governing principle.

While it is true that there were more mechanisms for academic staff (if not professional staff) to exercise some degree of collective governance before Dawkins, I argued in Chapter 4 that this conceptualisation of universities is a nostalgic one that glosses over the hierarchies of power that have always existed within universities. I concluded that in most instances, these hierarchies of power have not been mitigated but reinforced by neoliberal reforms. Women remain concentrated

in lower-paid professional roles as well as the lower rungs of the academic hierarchy (Strachan et al. 2013, 2016); and universities are still exclusionary places for many trans, gender-diverse and queer students (Waling and Roffee 2018, 670–72), especially those who also identify as Indigenous (Sullivan and Day 2021), as well as students from working class families (Bradley et al. 2008, 7) and refugee backgrounds (Lenette 2016). Neoliberal austerity measures have decreased the availability of student support services, which may heighten these barriers to access. At the same time, reforms to industrial relations legislation and diminishing public funding have further entrenched universities' reliance on casualised labour, producing a growing divide between casualised and permanent workers in universities (Thomas, Forsyth, and Bonnell 2020).

These hierarchies shape the institutional dynamics of sexual violence by determining whose experiences of sexual violence are treated as important within the university. This phenomenon is captured by Alison Phipps through the concept of 'reckoning up', by which complaints of sexual violence are assessed by universities to have different weight depending on the status of the parties involved and their value to the institution. As Phipps (2020b, 233) puts it, 'traditional hierarchies [of gender, race and class] intersect with newer evaluative technologies [such as publication metrics] to ensure that certain people are reckoned up differently'. As one of the participants in my study, Yasmine, noted, international students' experiences of sexual violence are rarely afforded the same level of public attention as those of domestic students (and particularly those of white, cis-gender women). At the same time, universities work to protect the reputations of those in power who are accused of sexual violence – for example, as I outlined in the previous chapter, that of the former Vice Chancellor of the University of Adelaide, Peter Rathjen. While Rathjen was Dean of Science at the University of Melbourne, the University found that he had committed serious sexual harassment against a postgraduate student. However, the University of Melbourne did not provide any information about this finding to the University of Adelaide, where Rathjen took up the position of Vice Chancellor and was subsequently found to have sexually harassed two colleagues (Buchan 2020; Siebert and Brice 2020). The intersection of the newer rules of managerialism and pre-existing hierarchies of power therefore shapes who is treated as valuable within the university and reinforces the ability of university managers to protect certain individuals and abandon others.

iii. Depoliticisation and commodification of higher education

Linked to the strengthening of managerialism is the depoliticisation and commodification of higher education. In contemporary universities, managers hold increasingly centralised power to determine the conditions of work and study, while staff and students have a diminished capacity

to challenge or resist managerial power. In Chapter 4, I examined how industrial relations reforms have over time weakened the capacity of campus trade unions to organise and take industrial action. I also explored the threats faced by student unions, most notably through the policy of Voluntary Student Unionism (VSU) that was enacted federally in 2005 and prohibited student unions from making union membership compulsory. As argued previously, the policy of VSU continues to haunt student unions from beyond the grave, having motivated a shift towards corporate sponsorships and other sources of private revenue that ultimately weaken the political autonomy and radicalism of student unions. These trends combine to produce a campus culture that is largely depoliticised, with students' participation in political movements constrained partly by the lack of resources and power afforded to student unions and partly through the subjectivity of the student-as-consumer that shapes many students' experience of tertiary study (Brooks, Byford, and Sela 2016).

The constrained political opportunities afforded to students were revealed in my interview data. In a context where student movements by and large lack the organising capacity and political power to influence policy-making through more direct forms of mobilisation, students have increasingly turned to mechanisms of consultation and collaboration offered by universities to pursue their aims. However, participants highlighted the challenges they faced when engaging in university-run consultation groups addressing the issue of campus sexual violence. In these groups, students found that their input and suggestions were rarely acted upon or taken seriously. In the view of one participant, Ava, these groups merely served to '[filter] down decisions that have already been made for student approval'. Another participant, Charlotte, noted that these discussions tended to be framed around institutional risk, which depoliticised the issue of sexual violence by drawing attention away from the experience of sexual violence as lived by student-survivors. Nevertheless, students continually sought to challenge this relationship, asserting their own expertise and demanding a role in decision-making. In this way, students have attempted to challenge the ideology of student-as-consumer and re-politicise the student body and its relationship to the university. This re-politicisation is important as it represents a key source of accountability for universities' responses to sexual violence. As my historical analysis has demonstrated, without agitation for transformative and effective institutional responses to sexual violence, universities' responses are likely to be shallower, more reactive and detached from the needs and experiences of student-survivors.

iv. Globalisation and international education

Australian universities have, since their inception, been imbricated in dynamics that transcend national borders. In Chapter 4, I outlined the history of Australian universities, demonstrating the political roles they have played since the early colonial period (in the case of the University of Sydney) as well as during war-time (in the case of the University of New South Wales). Imagined as vehicles for the promotion of state or national interests, universities have been incorporated into complex geopolitical relationships from the beginning. Despite this history, however, the role of Australian universities in the global political economy has shifted significantly over time. In particular, the gradual deregulation of international student fees from 1980 onwards, coupled with the withdrawal of public funding, has established a commercial industry for international education and motivated universities to enrol ever-increasing numbers of international students. As a result, the number of international students in Australia has almost doubled in the previous decade, from 226,140 in 2009 to 440,667 in 2019 (Ferguson and Spinks 2021).

At the same time, the trend of globalisation is layered on top of pre-existing racialised hierarchies within university settings. International students commonly experience hostile and racially discriminatory attitudes from domestic students (Barron 2006), social isolation (Rosenthal, Russell, and Thomson 2007) and racialised violence, with one Indian international student murdered on his way to work in Melbourne in 2010 (Mason 2010). International students also face particular barriers after experiencing sexual violence, including language barriers to reporting, difficulty accessing support services and fear of deportation if they speak out about their experiences (Chen 2018; Drevikovsky 2019). The visa rules imposed on international students, which curtail the number of hours they can work each week and require students to maintain continuous enrolment lest their visa be revoked, produce a state of precarity for international students that can compound the challenges they face after experiences of sexual violence. These racialised divides between domestic and international students also impact student activist spaces, which are rarely representative of international students. One participant, Yasmine, pointed to the lack of solidarity between international and domestic students in sexual violence campaigns: 'they've been left in the dark, even though they are a major part of our community'.

While universities increasingly seek to project an image of diversity and inclusiveness in order to attract international students (Pippert, Essenburg, and Matchett 2013; Scarritt 2019), my interview data revealed that universities' responses to sexual violence were often not designed to be accessible for international (or culturally and linguistically diverse) students. For example, in a working group meeting, Yasmine pointed out that the consent education provided by her

university was only available in English and should be translated into other languages, yet this suggestion was met with 'crickets'. International students have also spoken out in the media about the lack of support they have received from their universities following experiences of sexual violence. One survivor, Iris, recalls that when she made a complaint to the University of Sydney, their response was to terminate her lease in student accommodation, forcing her to move elsewhere to avoid contact with the student who had assaulted her (Drevikovsky 2019; see also Kale 2019). The lack of consideration afforded by universities to the emotional and psychological needs of international students accords with a view of international students primarily as 'human capital' (see, e.g., Deloitte Access Economics 2015, 47), only valued by the institution as fee-payers. This demonstrates that universities' self-styled images of diversity and inclusion have not, on the whole, been accompanied by effective efforts at addressing international students' experiences of sexual violence.

v. Gender mainstreaming and re-regulation

In Chapter 3, I suggested that neoliberalism in Australia has been marked by processes of re-regulation whereby declining public funding is often accompanied by increasing state regulation to ensure the efficient expenditure of this funding (Cahill and Konings 2017, 3). At the same time, these neoliberal shifts have taken place in an era of 'gender mainstreaming' in which there is increasing scrutiny of organisations' commitment to gender equality (usually measured through the numerical representation of women in various roles). These rules intersect to inform universities' responses to sexual violence. This intersection can be seen, to give one example, in the role that the AHRC report played, as I discussed in the previous chapter. The report's list of recommendations provided a yardstick by which to measure universities' progress on sexual violence and was used as such by regulatory bodies, including the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA). Following the publication of *Change the Course*, the Minister for Education and Training requested that universities provide information to TEQSA about the actions they had taken, which were compiled by TEQSA and published in a report to the Minister (TEQSA 2019). The mainstreaming of gender issues, combined with the increasing oversight of regulatory agencies over universities, created normative pressure for universities to adopt concrete and measurable initiatives to prevent and respond to sexual violence and to report on their progress in a transparent manner.

However, the actual substance of the initiatives taken by universities, as my data revealed, often fell short of the standards set by both key reports (such as *Change the Course* and *On Safe Ground*) and the expectations of students. In this instance, regulatory and compliance obligations stood in

tension with the managerial norm of risk aversion. Confronting the issue of sexual violence risks the exposure of harmful institutional practices and the prevalence of sexual violence, threatening to 'blemish' the progressive and inclusive brand image that universities promote (Phipps 2020a, 93). One of my participants, Anika, described this dynamic as follows: 'They're at this stage trying to toe a very fine line, between acknowledging student demands […] but on the other hand, how can we make that look cool, and still keep people coming in.' Further, expenditure within universities is increasingly governed by the logic of austerity, with limited resources allocated to the issue of campus sexual violence which lacks a clear return on investment. This context helps to make sense of the prioritisation of responses which are quicker, cheaper and more easily marketable to the public, such as Universities Australia's 'awareness-raising' campaign *Respect. Now. Always*. In the next section, I consider how these trends also motivate the co-option of feminist political aesthetics and rhetoric by universities, even when this is contradicted by the substance of their actions in relation to sexual violence.

