Tanya Serisier

Speaking Out

Feminism, Rape and Narrative Politics

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palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-3-319-98668-5 ISBN 978-3-319-98669-2 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98669-2

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018953719

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

For my brother, Gerrard, who never would have read a book of feminist theory on rape, but would have been proud of me for writing it. I miss you.

Acknowledgements

There are a great number of people who have contributed support and feedback for this book, in the form of informal chats, feedback on conference presentations or providing inspiration through their own thoughts and ideas. Over the long journey of this book, which began in a different version as a PhD project, they are far too numerous to mention.

Special thanks go to Nina Philadelphoff-Puren and Chris Worth, who assisted this book in its PhD stage. My work here and elsewhere owes an enormous debt to their dedication, enthusiasm, wealth of knowledge and willingness to challenge my ideas and writing to be tighter and stronger. Sharon Marcus and Tanya Horeck both offered extremely useful and generous feedback on the PhD in its final form, and this has significantly informed the final structure and shape of the book.

Numerous friends and colleagues have taken the time to engage and comment with ideas or papers that have ended up here in some form or have informed this work through wider-ranging conversations about gender, culture, sex and violence, and the connections between them. These include Mark Pendleton, Sarah Tayton, Liz Humphrys, Lisa Smyth, Véronique Altglas, Nicola Carr, Siobhán McAllister, Eoin Flaherty, Jonathan Heaney, Bob Miller, Madeleine Leonard, Paul Turnbull, Les Moran, Sarah Turnbull, Teresa Degenhardt, Steven Hutchinson, Anthea Taylor, Meaghan Morris, Zora Simic, Alex Dymock, Esther Singer, Sam Sowerwine and Dave Eden. I also want to acknowledge that I have been

lucky enough in my workplaces to have been surrounded by friendly and generous colleagues who, even if they didn't contribute directly to this book, made academic life better and easier, which is itself an enormous help and should be acknowledged.

Pulling the book together has been a significant undertaking, and I am particularly grateful to those who took the time to comment on chapter drafts (often with a very tight deadline!). Each of these people is an important part of my intellectual life and the final form of the ideas in this book. In each of these cases, the specific feedback is just the most obvious manifestation of the informal conversations, reading, writing and thinking that we have done together or that they have inspired me to do. Sarah Lamble always inspires me to think more deeply about difficult questions and models a commitment to combining ethics, politics and scholarship that I find truly inspiring. Kiran Kaur Grewal has been an extremely dedicated reader and whose excellent scholarship has challenged me to think deeper and better in my own work. Vicki Sentas and I began our PhDs at the same time, and I could not imagine someone with a more generous and thoughtful attitude to scholarship as a shared endeavour. Eve Vincent is the person with whom I have had the most dedicated on-going project of reading and thinking alongside, and her influence on this book is significant. Jessica Whyte and I graduated from our PhDs together, and I can't imagine life, or my work, without her influence, thoughts and feedback.

My parents constantly surprise me with their support and generosity, even though I live very far away. My siblings have also always made me feel that they valued and were proud of me and my work.

The person to whom I have the biggest debt of gratitude is Kate Carr, who has accompanied and supported me through many years and transnational moves during the writing of this book. She has read more of it and more often than anyone else and engaged in every aspect from the core concepts to where exactly to put the commas and references. She has spoken far more about rape and stories of rape than anyone could reasonably be expected to, and she still makes me laugh and smile more than anybody else I have met, even in the final weeks of editing this book.

I have been writing on the themes of this book for some time, and earlier versions of some sections have appeared elsewhere. Earlier versions

of sections of Chap. 2 appeared in 'Speaking Out, and Beginning to be Heard: Feminism, Survivor Narratives and Representations of Rape in the 1980s', *Continuum*, 32:1 (2018). An earlier version of the discussion of Andrea Dworkin in Chap. 7 appeared in '"How Can a Woman Who Has Been Raped Be Believed?" Andrea Dworkin, Sexual Violence and the Ethics of Belief', *Diegesis*, 4:1 (2015).