Giving five examples, I have argued that universities' responses to sexual violence in the neoliberal era are shaped by the complex layering of newer rules (such as managerialism, privatisation and re-regulation) over older rules (such as gendered and racialised hierarchies of power and universities' duty of care to students). This layering produces numerous contradictions, both between newer and older rules and between newer rules themselves, and creates a challenging climate for student activists who seek compassionate and holistic responses to sexual violence. However, this does not mean that students are simply passive victims of these larger dynamics and changes imposed by universities and the state. After all, this thesis began from the observation that student feminists have successfully agitated to establish campus sexual violence as a national political issue. In the remainder of this chapter, I turn to my second research question: how have student feminist organisers challenged and contested Australian universities' institutional responses to sexual violence since 2015, and how effective have their strategies been? In the next section I explore how these layered rules act to constrain student sexual violence organising in the neoliberal university, and in the final section I reflect on the strategies and tactics deployed by students to navigate and challenge these constraints.

2. Institutional constraints on sexual violence activism

As I outlined in the conclusion to Chapter 6, the overall feeling of many student activists was one of frustration and despair and a sense that overall, 'nothing has changed'. In this section, I return to this feeling of frustration to examine the inertia of institutional rules; that is, the various ways in which efforts to transform universities from below are actively constrained by certain structural

features of the institution and its broader social context. Even though student movements against sexual violence fell short of achieving their major aims, there is nevertheless value in attending to these partial failures of agency. Efforts to transform institutions are often processes of trial and error, and the latter can be as instructive as the former. Thinking about how, why and where these movements were constrained by particular features of their institutional context provides the basis for the insights offered in the next chapter as to how student movements may better navigate these constraints.

This section uses the concept of institutional constraints, as developed in the New and Feminist Institutionalism (NI and FI) literatures (Lowndes and Roberts 2010, 52), to explain why patterns in how the neoliberal university responds to sexual violence are so 'sticky' or difficult to change. Analysis of institutional constraints aligns with the broader focus, within NI and FI, on how institutions shape and structure human behaviour and the interest in specifying the 'constraining and bounding' effects that institutions have on the behaviour of actors (Mackay 2011, 192). In this analysis, I draw on the work of Vivien Lowndes and Mark Roberts, who argue that institutional constraints generally take three interrelated forms: rules, practices and narratives. They also note that:

> The real agenda for institutionalism is to better understand how these distinctive modes of constraint interrelate in practice, and to establish what this means for ongoing processes of institutional change and prospects for institutional resistance and reform. (Lowndes and Roberts 2010, 50)

I move through these three modes of constraint, considering how they operate within the neoliberal university, before considering how they relate to one another.

i. Rules

The first mode of institutional constraint identified by Lowndes and Roberts is *rules*. Rules are constraints that are 'formally constructed and recorded', and sanctioned by 'coercive action through formal rewards and punishments' (Lowndes and Roberts 2010, 52–53). Formal rules are therefore generally the most readily identifiable form of institutional constraint. The first set of rules that significantly constraints student activism is the formalised distribution of power in the neoliberal university, often referred to as ***managerialism***. Above, I described how managerial practices have been implemented in universities in the neoliberal era, in many cases strengthening pre-existing hierarchies of power. I argued that by positioning students as consumers, managerialism structures the logic of their exclusion from institutional decision-making power, as seen in the experience of the participants in university-run sexual violence working groups. The

implementation of 'streamlined decision-making processes' as recommended in the Dawkins review (1987, 52) has consolidated the power of university managers and narrowed the role of students in university decision-making. 'Student consultation' becomes a performative task, garnished with buzzwords like 'Listening, Challenging, Supporting' (UNSW 2021a), that does not offer any substantive or robust mechanisms for democratic participation by students.

While the rules of managerialism constrain the opportunity for students to participate in governance processes, these constraints also produce certain forms of political subjectivity amongst students. In his study of student politics under managerial governance regimes at the University of Cape Town, Thierry M. Luescher (2008, 149) found that managerialism channelled 'activist momentum into formal processes that could enhance the stability and legitimacy of the University's regime of governance'. Participation in the rules and processes of managerialism can thus shape activist practices by rewarding what Luescher (2008, 151, 157) calls an 'entrepreneurial' style of student activism, characterised by depoliticised demands for students to receive more 'value for money' and by 'SRCs that came to conceive of themselves in more business-like terms'. While I have previously analysed the political shifts in student unions resulting from Voluntary Student Unionism (see Chapter 4.2), the data from my interviews also highlighted the ways in which these shifts impact the political strategies adopted by contemporary feminist collectives. The UNSW SRC is situated within the student organisation Arc, which proclaims its 'strong, multifaceted and cooperative relationship with UNSW'; correspondingly, the UNSW Women's Collective was focused on collaboration with university decision-makers and working towards 'top-down' change, in the words of one participant. In contrast, the USyd SRC – which maintains organisational autonomy both from the university, and from commercial service provision – supported a culture of student radicalism in which feminist activists were willing to partake in riskier actions that contravened formal and informal institutional rules. The latter strategy was also underpinned, as I noted in Chapter 6, by an explicit critique of managerial power and a conviction that university managers were not allies to students.

The second set of rules that constrain student activists within the neoliberal university are those codified within ***misconduct and disciplinary policies***. These policies have historically been developed with the goal of managing plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct, yet there has been a push in recent years to incorporate bullying, harassment and anti-discrimination clauses into these policies to symbolise universities' putative commitment to the values of diversity and inclusion. Feminist activists have also sought to utilise these policies as mechanisms of redress

for people who have experienced sexual assault and sexual harassment in university settings. In doing so, they have pointed to the leniency with which universities have historically treated complaints of sexual violence. For example, a report released by UNSW indicates that out of 304 complaints of sexual misconduct made to the university between 2017 and 2020, only one resulted in 'disciplinary action', while four resulted in 'formal warnings', one in a formal reprimand, reflection essay and e-learning module, one in a 'written apology', and one suspension for making vexatious reports (UNSW Sydney 2020a, 39–51). Mirroring debates in the context of the criminal justice system about the value of retributive justice, advocates have suggested that these lenient responses send the message that sexual violence is not a serious issue, minimise the experiences of those who have been subject to violence and fail to deter sexual violence from occurring in the future (Cama and Durbach 2017, 27–28).[59] Universities' reluctance to utilise these procedures also reflects an avoidance of the legal risk posed by students who have been subject to disciplinary action, who may sue their universities for a perceived failure to uphold principles of procedural fairness (Durbach and Keith 2017, 33; *X v University of Western Sydney* 2014).

However, misconduct policies and procedures have increasingly been mobilised to discipline student activists. This is evident in proposed changes to the formal rules; in 2018, the UNSW Vice Chancellor's office proposed to add the following clause to the Student Code of Conduct:

> Students are expected to […] express political and religious views in a lawful manner which do not […] unreasonably impinge on university business or the reasonable use of university resources.[60]

While this proposal was defeated after pushback from students and staff, it nevertheless indicates an effort to contain and discipline forms of student activism that seek to disrupt 'business as usual'. Clauses in the University of Sydney's *Student Discipline Rule* (2016, 2.1) similarly define misconduct as conduct by a student that 'prejudices the good order and government [or] the good name or academic standing of the University'. There have been a number of recent complaints made at the University of Sydney against feminist activists including (as I discussed in Chapter 6) 2018 Women's Officer Madeline Ward, who was suspended for a semester as a result of the university's investigation into her political activity. Students have expressed concern about the broad wording

[59] Students have also made thoughtful critiques of the way in which advocating for harsher punishments for students who have perpetrated sexual violence is in tension with the abolitionist politics that many campus feminists espouse: 'When the broad majority of the left considers processes of community accountability and restorative justice to be best practice in achieving justice for survivors of sexual assault, it seems odd that we would suddenly revert to more punitive measures under the structure of the University itself' (Ward 2020).

[60] Proposal circulated internally to students and staff. This proposal was put forward less than two weeks after students from the group 'Fossil Free UNSW' shut down the Chancellery building by blockading its exits, demanding that the university divest from fossil fuel companies (Holbrook 2017).

of these clauses, and thus the difficulty of applying them fairly and neutrally. In this regard, USyd student Lara Sonnenschein argues that 'opaque wording facilitates an easier route for vexatious and politicised complaints to be levelled at students' (Sonnenschein 2019). In a context marked by heightened backlash to feminist activism, these putatively gender-neutral rules can thus have a gendered effect of suppressing feminist agitation due to the potential mobilisation of these rules by actors opposed to feminist politics.

The formal rules laid out in student misconduct policies are also reinforced by the informal practices of policing and surveillance that further stifle students' ability to politically organise on campus. Again, these practices are more visible – or at least more widely documented – at USyd than at UNSW. Investigations conducted by student journalists at USyd have revealed the increasing presence of plain-clothes police officers on campus, the surveillance of student and staff social media posts by police, the provision of security briefings from police to the university in the lead-up to student- and staff-led protests, and the use of force and violence by police to break up protests (Guo, O'Brien, and Hurst 2021). Neither of these phenomena – the use of misconduct procedures to discipline student activists, or the collaboration between university managements and police – are new. Similar events took place in the 1960s and 1970s, ending an earlier period of *de facto* exclusion of police from university campuses (Forsyth 2014a, 75; Marks 2018, 143). Yet these phenomena take on new contours in the context of the neoliberal university, contributing to the production of a depoliticised campus space in which students find themselves with declining political agency and fewer outlets for political expression.

ii. Practices

The second way in which institutional constraints can operate is through informal *practices* (Lowndes and Roberts 2010, 52–53). Unlike formal rules which are written down and codified, practices are 'demonstrated through conduct', sanctioned by 'displays of disapproval, social isolation, and threats of violence' (Lowndes and Roberts 2010, 52-53). The first practice that the neoliberal university deploys to depoliticise the issue of sexual violence is ***risk management***. The practice of risk management is underpinned by a shift towards marketised competition between universities, and thus an increased focus on marketing and branding. Literature on university branding suggests that the construction of the 'university brand' is a critical factor in differentiating and positioning universities within a higher education market, with increased enrolments considered as a return on investment in marketing (Drori, Delmestri, and Oberg 2013; Hemsley-Brown et al. 2016). This is perhaps particularly the case in Australia, given the greater homogeneity of higher education institutions after the creation of the Unified National System and thus the

need for individual universities to attract student enrolments in a relatively homogeneous market. The University of Melbourne 'Brand Hub' website, for example, describes the university brand as 'arguably our greatest asset' (University of Melbourne 2020). Indeed, these 'brand assets' are the products of significant financial investment: total spending on marketing by Australian universities rose by 23% between 2008 and 2013 (Favaloro 2015), with individual universities now spending in excess of $20 million per annum on advertising, promotions and marketing (Balogh 2017). Growing awareness of sexual violence within university settings is perceived as a potential blemish on the university's reputation and thus a depreciation in the value of the university's 'greatest asset'. If the university brand is what drives future enrolments, then threats to the university's public image are translated into threats to the university's economic security, hence a financial risk that must be managed away.