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Part I

Speaking Out, Building a Genre

1

Introduction: The Political Promise of Personal Narratives

Against Our Will: Men, Women and Rape, published in 1975 by Susan Brownmiller, became a *New York Times* bestseller and saw its author feature as one of *Time* magazine's 12 'Women of the Year' in the magazine's official tribute to feminism (*Time* 1976). The mainstream success of this feminist polemic is generally understood as 'the beginning of an era' in which feminist understandings of rape as a social problem and political issue entered the public sphere (Horeck 2004, p. 17). Brownmiller's (1976, p. 15) description of rape as 'nothing more or less than a conscious process of intimidation by which *all men* keep *all women* in a state of fear' is developed through an epic historical narrative of rape as a core feature of women's oppression. The story begins with an imagined 'first rape' by 'prehistoric man' and concludes with the birth of 1970s' feminist activism in the USA. Despite compelling criticisms of its racial politics (Davis 1983) and its historical accuracy (Porter 1986), the book remains, as Tanya Horeck (2004, p. 17) argues, important as 'a point of origin' for feminist anti-rape politics. It is a useful tool to 'inquire into the kind of work rape has done for feminism', as well as the work that women's narratives of sexual violence perform for feminism. This analysis is crucial to understanding the development, successes and limitations of feminist

T. Serisier, *Speaking Out*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-98669-2_1

responses to rape and the impacts of feminist politics on cultural understandings of sexual violence, and sexuality, gender and political authority more broadly.

This is a book about the foundational role that personal stories play in feminist responses to sexual violence, from the writing of *Against Our Will* to contemporary hashtag activism such as #MeToo and #YesAllWomen. I argue that feminist anti-rape politics is founded on the belief that producing and disseminating a genre of personal experiential narratives can end sexual violence. It is a belief, in the words of the well-known slogan, that 'breaking the silence' through telling personal stories can and will 'end the violence'. The production of this genre of stories is one of the key legacies of second-wave feminist politics, as is the widespread cultural acceptance of the political and ethical necessity of speaking out as a response to rape. *Speaking Out* is concerned with the consequences, both intended and unintended, of this commitment to the transformative political potential of experiential storytelling. I suggest that understanding the 'narrative politics' of speaking out necessitates examining the relationships between survivors of sexual violence, the stories they tell and the feminist movement that has enabled these stories to be told. In this introduction, I draw out the complex relations between personal narratives and feminist politics through an exploration of the story of Susan Brownmiller and how she came to write her foundational feminist work on rape.

The 'Personal Statement' that opens *Against Our Will* makes immediately clear that the book does not arise from a direct experience of sexual violence:

> The question most often asked of me while I was writing this book was short, direct and irritating: 'Have you ever been raped?'
>
> My answer was equally direct: 'No'.

Brownmiller attributes the prevalence of this mutually dissatisfying exchange to a 'curious twist of logic' on the part of her interlocutor: 'A woman who chooses to write about rape probably has a dark personal reason, a lurid secret, a history of real or imagined abuse, a trauma back there somewhere, a fixation, a Bad Experience that has permanently

warped her or instilled in her the compulsion to Tell the World'. She is not a survivor, although she 'may have been shortchanged here and there', and the text is not a survivor's story (Brownmiller 1976, p. 7). It is, instead, the result of five years of archival, academic and journalistic research, and draws on the traditional and impersonal authority of these discourses to tell its story.

There is, however, another story hidden within and behind the sweeping historical narrative that constitutes the majority of the book. It is the story, told briefly in the 'Personal Statement', and in greater detail in Brownmiller's (1999) memoir, *In Our Time: Memoir of a Revolution*, of how she 'changed her mind about rape' (1976, p. 9). This personal narrative provides the origin and the core of *Against Our Will*'s analysis and politics. It begins when members of Brownmiller's consciousness-raising group, 'West Village I', first suggested discussing rape in 1970. In response, Brownmiller 'fairly shrieked in dismay':

> I *knew* what rape was, and what it wasn't. Rape was a sex crime, a product of a diseased, deranged mind. Rape wasn't a feminist issue. (Brownmiller 1976, p. 8, emphasis in original)

After the group over-ruled her objections, Sara Pines, 'married, a professional psychologist, and the calmest woman in our group', volunteered to begin and told her story of having been raped while hitch-hiking (Brownmiller 1999, p. 198). To Brownmiller's (1976, p. 8) surprise, Pines was followed by other women, women who, 'when their turn came to speak, quietly articulated their own experiences' and showed that 'they understood their victimisation whereas I only understood that it had not happened to me'. She would later summarise the effects of this meeting in her memoir: 'Listening to Sara Pines was the moment when I started to change my mind about rape' (Brownmiller 1999, p. 198).