Risk management thus constitutes a governing practice in the institutional management of sexual violence. This practice can take multiple forms. First, it can manifest as silence and/or denial regarding campus sexual violence, as is seen in the history I detailed in Chapter 5. However, in more recent years, the practice of risk management has been expressed through attempts to stifle sexual violence activism and to mitigate the reputational risk that this activism poses to the institution. Students noted the discursive predominance of the concept of risk in some institutional discussions of sexual violence. For example, Charlotte described attending a sexual violence working group meeting as a 'big long table full of people, and everyone was talking about risk'. Risk management was also demonstrated in attempts to threaten and censor students who spoke openly about the prevalence of sexual violence. For example, after speaking out in the media about her university's handling of sexual violence complaints, Zoe was cautioned by members of the university administration who told her that 'it wasn't in [her] best interests, or the best interest of the students of the university, to be doing that'. There have also been incidents of suppression of student media: in 2017, Macquarie University blocked an article from publication in the student magazine, *Grapeshot*, that was critical of the university's handling of sexual assault (Langford 2017b). Finally, risk management practices can also take more subtle bureaucratic forms, such as the mobilisation of institutional ethics review procedures to reshape and narrow the scope of research that is critical of institutions' handling of sexual violence and thus mitigate reputational and legal risks, as discussed in Chapter 2.4.

In her text *Campus Sex, Campus Security*, queer theorist Jennifer Doyle examines these processes of institutional risk management and the investment of universities in promising and producing a

campus that 'feels safe' through practices of securitisation and bureaucratisation. To do this, she argues, the university 'must establish a procedure and manage its risk' (Doyle 2015, 25, 28). In doing so, Australian universities increasingly draw on the network of private consultancy firms to quantify and mitigate potential risks. For example, a publication by the Australian Deloitte Risk Advisory Group (2017) argues that 'universities need to continue building student confidence while enabling their organisational leaders to make *risk-based decisions* that prevent and respond to sexual assault' (emphasis added). Engaging with consultancy firms informs a specific conception of risk amongst university managers, foregrounding not the risk to students of experiencing harm or trauma but the reputational and legal risks to the university. In this way, these risk management practices stand at odds with the interests of feminists and survivors of sexual violence by discouraging open and frank discussion about the issue of sexual violence (a perceived source of reputational risk), minimising accountability, and prioritising actions that mitigate *institutional* risks over those that might prevent the emotional, psychological and physical risks to students within university environments.

The second major practice by university administrators that constrains sexual violence activism is the ***co-option*** of the rhetoric of safety and care often drawn upon by students. In regard to sexual violence, this trend is evident in the naming of university working groups on sexual violence ('Safer Communities') as well as public-facing campaigns run by universities, such as Universities Australia's *Respect. Now. Always.* initiative (see Chapter 7 for a more detailed discussion of universities' use of this language). While the incorporation of vaguely feminist rhetoric ('respect', 'safety') into university branding could be read as a symptom of the mainstreaming of feminist politics, my interview data revealed that this rhetoric was generally not accompanied by actions that substantively contributed to a culture of safety or respect. Students I interviewed pointed to the investment of universities in producing 'the illusion that they were taking action, and that they had integrity and cared about students' (Zoe), characterising the *Respect. Now. Always.* initiative in particular as a carefully constructed 'PR campaign' (Charlotte). The practice of co-option is underpinned by the neoliberal marketisation of the higher education sector, which incentivises universities to position themselves as friendly, safe and pro-feminist places. At the same time, co-option closes down the political space available for feminist activism. When the university presents itself as a progressive, feminist institution, the role of grassroots feminist movements may come to seem superfluous.

In her book *On Being Included* (2012, 52), queer theorist Sara Ahmed analyses the adoption of the language of diversity by higher education institutions in the UK, exploring the paradox between:

> On the one hand, the routine uses of the language of diversity by institutions and, on the other, the experience of many practitioners of an institutional resistance to diversity becoming routine.

She concludes that the language of diversity 'can allow organisations to retain their good idea of themselves', while at the same time containing criticisms about the material ways in which the university does *not* support diversity (Ahmed 2012, 71). This helps to shed light on how the co-option of feminist rhetoric by universities, while it might appear as a step in the right direction, is in fact a mode of institutional constraint on sexual violence activism. In the same way that 'institutional whiteness can be reproduced through the logic of diversity' (Ahmed 2012, 44), cultures of sexual violence can be reproduced and reinforced by the co-option of feminist rhetoric by universities. The specific narratives that are produced through the practice of co-option will be explored in the next section.

iii. Narratives

The third and final mode of institutional constraint identified by Lowndes and Roberts is narratives. Narratives are constraints that are 'expressed through the spoken word' (and, I would add, the written word, as well as the imagery included in marketing initiatives that represent the institution in certain ways) (Lowndes and Roberts 2010, 52). Unlike the codified sanctions for breaches of the formal rules or the disapprobation that shores up institutional practices, narratives are sanctioned by 'incomprehension and ridicule [or] attempts to undermine the reputation and credibility of non-conformists' (Lowndes and Roberts 2010, 53).

The first set of institutional narratives that acts to constrain sexual violence activism is constituted by universities' ***articulated commitments*** to tackling sexual violence. As discussed above, these narratives are produced through the practice of co-opting feminist rhetoric to align the institution with progressive values. These narratives are evident within universities' websites, published statements and comments to media about the issue of campus sexual violence. These documents frequently include affirmations that universities take the issue of sexual violence 'very seriously' (*7.30 Report* 2017), have 'zero tolerance' for instances of sexual violence (Jacobs 2016), are 'committed to the safety of all students' (UNSW 2021b) and 'want every student to be supported through their trauma and recovery' (Universities Australia 2018a). As demonstrated in both my historical analysis and empirical data, these narratives are deeply at odds with the actual practices of universities in regard to sexual violence. Universities' failures to enact timely, effective and

transformative responses to sexual violence contradict claims that they take the issue 'very seriously', are genuinely committed to student safety or have 'zero tolerance' for sexual violence.

Returning to Ahmed, her discussion of diversity provides further tools for understanding the function of these narratives. She describes such statements as 'institutional speech acts' that call into being a particular vision of the institution. While these speech acts are 'read as if they are performative' – that is, as though they commit the university to a course of action – in reality they are non-performative: they 'do not do what they say they do' (Ahmed 2006, 104). In other words, stating that the university takes the issue of sexual violence very seriously does not, in itself, bring into being an environment in which sexual violence is actually taken seriously – there is a gap between 'the issuing of the utterance [and] the performing of an action' (Ahmed 2012, 54). Therefore, the primary function that these institutional speech acts perform is to create the appearance of action to appease public concern or outrage. These narratives align with the practice of risk management, allowing universities to control the narrative around sexual violence and undermine the credibility of counter-narratives that critique existing institutional practices.

These narratives also play a secondary function in narrowing the space of political contention. My interviews revealed the difficulties that student activists experienced in trying to challenge the actions that were taken by universities around the time of the AHRC survey – for example, the purchase and roll-out of the flawed *Consent Matters* module at USyd. Students pointed out that once this module was in place, it became 'difficult to justify spending more money into researching something new' (Ava). Maya summarised the university's position as, 'we've got this and we're not changing this'. In the face of universities' self-congratulatory statements about having made 'significant progress' in relation to sexual violence (The University of Sydney 2018), students' demands for improving or replacing these initiatives can appear as the complaints of 'annoying, whiny students that are just yelling for the sake of it' (Emily). Focus is thus shifted away from the concrete demands of students, and towards the self-reinforcing claims made by university managers. The logic can be summarised as follows: 'If we are already doing a good job, why change what we are doing?'

The second narrative constraining student activism is one that identifies a ***free speech crisis*** as existing at Australian universities. While concerns around academic freedom have significant historical precedent (see, e.g., Forsyth 2014b), a distinct wave of outcry about the supposed limitations that left-wing student activists impose on freedom of speech emerged around 2018, in

the wake of the USyd Women's Collective's protest against Bettina Arndt (Bolton 2019). In this instance, the narrative was put forward not by university managers but by politicians, the media and public figures like Arndt herself. In the media, Arndt characterised the student feminists that attempted to deplatform her as 'free speech bullies' (Merritt 2018), while federal Education Minister Dan Tehan followed by commenting that free speech at universities is 'under threat' (Lesh 2018) and announcing an independent review of the status of freedom of speech in Australian universities (Tehan 2018). Arndt further proposed that in order to guarantee freedom of speech, universities required a 'big stick' to work with (Merritt 2018), demonstrating the way in which claims of a 'free speech crisis' were mobilised to justify further restrictions on student activism through the construction of this activism as a form of censorship or repression. These debates have continued, with the subsequent Education Minister, Alan Tudge, suggesting in 2021 that funding should be cut for student unions that 'attempt to stop the airing of views they oppose on campus' (Ferguson 2021).

The review commissioned by Tehan and led by former Chief Justice of the High Court, Robert French, was delivered in March 2019. The report concluded that:

> Reported incidents in Australia in recent times do not establish a systemic pattern of action by higher education providers or student representative bodies, adverse to freedom of speech or intellectual inquiry in the higher education sector. (French 2019, 217)

Many Vice Chancellors, as well as Universities Australia, took this opportunity to celebrate the report and reiterate their position that there is 'no free speech crisis' at Australian universities (Spence 2019; Universities Australia 2019b; UNSW 2019). The position of university managers is expressive of an idealised vision of the university as a 'marketplace of ideas', in the words of University of Sydney Vice Chancellor Michael Spence (2018). This vision, dovetailing with neoliberal imaginaries of the market as a sphere of free exchange and equality, glosses over existing hierarchies of knowledge and power within the institution, as well as the significant constraints students face in regard to political organising and the expression of dissent.

The report, however, highlighted significant issues with student misconduct policies. Analysing 46 student conduct policies across 38 institutions, the authors of the report expressed concern over the fact that a number of these policies 'involve the use of broad language capable of a range of applications affecting expressive conduct depending upon administrative discretions and evaluation' and concluded that these policies were 'capable of impinging on freedom of expression' (French 2019, 153, 217). These findings align with my analysis, above, of misconduct policies as a

form of rule-based constraints that act to limit political activism on university campuses. University managers omitted any acknowledgement of this finding of the report in their enthusiastic proclamations that there is 'no free speech crisis' on their campuses. This illuminates how universities' narratives – in this case, the narrative of universities as 'a place where people are free to express themselves and a place where people are also free to protest or disagree' (Spence 2019) – can operate to conceal both rule-based and practice-based constraints on student activism.

There is, therefore, a dynamic interaction between the three different forms of institutional constraint that I have discussed in this section. *Formal rules* – for example, the codified centralisation of managerial power – can be reinforced by informal practices such as that of risk management, which seeks to protect and consolidate this power by insulating it from potential threats. *Practices*, for example the co-option of feminist rhetoric, can generate particular narratives about what the university is and what it stands for. However, these *narratives* do not always align with the rules and practices of the university, as seen in the previous chapter. In this way, narratives can play an important role in concealing or distorting institutional rules and practices and shutting down critique. Taken together, this network of constraints constitutes a hostile climate for feminist organising. By situating these constraints within the broader political-economic context of the neoliberalisation of Australian higher education, I have sought to illuminate the material conditions in which these constraints came about and why they are so durable. These various modes of constraint, then, help to explain why universities' modes of response to sexual violence are so 'sticky' – efforts to transform these responses are frequently neutralised through the rules, practices and narratives I have outlined above.

3. Tactics, strategies and collective agency

Despite the significant constraints and barriers to student organising within the neoliberal university, student movements persistently seek to challenge and transform the institutional arena in which they act. The empirical data I presented in Chapter 6 provided a snapshot of the strategies and tactics that student feminist collectives engaged in to challenge their universities' responses to sexual violence. These included the deplatforming of right-wing speakers who denied the prevalence of sexual violence at universities, protest and direct action, lobbying, and the use of the media to generate public outrage and reputational damage. In this section, I contextualise these tactics by considering their relationship to the legacies of feminist politics I explored in Chapter 5. I argue that the strategies adopted by campus feminist groups are the product of a relationship of ambivalence between feminists and institutions, in which institutions are at once central to achieving feminist aims but also sites of risk that threaten co-optation, compromise and

neutralisation. This analysis therefore contributes to an understanding of the relationship between actors and institutions. Foregrounding the agency offered to students through collective social movements helps us to examine the mechanics of how these actors might incite institutional change even in hostile conditions by challenging, subverting or breaking the institutional 'rules of the game'.

i. Lobbying and consultation

In Chapter 6, I explored students' bids for inclusion within institutional decision-making processes, which resulted in the creation of university-run working groups or committees dedicated to the issue of sexual violence. Students attempted to use their positions on these committees to challenge the deficiencies in their universities' responses to sexual violence, including flawed reporting procedures, ineffective primary prevention initiatives and inadequate policy frameworks. In some cases, particularly at UNSW, students identified and worked with key allies within the university, holding the belief that change 'is not going to happen from the ground up, it's got to come from the top down' (Olivia). Students at UNSW generally shared a conviction that there were key decision-makers at their university who were 'pretty on board' with their concerns (Olivia) and were actively working to advance students' demands within the university bureaucracy. This lobbying strategy also often involved putting forward a moral case about the responsibility of the university to address sexual violence, sometimes couching these demands in the language of institutional reputation. For example, the open letter published in 2016 by the UNSW Women's Collective stated that 'ours will not be a world-class university until it enacts a world-class response to sexual violence on campus', highlighting the deficiencies of UNSW's responses as compared to those of prestigious international universities such as Harvard, Yale and the University of British Columbia (UNSW Women's Collective 2016).

However, there were clear shortcomings in this strategy. By working within the institutional 'rules of the game' – for example, in consultation groups that were overseen by university executives, who set the Terms of Reference, chaired the meetings and ultimately retained the power to decide what actions were taken – student activists had little agency to further their objectives. While participation within working groups did lead to some small wins, including tangible improvements to a new online reporting portal for sexual misconduct at UNSW, students' overall sense was that these working groups were performative, seeking to create the appearance of consultation and inclusivity instead of ceding any real power to students. This sense of frustration points to the relations of power within these working groups, showing how they represent sites in which managerial power is ultimately not challenged but rather maintained or even strengthened.

The emphasis of some feminist groups on the tactic of lobbying can be understood as the product of the historical shift I described, in Chapter 5 and above, towards a liberal mode of feminist politics concentrated on achieving institutional reform 'from within'. The main danger of this tactic is that playing within the institutional rules of the game can narrow the tactical options available to feminists, who may abandon more antagonistic tactics to maintain their position within institutional power structures. This was reflected by my participant Charlotte, who noted that after a tactical shift in the UNSW Women's Collective from more antagonistic and 'angry' forms of action to cooperation with university initiatives, there was a marked decline in the collective's outward-facing campaigning work. Some student activists became reticent to publicly criticise their university, fearing that doing so might jeopardise their position on committees and their relationships with decision-makers.

Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2000, 108), in her analysis of the inception of Women's Studies in Australian universities, suggests that as a result of this turn towards institutions, 'white feminist investment in institutional credibility took precedence over an action agenda'. Moreton Robinson's identification of this tactic within the specific legacy of *white* feminist politics reminds us that the 'institutional credibility' on which lobbying and negotiation often depends is not equally available to all. My participant Yasmine, a Muslim woman, suggested that she was not afforded the same credibility on university working groups as 'nice, pretty Georgina with her long hair and her Ralph Lauren polo'. Perhaps, then, there is a lesson to be learnt from the history of feminist's engagement with mainstream social institutions. While this strategy of 'unobtrusive mobilisation' (Katzenstein 1990) can in certain circumstances contribute to the achievement of important institutional reforms, it can also threaten to demobilise movements and to uphold unequal power dynamics that feminists seek to challenge, including those of race. Engagement with these consultative mechanisms requires a careful analysis of the risks and potential benefits of this strategy and is likely to be most effective when paired with other forms of pressure on university administrations.

ii. Direct action and mobilisation

Students also engaged in direct actions, protests and other forms of public mobilisation to raise public awareness about the issue of sexual violence and create pressure on their institutions to act. These events, such as the annual National Day of Action against campus sexual violence that has been held every August since the release of *Change the Course* in 2016, perform multiple functions. First, they create an important space for collectivity and solidarity. In campaigns that can otherwise be fairly isolating for small groups of campus feminists, these events – often with turnouts in the

thousands – demonstrate the strength of public support behind student-led campaigns. This is perhaps particularly important in the context of the neoliberal university, in which, as I noted above, students are increasingly atomised. In this way, the collective mobilisation of students in support of campaigns against sexual violence subverts the expectation for students to be passive, apolitical consumers of higher education. Secondly, these events often platform student-survivors and allow space for the expression of personal experiences of sexual violence and the harmful impacts of universities' responses. These protests are thus often intensely emotional events, cultivating space for rage, trauma and grief to be expressed. Participants also suggested that these events play an important role in sustaining campaigns, with feelings of 'elation and empowerment' (Ava) providing a welcome contrast to the difficult and emotionally draining work carried out by student organisers. Student-led protests against sexual violence also frequently garner significant media coverage (see, e.g., Baker 2017; Cormack 2016; Dias 2018), which suggests that these events have played an important role in drawing public attention to this issue.

Through these events, contemporary student feminist organisers draw on and continue the legacy of campus feminist politics laid out in Chapter 5. The cultural resonance of these protests with long-standing anti-rape traditions such as Reclaim the Night marches (held yearly since 1978) contributes to the public attention they receive, creating associations between contemporary movements against sexual violence and other traditions in the mainstream Australian feminist imaginary. As I argued in Chapter 5, it was also significant that these mobilisations started to take place against the backdrop of the #MeToo movement as well as the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sex Abuse (2013–2017), both of which generated increased awareness of the role that institutions and organisations can play in fostering the conditions for sexual violence. Yet like the #MeToo movement, student organisers found that the momentum and public support for these campaigns did not straightforwardly change institutional conditions. As Rachel Loney-Howes and Bianca Fileborn (2019, 336) write in regard to #MeToo, 'consciousness-raising alone does not equate to social, cultural, and political change'. In the final chapter, I consider what might be required for student movements against sexual violence to secure such structural changes.

iii. Media exposure and public outrage

One tactic utilised by students at both universities was a close engagement with the media as a means of generating public pressure on universities to respond to sexual violence and using reputational damage as a source of leverage. In this instance, dominant institutional practices of reputational risk motivation acted both as a constraint but also an opportunity for student activists

to galvanise action by their universities. This strategy also led to some significant gains for campus feminist groups, who in some cases gained the ear of university executives directly after high-profile media stories were published. Most importantly, students' strategic use of the media generated significant public awareness, with the issue of campus sexual violence frequently making front-page news in major national media outlets throughout 2016 and 2017 and raising the pressure on universities to take action.

However, as I suggested in the previous chapter, this tactic has its own risks. The financial and organisational imperatives of media outlets can cause the issue of sexual violence to be represented in a sensationalist manner that does not capture the nuanced political and institutional context, or in a way that privileges individual stories of trauma and harm over analysis of the structural foundations of sexual violence. This reflects what Alison Phipps (2020a, 82) calls the 'outrage economy' of the contemporary media, in which stories focusing on shock, tragedy, trauma and pain circulate rapidly, generating clicks, likes and shares. However, Phipps (2020a, 93) notes, this mode of emotional reaction to sexual violence can feed into reactionary responses from institutions that seek primarily to promote an 'unblemished' public image:

> The response to naming and shaming is often what I call 'institutional airbrushing': neoliberal institutions and organisations obsessed with how things *look* rather than how they *are* merely remove the 'blemish' that has been exposed. And this impulse to airbrush, rather than tackle problems head-on, is exacerbated by the dogged nihilism of media outrage.