Following this meeting, 'West Village I' proposed to the larger 'New York Radical Feminists' (NYRF) collective that they hold a speak-out and conference organised around the theme: 'Rape is a political crime against women' (Brownmiller 1999, pp. 198–199). NYRF organised ten women, including Sara Pines, to tell their stories at the speak-out to an audience of about 300 women and reporters from *Vogue* and *New York* magazines.

To Brownmiller's (1976, p. 9) surprise, 30 other women from the audience also spoke and what they said 'blew her mind'. The conference, held three months later, was a 'moment of revelation' where Brownmiller (p. 7) was 'forced by my sisters in feminism' to face 'a new way of looking at male-female relations, at sex, at strength and at power'. While the conference was designed to prioritise 'objective information, statistics, research and study' (p. 9), Brownmiller's experience of it was dominated by the personal accounts that underwrote and informed this political analysis. In addition to *Against Our Will*, these stories would inspire several significant feminist texts of the 1970s. Among these was Phyllis Chesler's (1972) story of being raped by her therapist, a topic she would revisit in *Women and Madness*, a now classic text on the pathologisation of women by the psychiatric establishment. Germaine Greer (1970), in New York to promote her book, *The Female Eunuch*, spoke about being raped at the age of 18. Florence Rush (1980) recounted her experience of childhood incest, a topic on which she would later publish one of the first feminist accounts, *The Best Kept Secret*. The speak-out and conference demonstrated the epistemological primacy and political power of women's experiential knowledge around sexual violence and solidified the central tenets of feminist belief in speaking out: it promises to produce cultural change by shifting public understandings of rape to more closely reflect the experience of survivors; it assists the collective liberation of survivors by chipping away at the stigma and shame of rape; and it produces individual empowerment for the speaker by having her story heard and herself recognised as an expert on the basis of her experience.

But these events also demonstrated that speaking out is a more complex form of politics than is often presumed. While feminist politics around rape traditionally emphasises the act of speech, perhaps the most important element in constructing a new understanding of rape was through practices of collective listening or 'witnessing'. Narrative requires both an individual to speak and a collective to listen, and, ultimately, storytellers are reliant on what Walter Benjamin (2002, p. 149) describes as the 'community of listeners' who act as the 'web in which the gift of storytelling is cradled'. Women did not begin to speak of rape in 1970, but at that time their speech found new collective and political practices of listening that made their speech meaningful in new ways. Feminism

did not give women the ability to speak where previously they had been silent. It provided them with an environment and a discourse in which their stories could be heard and verified through creating a community that was able to receive these stories (Plummer 1995).

This reception was in direct contrast to the failure of witnessing that has historically greeted women's stories of rape, legally and socially. As Sara Pines explained, this failure compounded, extended and could even surpass the harms of the act of sexual violence:

> The worst part of her ordeal had been at the police station. "Aww, who'd want to rape you?" an officer teased. Another said she was too calm to be credible – in his view she should have been crying hysterically. (Brownmiller 1999, p. 198)

The responses of the police officers render Pines' story untellable rather than simply untrue. As I discuss in more detail in Chap. 4, they subject her to what Jean-François Lyotard (1988) describes as a *differend*, a social process of silencing that refuses the victim of a wrong a legitimate speaking position. As feminist critics have shown, the law places contradictory and unfulfillable demands on women which prevent their stories from being heard (e.g. Smart 1998). Pines is pronounced too unattractive to be raped, where if she was labelled attractive she would be guilty of provoking the assault. She is too calm to be credible, where if she was crying she would be too hysterical to be reliable. In granting truth and authority to women's narratives of sexual violence in the 1970s, feminists not only generated a collective discursive politics that opened up new ways of speaking about and understanding sexual violence (Young 1997). It simultaneously exposed the history of legal and social suspicion of women's narratives as a form of political and social silencing that Leigh Gilmore (2017) has described as the 'tainting' of survivors and their testimony.