In other words, the neoliberal political economy of contemporary universities makes them more vulnerable to reputational damage, thus providing specific sources of leverage for student activists. However, relying on these sources of leverage can also provoke reactive responses from universities that primarily seek to mitigate reputational risk. This was evident in, on the one hand, initiatives that were rushed out, underdeveloped or ineffective, such as the *Consent Matters* module at USyd, and on the other hand, attempts to discourage students from speaking to the media, such as when my participant Zoe was told off for doing so by members of her university's administration.

In Australia, students' reliance on media exposure to fuel the momentum of their campaigns against university sexual violence had a further pitfall: it brought them into closer proximity to the far right, who latched onto campus sexual violence campaigns as a central example of the imagined stronghold of feminists and leftists on contemporary universities. I described earlier (Chapter 5.2)

how these conservative criticisms of student sexual violence campaigns were heightened around the release of the *Change the Course* report in a context where the AHRC was already under fire from the political right due to the outspoken stance of the then president of the AHRC, Gillian Triggs, on the federal government's refugee policy. As I outlined in Chapter 6, this backlash at times bore directly upon individual student activists, who were the subject of misconduct complaints and disciplinary actions taken by universities. It was also evident in the increase of trolling, harassment and doxxing that feminist student activists endured in online spaces, which I discussed as some of the costs for student activists.

This right-wing backlash can also create a disincentive for universities to take action on sexual violence insofar as it may threaten the relationship of universities to the federal government, their largest sole source of funding. In the period under analysis (2015–2020), the conservative Liberal Party held federal office, a party with close ideological and political ties to right-wing Australian media. Universities have been described in these media outlets as cowing to 'offence activism' and infringing on free speech (Albrechtsen 2019), 'capitulat[ing] to the postmodern bullies' (Albrechtsen 2017) and 'replacing their lectures and tutorials with Bedroom Policing 101' (Latham 2017). Given the dominance of right-wing and anti-feminist voices in the Australian mainstream media, these are not fringe perspectives – they have a significant influence both on the public image of universities and on policy-making under the Liberal Party. In 2018, the then Minister for Education, Dan Tehan, appeared on conservative Sydney talkback radio station 2GB to discuss the issue of 'political correctness' and freedom of speech at university campuses (Jones 2018). Tehan stated that he was in direct contact with Bettina Arndt after the protest against her 'Fake Rape Crisis Tour' to 'express sympathy with her plight' (Koziol 2018), and that he was concerned about the status of freedom of speech at Australian universities. Tehan also met with Arndt in relation to a federal taskforce to oversee university responses to sexual violence (Elliott 2019). This demonstrates the role of the conservative media in shaping the federal government's stance on campus sexual violence, and the potential for conservative backlash to feminist activism to have direct implications on the policy and regulatory arena. Reliance by students on this media landscape as a major source of momentum and publicity for campaigns can therefore be counter-productive, given the way in which campus sexual violence has been drawn into 'culture wars' that surround gender politics and universities.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that contemporary Australian universities have been shaped by a process of layering in which newer and older rules intersect to produce particular ways of

conceptualising and responding to sexual violence. Neoliberal reforms have, in many cases, reinforced existing hierarchies of power within universities, shaping how university managers conceptualise sexual violence (i.e. as a risk to the reputational and economic security of the institution) and at the same time delimiting the role that students are able to play in determining institutional responses to sexual violence. While these rules did provide some opportunities for students (e.g. in their use of the media to leverage universities' aversion to reputational risk), by and large they represented constraints on the ability of students to organise, express dissent and exercise agency. Students demonstrated creativity and courage in their efforts to publicise and politicise the issue of campus sexual violence, but were ultimately left with the sense that their key objectives had not been achieved.

As I argued above, these partial failures of agency can be instructive for those seeking to understand and to transform the institutional dynamics of sexual violence. A close analysis of the ways in which universities move to contain, co-opt and control oppositional student activism provides the basis for theorising more effective forms of resistance. This analysis suggests that in order to overcome these constraints and instigate changes that go deeper than the surface-level responses taken by many universities in the wake of the *Change the Course* report, student movements must develop the capacity to disrupt processes of institutional reproduction and challenge the reformist approach adopted by universities. In the concluding chapter of this thesis, I turn to consider the necessary conditions for the kinds of transformative and structural changes that are required to address sexual violence in Australian universities, and how student movements might strategically respond to the various constraints I have detailed in this chapter.

Chapter 9 | Conclusion

> Love and study cannot exist without struggle, and struggle cannot occur solely inside the refuge we call the university. Being grounded in the world we wish to make is fundamental.
> – Robin D. G. Kelley, 'Black Study, Black Struggle'

Introduction

In this thesis, I have traced political contestations over campus sexual violence back as far as 1978, when feminists at the University of Sydney rebelled against the rape and murder of a young woman, Annette Morgan, on the grounds of St Paul's College. Now, almost half a century after this incident, this story remains unfinished. Although the structure and function of Australian universities has changed remarkably over this period, the prevalence of sexual violence has not. According to the data gathered by the Australian Human Rights Commission (2017a, 7), 6.9% of university students in Australia are likely to be sexually assaulted within a two-year period – given current enrolment figures, this translates to over one hundred thousand people (Department of Education, Skills and Employment 2020). Sit with this figure for a moment. Though some of the political contestations that I have explored in this thesis have taken place on a small scale, the issue that student feminists are grappling with is immense. As the history presented in this thesis has shown, the political problem of sexual violence in universities is deeply entrenched and resistant to change.

I began this project with a curiosity as to why feminist demands for transformations in institutional responses to sexual violence have gained some uptake at this historical moment, one that coincides with the accelerating neoliberal transformation of the higher education sector. In answering this question, I have explored the contextual factors that underpinned the momentum of campus-based feminist movements between 2015 and 2020. Against the backdrop of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the global popularity of #MeToo, and international movements agitating around campus sexual violence, the re-emergence of these movements in Australia capitalised on a growing social consciousness of the role that institutions play in perpetuating or challenging cultures of sexual violence. Student activists used public demonstration, direct action and the media to show how universities, too, were complicit in the widespread social prevalence of sexual violence. A major outcome of this period was the production and release of the *Change the Course* report by the Australian Human Rights Commission, which was publicly perceived as a watershed moment. However, for student activists,

this report marked the beginning of a process in which universities moved to co-opt and control the issue of sexual violence which helped to defuse the public pressure that students had generated. As I argued in Chapter 7, following the release of this report, student activists experienced tightening constraints on the opportunities for political agitation. Ultimately, student movements against sexual violence have – for now – entered a period of relative abeyance, a shift that also limits the potential for transformative university responses to sexual violence.

This concluding chapter is comprised of three sections. In the first, I present the key findings from my research, returning to my research questions and addressing the three key themes of institutional responses, institutional contestations and institutional power. This section also offers some critical reflections on the shortcomings of these movements and potential future directions for campus feminist organising. In the second section, I highlight the key contributions to knowledge that this thesis offers. I suggest that the 'embedded institutionalist' approach adopted in this thesis provides the basis for a more holistic mode of institutional analysis, but also that institutionalist theory has shortcomings in its ability to account for the role of emotion, affect and embodiment within institutions. I also outline the methodological contributions this approach offers to institutionalist theorists, arguing that the approach advanced in this thesis might contribute to the development of more politically engaged methodological practices within the institutionalist field. In the final section, I reflect on the limitations of this project and potential future directions for research.

1. Key findings

The two research questions addressed in this thesis are:

1. How are Australian universities' responses to sexual violence conditioned by the ongoing neoliberalisation of the Australian university sector?
2. How have student feminist organisers challenged and contested Australian universities' institutional responses to sexual violence since 2015, and how effective have their strategies been?

In this thesis, I set out to critically examine the politics of feminist activism against sexual violence at Australian university campuses and to situate this activism within the broader context of the neoliberalisation of Australian universities, to reveal how this activism has challenged – and at times, acted in complicity with – these broader transformations in the landscape of Australian higher education. In summarising my findings in relation to these questions, I focus on three key themes: institutional responses to sexual violence, institutional contestations around sexual violence, and the underlying question of institutional power. I then turn to reflect on the

shortcomings of student movements against sexual violence, asking what might be necessary in the future to enable these movements to enact transformative change within the neoliberal university.

i. Institutional responses

As I outlined in Chapter 7, the release of the Australian Human Rights Commission's *Change the Course* report in 2017 was a catalyst for universities to undertake (and publicise) concrete actions in response to sexual violence. Universities' own reports of the initiatives they undertook are documented in audits by the Australian Human Rights Commission (2017b, 2018) as well as a review by the national higher education regulator (TEQSA 2019). Drawing on and interrogating these documents, I sought to critically analyse the actions taken by two universities (the University of Sydney and the University of New South Wales) in the wake of *Change the Course*. My critical analysis engaged with the perspectives of student activists, who saw first-hand the contradictions and limitations of the actions taken by universities, as well as media reporting and other documentary evidence. This analysis revealed a number of patterns in these universities' responses. While both universities set up consultation groups including student representatives with the ostensible responsibility of steering their initiatives, in both cases these groups were ineffective and undemocratic, offering students little real scope for input. However, one factor that improved the quality of universities' initiatives as well as students' trust and engagement in these initiatives was the involvement of academic staff with relevant expertise. At the University of New South Wales, these staff formed important sources of solidarity and advocacy for students' interests and provided epistemic legitimacy for the claims and demands put forward by students.

Students also highlighted the dominance of a risk management logic amongst university managers and the prioritisation of initiatives that were able to be rolled out quickly and publicised widely. This affirms the work of other scholars (Hawzen, Anderson, and Newman 2018; Phipps 2020b; Phipps and McDonnell 2021; Quinlan et al. 2017) who have highlighted the centrality of reputational risk management in universities' handling of sexual violence. Building on their analyses, I suggested that the practice of risk management in Australian universities is informed and strengthened by the contracting of consultancy firms, who have produced reports and other documents which act as a means of risk management by 'serving as a record that [these institutions] are genuinely committed' to tackling sexual violence (Elizabeth Broderick & Co 2017, 4). I also considered in Chapter 2 how institutional ethics review committees can contribute to risk management practices by narrowing the scope of critical research on campus sexual violence. This adds to an understanding of the nature of risk management in the neoliberal university by

highlighting how this practice operates not just in the opportunistic marketing of universities' initiatives related to sexual violence or in attempts to avoid legal retaliation for their responses to complaints of sexual violence, but also in more subtle ways through the exertion of control over the production of knowledge.