By providing a space in which women's stories of sexual violence could be told, feminists demonstrated how social storytelling can contest power relations and create a stream of further action and storytelling (Plummer 1995). The narratives told in forums such as the 'West Village I' consciousness-raising group and the NYRF speak-out and conference became part of a feminist 'web of stories' that could call new narratives

into being by creating a space in which they could be told, heard and validated (Benjamin 2002). It is almost impossible to trace a clear beginning to this web just as it is impossible to locate an end-point. For instance, while the 'West Village I' conversation was a point of origin for Brownmiller, the group made the decision to speak about rape after reading a personal account, 'Anatomy of a Rape', in the San Francisco zine, *It Ain't Me Babe* (Brownmiller 1999, pp. 196–197). It is in this sense that I argue that speaking out needs to be understood as a form of genre creation, enabling new modes of telling, understanding, hearing and reading women's accounts of rape.

This new genre of feminist stories of rape was able to change women's understandings of their experiences by providing a new discursive framework for making the experience and its articulation politically meaningful (Scott 1992; Phipps 2016). Brownmiller initially objected to rape as a topic of discussion on the basis that it was a 'sex crime' and therefore 'not a feminist issue' (Brownmiller 1976, p. 8). It belonged under the authority of criminal justice discourse and was understood as an act of pathological and deviant individuals. On the basis of the stories she heard, she came to see it as belonging rightfully under feminist discourse and a universal gendered logic that saw her pronounce 'police blotter' rapists the 'shock troops' of patriarchal rule (Brownmiller 1976, p. 209). To use the language of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981), whom I draw on throughout this book, Brownmiller was one of the major figures in a discursive struggle by feminism to move rape and sexual violence out of the discursive orbit of criminal justice and into the domain of feminism and the politics of gender (Serisier 2005). This also redefined women who spoke about rape from objects of legal suspicion and silencing who the 'women's movement had nothing in common with' to heroic survivors whose narratives of experience were foundational to feminist activism and theory (Brownmiller 1976, p. 8).

As cultural theorists have made clear, however, the horizons of possibility for new stories are constrained by the norms and conventions surrounding existing representations (Ewick and Sibley 1995, p. 208). In other words, the discursive shift that I discuss isn't a process of absolute rupture but involves drawing on, reworking and incorporating the existing canon of stories and their discursive frameworks

(Bolter and Grusin 1999, p. 56). Otherwise, the new framework of understanding is not culturally comprehensible. In the case of Brownmiller's (1976, pp. 174–209) text, the process of accommodation with existing frameworks is made most explicit in the chapter, 'The Police Blotter Rapist', in which she uses criminal justice statistics and discourse to conclude that rapists are most likely to be poor men of colour. As Angela Davis (1983) has famously argued, in a book that otherwise sees the criminal justice system as responsible for a set of woman-blaming 'myths' about rape, Brownmiller fails to question criminal justice myths around race and rape. As a result, she reproduces what Davis labels the 'myth of the black rapist', a damaging cultural trope that sees sexual violence as a crime committed primarily by racially marginalised men against white women. Brownmiller's insistence on seeing rape solely in terms of gender makes her unable to critique the carceral politics that selectively recognises and punishes rape as a crime through racist and class-biased policing, prosecution and sentencing practices (Bumiller 2008).

In her prioritisation of gender over race and insistence on a politics of gender universality, Brownmiller paradoxically constitutes race as a generic boundary around the genre of women's stories. As Derrida (1992) has made clear, genre is both an enabling and a constraining force. It constructs a cultural space and a set of tools for telling certain narratives but marks other narratives as outside of that space and forecloses other ways of telling or understanding a story. Brownmiller locates the beginning of women speaking politically about rape in the radical feminist consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s, despite the fact that black women in the US had been speaking publicly and politically about rape from the time of slavery when abolitionists made political use of women's accounts of sexual violence (e.g. Jacobs 2000). Throughout the twentieth century, black women such as Recy Taylor and Amelia Boynton Robinson also testified to their experiences of sexual violence at the hands of white men as part of civil rights and anti-racist movements (McGuire 2010). They produced political understandings of rape as a 'conscious process of intimidation' by which white men kept all black people in a state of fear. Their narratives demonstrate that the feminist truth constructed by Brownmiller is a particular interpretation of some women's experiences rather than a universal truth that arises naturally from listening to all

women's stories. It is a truth that sees only speech that is solely about gender as political speech about sexual violence, thus casting the history of black women's speech as located outside this politics of story production. As I show in later chapters, as feminists attained increasing discursive authority in relation to rape, selective recognition of stories continued this process of generic boundary-making at the same time as enabling specific forms of narrative. Relations between feminist experts on rape and the narratives of experience that provide their inspiration are marked by power dynamics that, at their most extreme, contribute to or produce the erasure of certain women's narratives or their framework of interpretation. As I explore in the following chapters, this has made the genre of stories enabled by speaking out a predominantly white genre. Within this genre, as I discuss in Chaps. 3 and 6 particularly, the stories of women of colour may be incorporated within white feminist stories that presume to speak on their behalf.

But even relations between feminists such as Susan Brownmiller and the women like Sara Pines whose stories they tell are not as automatically or naturally complementary as feminist analyses often presume them to be. In the introduction to the 1974 New York Radical Feminists' publication, *Rape: The First Sourcebook for Women*, a collection of papers and narratives from the 1971 conference and speak-out, the editors note pointedly:

> Rape as an issue didn't arise because feminist leaders decided it was 'the issue' or because it was a designated topic on a consciousness-raising list. Instead, it became an issue when women began to compare their experiences, and realised sexual assault was common. (Connell and Wilson 1974, p. 3)

Indeed, some leaders like Brownmiller had to be dragged unwillingly into recognising the political significance of rape by survivors such as Pines. Once convinced, Brownmiller spent the next four years researching and writing *Against Our Will*, a text that would establish her as the pre-eminent feminist expert on rape and largely obscure its own foundations in the stories and insights of Sara Pines and the other unknown women whose experiential narratives inspired the project. Feminist interlocutors like Brownmiller are not merely supportive listeners or

even sources of dissemination and amplification for women's experiences and the understandings which arise from them. Instead, feminist texts based on women's experiential narratives simultaneously produce new understandings of rape and install themselves as the experts or custodians of these new truths (Yeatman 1993). A hierarchy can be introduced in which the narrative of experience is shaped and moulded into a political feminist story by the expert. Through this reshaping, Brownmiller, now authorised as a feminist storyteller, gains the right to make meaning from Sara Pines' story, which only reaches us through Brownmiller's mediation.

All of this speaks to the ambivalent position of survivors who tell their stories. To speak of sexual violence, and break the silence and taboos surrounding it, can be an incredibly empowering experience, a way of reclaiming subjectivity and agency after a desubjectifying experience of violence. But it is an experience that is fraught with vulnerability and risk. There is the potential response of disbelief or trivialization, as documented by Sara Pines in her experience with the police and other survivors who told stories to Brownmiller of disbelief and denial from friends, families and partners. But, these are accompanied by less obvious risks. Even sympathetic and feminist audiences may want to hear a story told in a certain way or may interpret an experience differently to a survivor and insist on that interpretation. The political model of speaking out offers political benefits to survivors but it also asks and even demands a lot from them. Feminist politics both supports survivor stories and requires survivors to tell these stories and to tell them in specific ways. This ambivalence has only been heightened with the success of speaking out as a form of discursive activism 'directed at promoting new grammars, new social paradigms through which individuals, collectivities, and institutions interpret social circumstances and devise responses to them' (Young 1997, p. 3).

Speaking of the women who spoke at the first New York Radical Feminist speak-out in 1971, Brownmiller (1999, pp. 198–199) reflected that 'their words were to reverberate far beyond the confines of the tiny church' in which the speak-out was held, and it is these reverberations that are the focus of the remainder of the book. The success of speaking

out means that it has moved from feminist-defined and controlled spaces, such as consciousness-raising groups, into the wider public domain. In doing so, it has become an increasingly mediatised and mediated process. The journalists who were present at that speak-out were the first of many who would find the phenomenon of women speaking about sexual violence newsworthy. Survivor narratives can now be found as books, magazine articles, in documentaries, films and television talk shows, and, in recent years, on the internet and social media. This growing cultural influence is shown in the 2017 *Time* magazine award of 'Person of the Year' to the 'Silence Breakers' who had spoken out about workplace sexual harassment and violence, following the emergence of the #MeToo movement (Zacharek et al. 2017). This was the first time the magazine had awarded the title to a group since the 1975 'Women of the Year' edition that featured Susan Brownmiller, although by 2017 it was speaking out, defined far beyond feminism and feminist influence, that was the topic of the magazine's profile, a moment I return to in Chap. 5.