Beyond merely describing the actions taken by universities or pointing to their shortcomings, in this thesis I further sought to understand the factors motivating universities to respond to sexual violence in particular ways. Through a historical analysis of the political-economic development of Australian universities, I highlighted some of the key features of the neoliberal university in Australia. I suggested that the Australian neoliberal university is i) closely tethered to the needs of a casualised labour force, ii) integrated into complex geopolitical processes, iii) primarily funded by private sources but still publicly subsidised and iv) marked by distinct and intersecting hierarchies of power. Situating these features within earlier Australian higher education policy, I argued that neoliberal shifts in universities' nature and functions have not displaced former rules and practices within universities but have instead been layered onto these rules and practices, in many cases strengthening and reinforcing them. This historical and political-economic analysis of Australian universities helps to provide explanatory power to an analysis of universities' responses to sexual violence, tracing links between the declining public funding available to universities, their subsequent turn to private revenue sources (especially full-fee-paying international students) and thus the imperative to maintain a positive and progressive brand image, as well as how these responses are underpinned by entrenched gendered and racialised hierarchies of power.

ii. Institutional contestations

My archival research uncovered a significant historical legacy of campus-based organising against sexual violence within Australian universities, spanning back at least forty years. It also revealed shifts in feminists' political orientation and strategies throughout this time, from separatist and socialist political commitments to a reformist orientation that was more narrowly focused on securing specific changes to rules and procedures within universities. Analysing contemporary organising against sexual violence at two campuses through a series of interviews, I found some of the same political tensions echoed in student activism in the contemporary era. While student feminists held shared goals in the broadest sense – that is, to make campuses safer for women and other marginalised groups and to reduce the prevalence of sexual violence – there were disagreements about how this is best achieved, and specifically about the role the university should play in intervening in cultures of sexual violence. Student activists differed in the ways they engaged with university managers and power-holders, their perception of whether institutional change should be instigated by university leaders or grassroots movements, and their willingness to take risks and engage in tactics that may expose them to threats from opponents such as Men's Rights Activists or to university

disciplinary procedures. This finding challenges prior research that has treated students' sexual violence activism as relatively homogenous (e.g. Rentschler 2018; Vemuri 2018), revealing instead the diversity of strategies, tactics and political philosophies within and between organising groups.

Examining the efficacy of students' efforts in challenging institutional rules, I found that overall, they experienced limited success. While students were able to draw significant public attention to the issue of campus sexual violence, they were ultimately left unsatisfied with the actions their universities had taken in relation to primary prevention, reporting procedures, policy reform and the improved provision of counselling and healthcare services on campus. Analysing the constraints on student activism within the context of the neoliberal university, I argued that these constraints operated to insulate institutional rules from opposition and therefore to reproduce these rules. These constraints included *rules* that uphold managerial power and proscribe sanctions for student misconduct, the *practices* of risk management and co-optation, and *narratives* that position universities as benevolent and progressive and student activism as a threat to free speech. In the face of these constraints, students' campaigns waned in momentum and mobilisation, relying more heavily on external factors such as the release of reports to generate public outrage and political pressure.

iii. Institutional power

Underlying student feminists' demands for universities to respond to sexual violence is an ambivalent relationship to the university as an institution. Students appealed to those in power within the university to take action and carry out key reforms, but at the same time sought to challenge the legitimacy of the structures of managerial power that constitute the university. This was reflected in students' equivocal views about universities' use of disciplinary procedures in response to sexual violence. It was clear to some of my participants that there were contradictions between the liberal feminist demand to increase the university's power to investigate and discipline individual students for breaches of misconduct policy, and the ability of feminists to mobilise and to undertake disruptive forms of action when these actions were increasingly subject to discipline through the very same policies. While there was a consensus that there should be transparent and accessible procedures for students to report experiences of sexual violence, it was less clear what powers universities should be afforded in dealing with these complaints. Will suspending, expelling or otherwise punishing students who the university believes to have perpetrated sexual violence ultimately contribute to a safer campus? This remains a live question for student activists as well as feminist theorists of campus sexual violence, some of whom have turned to the field of abolitionist university studies to analyse these contradictions of feminist politics within universities. As Alison Phipps (2021) poses the question: 'how can the university protect us from violence, when the university *is* violence?'

While my interviews focused largely on the period between 2015 and 2020, it seems that from 2020 onwards there has been a growing cynicism amongst feminist activists towards the strategy of reform. Feeling as though 'nothing has changed' for students and survivors, despite changes to policies and procedures, some participants reflected on the inadequacy of campus-level reforms to address the widespread and deeply engrained phenomenon of sexual violence. In recent years, the University of Sydney Women's Collective has called for the closure of the university's residential colleges and their replacement with affordable student housing, commenting that:

> The elite residential colleges have never changed or improved, they have only gotten better at hiding the violence under the surface […] [their] attempts at reform have always been inadequate and unsuccessful. (Tandan, Wang, and Sonnenschein 2020)

Contrasted with the more modest demands made by the same collective in 2016 (University of Sydney Women's Collective 2016), campaigns to 'dismantle the colleges' grapple with the wider functions of these institutions in reproducing not just gender inequality but myriad forms of injustice, from wealth and housing inequality to racism and homophobia. In this way, some contemporary feminist activists are turning away from the liberal feminism that underpins a reformist approach and calling for more wide-ranging and structural changes. However, the success of these demands will rest on the power and organisation of the movements of students that put them forward. In this thesis, I have argued that the neoliberalisation of universities has been marked by the declining political power and reach of student movements, hindering their ability to challenge or change institutional rules.

Strategic shortcomings of student movements

In Chapter 1 I examined the relatively limited field of research on student activism against sexual violence, arguing that existing research has tended to afford this activism a level of epistemic and political privilege that precludes critical engagement with its shortcomings. Drawing on Mandi Gray's (2019) work, I highlighted the importance of acknowledging the potential for feminist movements to collude with or support flawed and reactionary responses to sexual violence. To me this is important not only analytically, to develop an accurate and complete understanding of the functions that feminist politics can play, but also politically, to fulfil my methodological commitment to research that contributes to feminist activist practice. Critical scrutiny and reflection are integral to the development of emancipatory movements and are at the heart of the role of the activist researcher as explored in Chapter 2. In this spirit, I now offer three reflections on the shortcomings of these movements and future directions that might provide the basis for more transformative change within universities.

Engagement with campus trade unions

Firstly, student feminist movements against sexual violence in Australia have largely worked separately to efforts within staff trade unions that frame sexual violence as a workplace health and safety issue for university workers. To date, there has been little sustained connection in Australia between student movements against sexual violence and university trade unions, despite acknowledgement by some of my participants that such a coalition would form a promising basis for challenging university responses to sexual violence. University workers, of course, also experience sexual violence (Ellinghaus et al. 2018; National Tertiary Education Union 2019b) and have also organised to challenge and resist cultures of sexual violence on campus. Staff trade unions also represent an important (if currently tenuous) source of power in campus politics, with sources of leverage unavailable to student unions – namely, the withdrawal of labour power. While some of my participants recognised the importance of trade unions as a source of political power on campus, there had been few attempts by campus feminist groups in recent years to establish working coalitions with these unions. As I described in Chapter 4, trade unions – including the National Tertiary Education Union – have been greatly weakened by neoliberal reforms to industrial relations regulations, a challenge with which feminist unionists must contend.

On the other hand, trade unions themselves have rarely worked actively to build relationships with student feminist groups. While the National Tertiary Education Union (NTEU) – the largest union representing university workers nationally – has periodically spoken out in support of student campaigns against sexual violence, statements issued by the NTEU on the issue of sexual violence experienced by students have tended to frame this as a separate issue to sexual violence experienced by staff. For example, an article published in the NTEU's *Agenda* magazine in 2019 was titled '2nd student survey welcome, but sexual harassment in our universities remains a serious workplace risk', and went on to state:

> […] while the focus of universities has been on addressing the concerns of students around the prevention and reporting of sexual harassment and assaults, the Union's own research has shown that many staff in our universities and TAFEs who have had similar experiences have been left in the cold. (MacDonald 2019)

While the intention to draw attention to sexual violence as a workplace health and safety issue for staff is laudable, framing this issue as distinct or opposed to 'the concerns of students' does not form a good basis for a coalitional movement between students and staff. It also fails to recognise that there is a significant overlap between the categories of student and staff, especially in the case of postgraduate students who are also often (usually casualised) university workers. The concerns of students are closely intertwined with the concerns of staff represented by the union, pointing

to the need for a more nuanced understanding of the connection between staff and student sexual violence.

The rising casualisation of the university workforce may offer an opportunity for greater allegiances between student movements and casualised staff. Recent years have seen a rapid rise in the self-organisation of casualised university workers in Australia (Boncardo 2021; Casualised, Unemployed and Precarious University Workers 2021). These workers are in many ways natural allies for student movements – a significant proportion of casual university workers are postgraduate students themselves, and many of these staff are in teaching and student support roles and thus in close contact with the student body. Tim Briedis (2018, 14) also notes the potential for solidarity between casualised university staff 'with less of a stake in the system' and undergraduate students. The increasing casualisation of the university workforce is also pertinent to staff experiences of sexual violence: the NTEU recognises casualisation as a 'major driving factor in a workplace culture where staff are afraid to report or even reject harassment' (National Tertiary Education Union 2019b, 20). These factors provide a fertile basis for coalitions between student movements and casual university workers.

My analysis also reveals the potential limitations of some contemporary student unions as sites for challenging managerial power, especially student unions that have entered into a close relationship with the university. This may be especially the case in organisations that serve the dual functions of being representative student councils as well as service providers, as these unions tend towards a more corporate and less overtly political orientation. 'Arc @ UNSW', for example, boasts of its 'cooperative' relationship with UNSW (Arc UNSW 2021). Such 'partnerships' can have the effect of discouraging more radical tactics that might threaten the relationship between the student organisation and university managers, and thus create further constraints on the organising capacity of students. This suggests that in some instances alternative organising spaces, outside the constraints of institutionalised student unions, might allow for greater autonomy and enable movements to break out of the established tactical repertoire that I described in the previous chapter.