As survivor accounts have acquired greater cultural acceptance and a broader sympathetic audience, their public and cultural dissemination has come to exceed the discursive and political bounds of feminism. While many survivors and their supporters speak as feminists, not all do, and feminist claims to a natural affinity with survivor narratives are challenged by other experts and interpreters, from psychologists and therapists to proponents of law and order and victims' rights organisations. The success of speaking out has produced, I argue, a more complex set of risks, pitfalls and ethical dilemmas for feminists and survivors. All of these are underwritten by a central paradox. Breaking the silence, despite its significant cultural impact, has not ended sexual violence, nor does it seem to have significantly reduced it, or to have eradicated the stigma associated with being a rape victim. Many of the stories women tell almost 50 years after the birth of the feminist anti-rape movement contain disturbingly similar elements to those from that first speak-out, even as the cultural context in which they are told has been undeniably altered by the effects of half a century of speaking out. This paradox provides the primary context and impetus for this book.

Approach, Scope and Organisation

This is not a book about rape as such. Rather, it is a critical analysis of 'speaking out' against rape as a form of narrative politics. My aim is to trace some of the consequences of telling stories of sexual violence as a form of political activism. The book is framed around a central question: What are the implications of this narrative-based politics for the project of ending sexual violence, and for survivors and feminists who participate in this project? The answers to this question will necessarily be partial, based in part on the rapidly changing political and cultural landscape surrounding this issue, the most recent example of which at the time of writing is the explosion of public speech around rape falling broadly under the auspices of #MeToo. The cultural scholar John Fiske (1996, p. 13) has written that: 'Anyone who analyses change while it is in progress and is foolish enough to predict its direction must be prepared for history to prove him or her wrong'. Nevertheless, as Fiske notes, it is possible to draw out historical tendencies and legacies while being mindful of this limitation. That is what I attempt to do here.

The primary object of enquiry in this book is Anglophone Western feminist practices of speaking out and their legacies. This limits the scope of the book in several ways. First, following feminist understandings of rape and sexual violence as an act which shapes the life experiences of women in specific and highly gendered ways, when I discuss survivors of victims of sexual violence, I generally refer to women, and where relevant, I move between discussions of survivors of sexual violence and women as a social group. There is a great deal to say about other gendered experiences of survivors but that is beyond the scope of this book. The case studies discussed move between national contexts (particularly the USA, UK, Australia and Canada) but remain within what Rentschler and Thrift (2015, p. 239) label a transnational, Anglophone feminist 'discursive public' defined through shared discourses, media platforms and reference points. Within this context, feminism as a cultural and political movement is the product of both shared and nationally specific histories and understandings, as are cultures of telling stories of sexuality and victimisation. As Ken Plummer (1995) notes, the culture with the strongest

history of narrative politics around rape is the USA, and this is reflected in the proportion of case studies that focus on that country.

This is an interdisciplinary work that is primarily situated in relation to debates within and among feminist scholars even as it draws on wider sociological and cultural work on the social and political uses of narrative. I follow in the tradition of feminist interpretation of representation, narrative and rape that contends that understanding and combating rape is as much 'a question of language, interpretation and subjectivity' as it is about embodied violence (Marcus 1992, p. 387). Or, as Lynn Higgins and Brenda Silver argue, 'who gets to tell the story and whose story counts as "truth" determine the definition of what rape *is*' (Higgins and Silver 1991, p. 1). Feminists have used these insights to make powerful critiques of the ways that women who speak about rape are 'tainted' by doubt and disbelief (L. Gilmore 2017), and their narratives over-written legally, socially and culturally (Ehrlich 2001), while respectable and powerful men are granted narrative 'immunity' from the consequences of the stories that women tell (Waterhouse-Watson 2013). These critiques, and the debates and discussions from which they arise, form an important foundation of this work.

The book also takes part in on-going processes of interrogation and critique of feminist responses to sexual violence, noting with Wendy Brown (1995, p. x) that 'critique is not equivalent to rejection or denunciation, … the call to rethink something is not inherently treasonous but can actually be a way of caring for and even renewing the object in question'. In producing my own critique, I draw on debates on the potentials and limitations of 'survivor discourse' as a tool for political transformation (Alcoff and Gray 1993; Naples 2003), and the investment of feminists and feminism in social stories of rape and the ways in which they are told (e.g. Haag 1996; Horeck 2004; Mardorossian 2014). In my consideration of the ways in which speaking out has become a widely accepted and even 'common sense' response to rape, I engage in a growing literature that is concerned with what Rose Corrigan (2013) refers to as the 'failures of success' in the feminist politics of rape. In engaging in critiques of 'feminism', I remain cognisant not only of the existence of multiple feminist positions but of the importance of not ceding the terrain of feminism to institutionally or discursively dominant forms. Nevertheless, following

the critics above, I find it useful to retain a focus on 'feminism' as a meaningful term that can specify, variously, political commitments, institutional position or a cultural location. For this reason, I frequently discuss 'feminism' even as many of the chapters articulate and explore debates and disagreements about feminist identities and politics.

As a critical engagement with the politics of 'speaking out', this book extensively discusses, analyses and debates women's narratives of experiences of sexual violence. In doing so, I only make use of published or otherwise public narratives. Where this 'public' status is questionable, as in the case of individual tweets, I err on the side of what the Association of Internet Researchers (2012) refers to as 'contextual' privacy, recognising that simply because something is publicly searchable it is not necessarily intentionally public. Beyond this, I am committed to engaging ethically with these texts through, firstly, giving them what Leigh Gilmore (2017, p. 5) refers to as an 'adequate witness', responding to them without 'deforming' them by doubt or 'substituting different terms of value for the ones offered by' the survivor herself. I do not interrogate the 'truth' of the narratives here but accept them on their own terms, although I do explore the ways in which some of these narratives were granted or not granted belief. I accept the story and interpretation offered by the writer or speaker. For me, this does not mean simply accepting all interpretations offered and presenting them as empirical artefacts but engaging with the authors as experts on their experience. I both discuss these texts as examples and treat them as feminist literature to be drawn on, debated and considered. Following the point made by the survivor and anthropologist Cathy Winkler (2002, pp. vii–viii), I avoid terminology such as 'her rape' or 'her rapist' that linguistically connects the event to survivors' identity and decentres the responsibility of men who rape. Finally, the terms victim and survivor are subject to extensive debate. My usage reflects the dominant tendency in the survivor narratives discussed here, outlined in Chap. 3. In what I label the core narrative of speaking out, a victim transforms herself into a survivor through her act of speaking out, and that is the usage I follow, even as I seek to draw out the complexity and paradoxes of that narrative structure.

The chapters of the book are based around a series of case studies that draw out key elements of the politics of speaking out. The book does not

attempt to provide a comprehensive survey or overview of the stories told by survivors of sexual violence or their political influence historically or geographically. Indeed, a focus on public texts means that the majority of acts of speech about sexual violence, told in private or semi-private forums, are not the subject of this book. Instead, it seeks to analyse moments, texts and case studies to draw out their significance for the public reception and understanding of survivor speech, and to assess the political and cultural legacies of speaking out as a form of narrative politics. Chapters 2, 3, 4 and 5 map the discursive framing and institutional and cultural positioning of these narratives, while the remaining chapters focus on the political and ethical responsibilities of feminist audiences and interlocutors of these narratives.

Chapter 2, 'Speaking Out Beyond Feminism: Public Survivors and Rape Narratives', provides an account of the increasing cultural acceptance of the ethical and political necessity of speaking out as a response to sexual violence through revisiting the late 1980s as a turning point in the public recognition of survivor narratives and 'public survivors', women who achieve a public profile through speaking about their experience of rape. Using Mikhail Bakhtin's (1981) work on the 'competition' between discourses to draw words and concepts into their 'orbits', the chapter traces the way that the growing cultural authority of speaking out has seen survivor narratives become discursively separate from feminism, focusing particularly on the competing discourse of criminality and 'law and order'. The chapter explores this through consideration of two early 'public survivors', Nancy Ziegenmeyer in the USA and Jill Saward in the UK, ordinary women who became public figures through speaking out about their perspectives of rape, although not, as I argue, from a straightforwardly feminist perspective.