Engagement with international students

Secondly, international students were vastly under-represented in the movement groups analysed in this thesis, reflecting the broader social divides that persist between domestic students and international students in Australian universities (Rosenthal, Russell, and Thomson 2007, 76). In some instances, international students have established their own networks and initiatives in

response to the prevalence of sexual violence amongst international student cohorts. One example is Project Coffee, an initiative based at the University of Sydney and founded by Chinese international student Xi Chen, which aims to provide a peer-to-peer, informal and supportive space for international students to discuss their experiences of sexual violence (Saw 2018). The inclusion of international students within campus feminist movements is not just important for the sake of demographic representation – international students represent a growing basis of power in Australian universities, as the source of an increasing share of university revenue. Beyond this, international students also experience complex challenges relating to sexual violence, including linguistic, cultural and economic barriers to accessing support services, fears of deportation, social isolation and precarious housing conditions (these are explored in Chen's ethnographic analysis of Chinese international students' experience of navigating dating and intimacy: see Chen 2018). An increased participation of international students in movements against sexual violence would enable a more nuanced understanding of the impacts of sexual violence on international students and would broaden the horizon of campus feminist politics to encompass the various forms of exploitation and precarity experienced by international students that intersect with the phenomenon of campus sexual violence.

Bridging on-campus and off-campus movements

Finally, these movements showed, at times, a tendency to focus largely or exclusively on issues affecting university students, failing to connect these issues to political struggles beyond the campus walls. An example of this tension was evident in the public discussion of the data presented in *Change the Course*. Student activists and advocates sought to use this data to argue that campuses were especially unsafe and dangerous places, while opponents such as Bettina Arndt (2021) attempted to do the opposite, claiming that 'the NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics has shown universities are 100 times safer for young women than the rest of the community'. Beyond technical methodological debates about the accuracy of the data and its comparability to broader crime statistics, this exchange invokes an important political question: does emphasising the campus as an exceptional space of danger and risk divert attention away from the many forms of violence that communities beyond the campus face? Further, might such an approach conceal the ways in which the constitutive exclusions of the university make the campus safer for some than others, and simply inaccessible to others still?

I am not arguing that feminist activists should only focus on the single, most dire issues women face, nor that campus sexual violence is unimportant. Rather, it is important to conceptualise the political connections between sexual violence that occur on and off campus, and to acknowledge

that while campus sexual violence is clearly prevalent, the campus is not an *exceptional* space of danger for young women. As Rebecca Ropers-Huilman et al. (2016, 190) write, 'persistent and pervasive sexual violence exists just as much outside of the academy as within it'. Further, contemporary universities, as I argued in Chapter 4, continue to be spaces of privilege, with access to universities still stratified by class, citizenship status, geography, disability and other factors. Expanding the political concerns of campus feminist collectives to encompass broader issues of access and equity in higher education may counteract the tendency of these collectives to focus on the concerns of middle-class university students. Further, this strategy provides a basis for forming coalitions with feminist and other movements outside the university in order to build stronger coalitions – for example, with groups of working women, migrant women and Indigenous movement groups.

2. Contributions to knowledge

This thesis contributes to a growing body of research on campus sexual violence. Although there is a small amount of existing work that specifically analyses student activism against sexual violence, this research is the first to carry out such an analysis in the Australian context. This thesis therefore contributes a novel case study to this field, drawing on and extending existing analyses of university sexual violence from a critical and institutionalist standpoint. It also provides a contribution to the institutionalist literature, which has used the tools of feminist institutionalism to analyse sexual abuse within institutional settings (see, e.g., Gleeson 2016) but not yet in the context of the neoliberal university (McCray 2015). In the application of feminist institutionalism to the topic of campus sexual violence activism, this thesis has made both theoretical and methodological contributions to institutionalist theory; this section reflects on each of these in turn.

i. Theoretical contributions

In this thesis, I have interrogated the ability of existing concepts in the field of feminist institutionalism to explain the institutional politics of sexual violence within the neoliberal university. In Chapter 3, I critically engaged with theories in New and Feminist Institutionalism (NI and FI), identifying two particular areas of ambivalence within FI theory: the relationship of institutions to their macro-social contexts, and the role of social movements or collective actors within institutions. I argued that these areas of ambivalence arise from the conscious attempt of FI theorists to narrow their focus to the meso-level of institutional dynamics, a turn driven by an aversion both to structuralist and overly deterministic accounts of institutions as well as

voluntaristic accounts that overemphasise individual agency. However, as I argued in Chapter 3, this shift in focus has led to a tendency to analyse institutions in a manner that is largely detached from the broader relations of power in which they are situated.

The conceptual approach I have put forward in this thesis, which I have termed embedded institutionalism, seeks to correct this narrow focus. I have suggested that an examination of institutions from multiple angles ('from above', to consider the macro-social context of institutions, and 'from below', to consider the political struggles waged by those disempowered by institutions) provides a more systematic insight into institutional politics. To this end, I interrogated the embeddedness of Australian universities within a particular political-economic and historical context and argued that this context helps to explain why, despite significant momentum and public pressure behind the demands being made by students, they were ultimately not achieved. The 'stickiness' of universities' ways of responding to sexual violence, in a manner governed by risk management and brand control, constrained the space for alternative responses to sexual violence. This approach extends existing analyses in FI, such as Mackay's (2014) concept of 'nested newness', by tracing links between macro-scale social phenomena and the meso-level internal dynamics of institutions.

However, this does not mean that individuals and movements within institutions are controlled by the vagaries of large-scale phenomena such as macro-economic trends. Structural analysis must be balanced with an appreciation of the ever-present possibility of resistance and the fact that institutions are constantly exposed to political challenges, especially by those disenfranchised by institutional structures of power. In this thesis, I sought to employ an analysis that was able to simultaneously account for the embeddedness of universities in neoliberal political economies as well as the sites of resistance and collective organising that challenge and disrupt the university's rules. As I argued in Chapter 3, an approach that attends to collective actors within institutions helps to answer persistent theoretical questions in FI and NI about the role of actors and to address what Lowndes and Roberts term the 'under-theorisation' (2010, 77) of agency and power in the field. I argued that a focus on collective actors (such as social movements) within institutions can help to bridge the micro- and meso-levels of analysis in institutionalist theory and to explain how individuals coordinate political action and motivate institutional change.

This research project also revealed a further lacuna within institutionalist theory in regard to its ability to capture the emotional, embodied and affective dimensions of institutional life. An emergent theme in many of my interviews was the prevalence of burnout among feminist activists.

Participants described feelings of guilt, frustration and stress, as well as a sense of inadequacy or failure: in Emily's words, 'just feeling like I hadn't done enough'. This was heightened for activists who had themselves experienced sexual violence, for whom this organising work was particularly emotionally intensified, as well as for those who commonly received disclosures of sexual violence and were thus at risk of vicarious traumatisation (Lerias and Byrne 2003; Linder and Myers 2018). While there has been some work that inquires into how institutional rules can have gendered emotional *effects*, for example on workplace wellbeing (Galea et al. 2021), FI by and large lacks a fleshed-out conception of actors as embodied and affective beings and has not developed an account of the role that emotion and affect play in processes of institutional change. In this vein, institutionalist theory needs to develop a more robust conception of how emotion and affect can both motivate and undermine attempts at institutional transformation, in line with Deb Gould's (2009, 3) assertion that 'feeling and emotion are fundamental to political life' (see also Celermajer et al. 2019).

ii. Methodological contributions

I now turn to the methodological insights that this project might offer to the fields of FI and NI. There is little methodological consensus within NI and FI, with scholars deploying a diverse range of methods and techniques to investigate institutions. As Lowndes (2014, 685) writes, 'despite its popularity as a conceptual framework, institutionalism is characterized by a deep methodological uncertainty'. In their overview of the field, Lowndes and Roberts (2014, 48) identify seven different 'institutionalist methodologies': mathematical modelling, game theory, experimental methods, ethnography, country case studies, practice case studies and narrative analysis. This diversity of methods is striking, especially in the context of Lowndes and Roberts' (2010, 200) argument that institutionalist theory has transitioned from a period of theoretical fragmentation to one of 'convergence and consolidation'. It would seem that these different methodologies belie quite different assumptions about the nature of institutions – for example, the cultural and sociological approach to institutions embedded in ethnographic methodologies versus the economistic assumptions about actors that underpin game theory.

Given this fragmentation in methodological approaches, there is importance in the alignment of theory and methodology to ensure that the tools used to answer a question are appropriate for the nature of the question being asked. As Peter Hall (2003, 374) explains:

> Ontology is ultimately crucial to methodology because the appropriateness of a particular set of methods for a given problem turns on assumptions about the nature of the causal relations they are meant to discover.

In this thesis, I have made the theoretical point that in narrowing the scope of their analysis to the meso-level of internal institutional dynamics, feminist institutionalist theorists have afforded insufficient attention to the relationship of institutions to two important social forces: macro-social political-economic dynamics, and the political struggles waged by social movements. Following Hall's reasoning, insofar as this represents a shift in the ontological understanding of institutions and their causal relations, it should also motivate a shift in the methods deployed to investigate these relations. In other words, giving greater theoretical consideration to the role of macro-social dynamics and social movements in institutional politics should inform how and where we go looking for knowledge.

In particular, a greater theoretical and conceptual focus on the role of social movements within institutions might offer corresponding methodological insights to theorists of institutions. A shared objective of many institutionalist theorists is to contribute to 'strategies for institutional resistance and reform in the interests of social justice' (Lowndes and Roberts 2010, 204). However, although this commitment is frequently expressed, there has been little reflection on the specific methodologies that might enable institutionalist theorists to ensure that their work enacts this commitment. In this vein, we might ask of institutionalists: how is the knowledge they produce disseminated? How are marginalised actors within institutions empowered by their research practices? How might institutionalist theory contribute to destabilising hierarchies of knowledge and power within institutions?

As I explored in Chapter 2, these questions are central to the tradition of action research. More explicit engagement with these alternative methodological traditions would assist institutionalist theorists to fulfil their commitment to contributing to processes of institutional change. First, the tradition of action research provokes greater reflection on how and where knowledge is produced. With some important exceptions (e.g. Chappell 2002; Waylen 2007), FI has largely focused on the perspectives of elite actors and policy-makers within institutions. While the perspectives of these actors can provide important insights into the internal processes through which institutional rules are produced and challenged, this focus can occlude the dynamics of institutional change that originate 'from below', through the struggles of those marginalised by the power relations of a given institution. It can also risk reproducing hierarchies of knowledge that privilege those already within positions of power as institutional 'experts'. In contrast, activist scholarship highlights the diverse sites in which knowledge is produced, arguing that social movement participants generate knowledge that is organically linked to processes of social change (Choudry 2013; Nabudere 2008). Treating social movement participants as holding situated forms of expertise in institutional

dynamics – or, as Cox and Fominaya (2009) term it, 'movement knowledge' – can produce unique and otherwise inaccessible insights into the power relations of institutions.

Second, turning our focus towards social movements as collective actors within institutions can help to ensure that the knowledge produced by institutionalist theory is relevant to grassroots processes of institutional change. Through the guiding concept of 'movement-relevance' (Bevington and Dixon 2005), in this thesis I have sought to produce knowledge that speaks to the experiences of students engaged in organising against sexual violence and may contribute meaningfully to transforming institutional cultures of sexual violence in the neoliberal university. This has been achieved in part by taking seriously the perspectives of student activists, a source of knowledge that is often marginalised in existing research about campus sexual violence (see Chapter 1.2). This objective has also been furthered by the methodological principle of reciprocity, through sharing my findings throughout the project and participating in events and actions organised by my participants. While this engaged stance does add ethical and intellectual complexities to the research process (as discussed in Chapter 2), it can also allow scholars of institutions to actively participate in processes of institutional change. In turn, this promises new forms of insight into these processes, producing knowledge that is lived and experienced in an embodied manner by the researcher rather than treated abstractly or at a distance.

3. Limitations and directions for future research

While this thesis has made important contributions to the fields of campus sexual violence research as well as FI theory, there are of course also limitations to this project. First, the empirical data presented in this thesis was largely gathered through semi-structured interviews as well as archival analysis. While these interviews provided subjective descriptions and reflections on students' experiences of organising against sexual violence within two university settings, alternative methodological tools such as ethnographic methods could potentially capture richer and more textured data about everyday interactions within institutional spaces. The ethnographic method is 'attuned to the complex place-based meanings, flows, and sensibilities that interact within momentary spaces of encounter' (Juris and Khasnabish 2013, 5), and is therefore situated in spaces of activist practice in ways that discursive interviews are not. This opens up one direction for future research – the use of ethnographic techniques, for example institutional ethnography (Smith 2005), to investigate the dynamics of sexual violence within the neoliberal university. Such an approach could pay attention to the day-to-day practices of organising and resistance carried out by students and staff, as well as the workings of those who 'manage' complaints, devise carefully worded

policies, make statements to the media and in many other ways perform the daily work of maintaining an 'airbrushed' public image for the university (Phipps 2020b, 230).

Second, the empirical component of this research was confined to two case studies, both urban, Group of Eight universities in Sydney. These universities differ vastly in structure, demographics and institutional culture from other universities in Australia and especially from rural and regional campuses. The prevalence of sexual violence differs across campuses, as is evident in data from the *Change the Course* report, which showed rates of sexual assault among students ranging from 4% at Swinburne University (an urban campus in Melbourne) to 10% at the University of New England (a campus in rural New South Wales) (*ABC News* 2017). Campuses also have different political cultures and diverse histories of student activism, as illustrated in Graham Hastings' (2003) political history of Australian student activism. The results of this research, then, are not necessarily generalisable across the Australian higher education system. Further research could inquire into the institutional politics of sexual violence in rural and regional universities, perhaps utilising comparative methodologies to interrogate the institutional differences between urban and regional campuses.

Third, as this research project focused on students' experiences of organising within the neoliberal university, I did not consider in depth the role of university staff in challenging institutional responses to sexual violence. This is a significant limitation and perhaps serves to reproduce the problematic separation between staff and student experiences of sexual violence that I discussed above. A more complete understanding of the institutional politics of sexual violence should attempt to understand where and how students and staff have collaborated to transform institutional responses to sexual violence, as well as the specific factors that might constrain and prevent such collaboration. Integrating an understanding of sexual violence as a workplace issue for university staff, with attention to the complex and stratified power dynamics amongst these workers, would greatly enhance and expand research on campus sexual violence, which has to date largely focused on the experiences of students.

Fourth, the limited sample of students that I interviewed has evident implications for the scope and generalisability of my research findings. In this project, I predominantly interviewed students who had assumed positions of visibility within campus feminist groups, and others who were closely connected to these activists. This recruitment method produced a particular sample of student activists, one with a predominance of white women. In Chapter 2, exploring the central claims of standpoint theory, I made the point that knowledge is situated within specific social

contexts and power dynamics and that some knowledges, by virtue of their social positioning, provide special insights into processes of domination and oppression. The implication of this insight is that my interview data is also partial. While my interviews provided important insights into the rules, practices and narratives that act to constrain feminist mobilisation and the possibility of change within the neoliberal university, they also potentially obscured the ways in which the neoliberal university (and perhaps, too, feminist movements emerging from within it) are also at once sites of racial domination. The history of Australian universities that I traced in Chapter 4 showed that the colonial origins of these universities has enduring ramifications for the structure and function of contemporary universities. Yet the nuances of how this is experienced by Indigenous students, as well as other groups of students marginalised within a deeply white institution, are largely absent from my interview data. An important question for future research is whether and how campus feminist organising might challenge the dynamics of racism, colonialism and imperialism that continue to saturate Australian universities, and how such an orientation might also reshape the nature of feminist organising against sexual violence.

It is also worth noting that the predominant focus of this thesis on *feminist* collectives results in part from a context where student unions have established separate political groupings on the basis of identity, such that women's collectives, queer collectives, anti-racist collectives and so on organise themselves autonomously. While women's collectives have formed the most visible sites of organising against campus sexual violence, future research could inquire into the contributions that queer and anti-racist groups have made to challenging campus sexual violence. Both queer and anti-racist movements have long traditions of feminist anti-violence organising with tactics, strategies and political orientations that diverge from those of mainstream white feminism, including an enduring focus on abolitionism as a central tenet of anti-violence strategy (see e.g. Patterson 2016; Davis 1985). The connections, or lack thereof, between feminist, queer and anti-racist groups on campus, and the implications for the political strategies adopted by these groups, is another topic deserving of further investigation.

Finally, future research might investigate the applicability of the theoretical framework I have put forward in this thesis to other contexts. While I focused largely on political economy as a major feature of the macro-level context in which Australian universities are embedded, considering in detail the relationship between other macro-social structures (e.g. colonialism and imperialism), institutions and collective actors might continue to develop this framework or shed light on its limitations. In particular, this framework would benefit from further consideration of how different macro-social structures interact to shape institutions, as well as how competing or

conflicting social movements interact within institutional settings. To this end, an analysis of campus sexual violence movements utilising the tools of social movement theory (e.g. Goodwin, Jasper, and Polletta 2001; Melucci 1995; Polletta and Jasper 2001) would produce further insights into the strategies, tactics, culture and collective identity of these movements and the people within them.

Conclusion

This investigation is situated within a historical moment at which two vectors coincide: the global (re)emergence of movements against campus sexual violence, and the neoliberal trajectory of universities around the world. Throughout this thesis, I have sought to weave some connections between these events and to understand the challenges, as well as the promises, involved in feminist efforts to transform the neoliberal university. Tracing histories of feminist organising in Australian universities, many of which remain hidden in archives and footnoted in histories of student activism, I sought to understand the persistent appeal of universities as vessels for feminist demands. Inherent to this dynamic, I argued, is a contradiction between the necessity of utilising powerful social institutions as a means of achieving feminist goals and the resistance to feminist politics that is often entrenched within these institutions. Feminists are, at once, drawn towards and repelled from these institutionalised sites of power. Through the lens of embedded institutionalism, I sought to account for how institutional dynamics are protected and reproduced by larger social structures of power, while at the same time constantly exposed to challenge and dissent from those marginalised by these same structures of power. Delving into the meso-level at which campus feminist organisers came up against the rules and structures of the neoliberal university, I traced the ways in which institutional power-holders shut down these challenges and generated a resilient image of the university as progressive and inclusive that conceals the forms of violence that are part of its institutional fabric.

Although in recent years these institutional constraints have been relatively successful in demobilising student movements against sexual violence, the fifty-year history that I have followed in this thesis shows that these movements are persistent and tend to re-emerge after periods of abeyance. At the same time, universities continue to undergo significant structural changes, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Through all of this, sexual violence remains a persistent, entrenched and complex problem that will require significant and structural changes, both at the campus level and at a societal level, in order to shift the institutionalised relations of power that enable it. Our theories must be up to the task of analysing the complex workings of power that make these structural changes so difficult, as well as imagining possibilities and

pathways towards social transformation. Grassroots feminist movements, of course, are already well at work on these tasks; it is up to feminist theorists to walk the path alongside them.

List of publications and presentations arising from this research

Journal articles and book chapters

Hush, Anna. 2022. "Thinking beyond cultural change: Towards a materialist theory of sexual violence prevention." In *New Directions in Sexual Violence Scholarship: Law, Power and Change*, edited by Yvette Russell and Kate Gleeson. Routledge.

Hush, Anna. 2020. "What's in a hashtag? Mapping the disjunct between Australian campus sexual assault activism and #MeToo." *Australian Feminist Studies* 35(105): 293–309.

Hush, Anna. 2019. "The imaginary institution of the university: Sexual politics in the neoliberal academy." *Angelaki* 24(4): 136–150.

— Republished in the edited collection *Institutional Transformations: Imagination, Embodiment and Affect*, Routledge, 2020.

Celermajer, Danielle, Churcher, Millicent, Gatens, Moira, & Hush, Anna. 2019. "Institutional Transformations: Imagination, Embodiment and Affect." *Angelaki* 24(4): 3–21.

— Republished in the edited collection *Institutional Transformations: Imagination, Embodiment and Affect*, Routledge, 2020.

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