Chapter 3 uses the proliferation of book-length 'rape memoirs' in the late 1990s to explore the effects of genre formation and the existence of a recognisable core narrative of speaking out mentioned above. While feminists and survivors believed that speaking out would enable all survivors to speak and to tell a diverse range of stories, this chapter describes a clear set of generic boundaries around the kinds of stories that are tellable: primarily narratives of stranger rape told by educated white women. The chapter also explores the ambivalent effects of speaking out as described

by the women who tell their stories. While the promise of speaking out is that it can produce individual empowerment and collective liberation, the survivors in this genre describe it as an act fraught with risk and vulnerability as well as recognition and empowerment.

Chapter 4 considers the complicated relationship of the criminal law to women's speech about sexual violence. It discusses the Victim Impact Statement of Emily Doe, produced for the criminal trial of Brock Turner, and then distributed publicly as a political statement condemning both Turner and the legal system that minimised his actions (Baker 2016a). Doe's statement helps to elaborate the ways in which speaking out has worked to contest the law's self-proclaimed ability to determine the 'truth' of rape by revealing legal investments in rape myths and its refusal to grant women's speech a just hearing. Simultaneously, as I argue in the second half of the chapter, Doe's story reveals a continuing commitment among survivors and many feminists to speaking through and within legal domains. The chapter concludes by asking whether speaking out offers a means for moving 'beyond' the law as a site for the judgement of women's speech about rape.

The first half of the book concludes with a discussion in Chap. 5 of the significance of social media as a forum for the production and dissemination of women's narratives of sexual violence. Recent years have seen an upsurge in public and publicly accessible survivor speech, accompanied by claims that social media has produced a new era of speaking out, in which it is far easier for women to speak, and to find a 'community of listeners'. This chapter begins with a discussion of the effects of the collective storytelling of hashtag activism, and the ways it has enabled increasing forms of speaking out. I argue, however, that social media does not eliminate the problems discussed in previous chapters, of a lack of control over the framing and reception of narratives; of generic boundaries that exclude certain stories; or of being disbelieved and refused a hearing. Instead, I suggest that it changes the terrain on which these conflicts happen. Finally, I ask whether, if social media represents a logical extension of the politics of speaking out, it might also offer insight into its political limits.

The focus on feminist politics in relation to survivor narrative begins with an attempt to think through the relationship between the experiences

of survivors and their representation by feminist experts. This is examined through the lens of a significant controversy in Australian feminism, the 'Bell debate', which centred on the right of Diane Bell, a white American anthropologist to 'speak out' about high levels of sexual violence in remote Aboriginal communities. Revisiting this debate, the chapter insists that postcolonial analyses of power relations between and among women are crucial for understanding the political and ethical responsibilities of feminists in relation to narratives of sexual violence. The Bell debate demonstrates, I argue, the importance of subjecting the actions of feminist interlocutors of women's experiences to critical scrutiny.

The following chapter discusses the ethical and political responsibilities of feminist interlocutors through a discussion of the politics of generic judgement and belief. I argue that rather than enacting a politics of universal belief, the politics of speaking out shifts the boundaries of belief and disbelief, and the basis on which this boundary is drawn. The chapter begins with an analysis of the ways in which the controversial radical feminist, Andrea Dworkin, was unable to obtain belief from feminists in response to her story of being raped in a Paris hotel room in 1999. I suggest this was because she failed to adhere to generic requirements of credibility. I then introduce the problem of authenticity through a discussion of Katie Roiphe's (1993) *The Morning After: Sex Fear and Feminism*, a text that asserted that the generic conventions that structure survivor narratives render them insufficiently authentic and therefore unworthy of belief. Finally, I consider Laura Kipnis' (2017) *Unwanted Advances: Sexual Paranoia Comes to Campus* and her argument that the genre of speaking out is an inappropriate genre for telling specific and general stories of sexual harassment on campus. I contend that these examples are united in drawing attention to the inevitability of generic judgement and the vulnerability it produces for survivors.

Chapter 8 revisits the opposition between speech and silence that underwrites much of feminist and survivor discourse in this area. The chapter argues for a more complex understanding of speech and silence that recognises, following theorists such as Foucault, Lyotard and Brown that both speech and silence are components of discourse and that neither are inherently liberating or oppressive. The chapter explores survivor