Australian Feminist Approaches to Mass Awareness Campaigns:
Celanthropy, Celebrity Feminism and Online Activism

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Abstract

This research asks which methods can successfully promote mainstream recognition for an issue, and if the success of such methods translates to a stronger feminist movement in Australia in the twenty-first century Western zeitgeist. These questions are important because broader-scale feminist consciousness-raising is critical at a time when the dominant discourses of neoliberalism and postfeminism often mean a reduced focus on collective campaigning for issues such as the awareness of gender-based violence, and there has arguably been an evacuation of substantive feminist politics in some areas.

My original contribution lies in the testing and analysis of campaign methods and pathways for the information of Australian feminists who want to take women’s rights issues to more central mainstream spaces in feminist mass awareness campaigning. This research explores the deployment of what I call the twenty-first century’s ‘Tools of the Zeitgeist’. This thesis focuses on three current mainstream Tools of the Zeitgeist: celebrity philanthropy and activism; celebrity feminists; and mainstream, online and social media activism. This research is unique because the discussion revolves around these three areas for feminist activism, which I argue would be most beneficial when used in tandem because they are often utilised in other social movements’ mass awareness campaigns (e.g., poverty or environment) and are rarely deployed in unison in organised feminist mass awareness campaigning. This thesis argues that there is an increased velocity in the Australian mediasphere of feminist discourse and engagement, and as such, it recognises that this is a critical nexus for the potential for a larger scale feminist-led mass awareness campaigning in Australia.

As an interdisciplinary feminist study, this work does not always comfortably fit within any single discipline. However, the overarching field is Feminist Cultural Studies, and as I do not binarise the academic and the popular, it is an appropriate field through which to predominantly frame and inform this research. The research also calls upon the emerging fields of, for example, Celebrity Studies and Internet Studies. As such, it considers the *Half the Sky* campaign (Kristof & WuDunn 2009) and the effect of celebrity activism such as celanthropy (celebrity philanthropy). It also analyses some uses for online feminist activism, such as grassroots petitions and social media.
Additionally, it looks towards the potential of utilising the figure of the ‘celebrity feminist’ (Wicke in Landes (ed.) 1998) in such campaigning. While celebrity feminists are potentially viable cultural and political figures in organised, large-scale feminist campaigning, they are largely critically unexplored and under-utilised in the Australian campaigning context. Therefore, an exploration of the potential efficacy of such feminists for such campaigns is part of the original contribution of this work. This research engages the mediasphere in order to better understand its strengths and drawbacks, and to signal the need for more scholarly research into the benefits of embracing the activism of popular feminist campaigning while also remaining cautious about making it the sole public face of feminism. This research attempts to resist notions of legitimate feminisms or feminists.

Some grassroots methods have been trialled and self-reflexively critically analysed to ascertain what may or may not be useful in broader-scale campaigning. The overall methodology of this thesis is qualitative, and the study makes suggestions and provides cautions from action research and scholarly investigation. It does not propose a specific communication-based mass awareness campaign (or multiple campaigns under one umbrella); rather, it gestures towards certain creative, technological techniques to involve feminist drivers for change in order to mobilise communities towards focused change agitation. The thesis seeks to attain two goals: to raise awareness in the broader community of the need for feminism by feminist activists, and to find a way to centralise the issue of preventing violence against women in Australia. While this thesis is not about violence against women, it is suggested that there is a need for more mass awareness cultural attitudinal change campaigning in Australia around this complex issue. This comes with a caveat that this type of activism is an entrée in the activist continuum.
Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed)_______________________________

Sarah Jane Casey
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Chapter 1: Introduction, Methodology and Structure

…Just as popular culture is often dismissed as unimportant for feminist concern, so is activism that engages with it…But one form of activism does not necessarily exclude the other…cultural activism is important activism in and of itself (Redfern & Aune 2012, p. 191).

…An argument of second-wave feminism (one shared with Marxism and Black politics) that I think is worth holding onto is the argument that political consciousness is achieved: raising consciousness is a crucial aspect of collective political work (Ahmed 2010, p. 6).

1.1 Introduction

This thesis argues that Australian feminists can, and should, make use of celebrity feminists, celebrity activism such as celebrity philanthropy (celanthropy) and online activism in organised, large-scale public awareness campaigns not dissimilar to those of the scale used in other social movements. These methods should be utilised to reach out to a broader range of Australians concerning feminist issues, and they are applicable to a wide spectrum of feminist issues in Australia. I have chosen to focus specifically on the awareness of gender-based violence prevention because gender-based violence is a global pandemic. This thesis analyses mass awareness campaigning, such as the Half the Sky movement (Kristof & WuDunn 2009),¹ and the effect of celanthropy (celebrity philanthropy) and celebrity activism associated with, for example, Oprah Winfrey and Angelina Jolie. It also analyses some uses for online feminist activism, such as grassroots petitions and social media. Additionally, it looks towards the potential of utilising the figure of the popular media feminist (and/or ‘celebrity feminist’); Wicke in

¹ The full title of the book is Half the sky: turning oppression into opportunity for women worldwide (Kristof & WuDunn 2009); however, the movement that runs in tandem with the book is called the Half the Sky movement. Throughout this thesis, both will be referred to as Half the Sky unless a specific distinction is required between the book and other parts of the movement.
Landes (ed.) 1998) in such campaigning. It explores these in order to better understand the deployment of what I call the twenty-first century’s ‘Tools of the Zeitgeist’.

1.2 Tools of the Zeitgeist

The Tools of the Zeitgeist are fluid in that they mostly have undefined and indefinable temporal and cultural boundaries; this suits feminist activism, which should not be dictatorial, and some types of activism are better suited to certain types of issues and/or targets. This thesis contends that boldness and surveillance on the zeitgeist are vital, not to uncritically accept the tools, but to provide awareness about which parts need to be discarded and to ascertain what has utility and what could be better appropriated. This thesis focuses on current key mainstream Tools of the Zeitgeist such as celebrity philanthropy and activism, celebrity feminists, and mainstream, online and social media activism.

1.3 Research Questions

The key research questions in this thesis are: In the twenty-first century Western zeitgeist, which methods successfully promote mainstream recognition of an issue? Can the success of these methods translate to a stronger feminist movement in Australia?

These questions are important because collective feminist campaigning (larger-scale consciousness-raising) is critical at a time when the dominant discourses of neoliberalism and postfeminism often mean a reduced focus on collective campaigning for issues such as the awareness of gender-based violence, and there has arguably been an evacuation of substantive feminist politics in some areas of the mediasphere.² This

² Neoliberalism and postfeminism share attendant individualised discourses where the responsibility is often at the individual level rather than the collective, structural level. These ideologies of individualism and neoliberalism have meant a reduced focus on structural inequality and collectivity, and issues pertaining to gender equality are seen to be individually addressed rather than through collective action. Thus, it is paramount to draw more people to feminist engagement with intersectional oppressions around the pandemic of violence against women. Neoliberalism and postfeminism are expanded upon later in the thesis.
research is unique in addressing these questions because the discussion revolves around three areas of feminist activism (celebrity activism, celebrity feminism and online activism), which I argue would be most beneficial when used together because they are often utilised in other social movements’ mass awareness campaigns (e.g., poverty or environment) and not often used in organised feminist mass awareness campaigning.

This thesis asks: What is it about online activism, celebrity activism and celebrity feminism that may be most useful to Australian feminists, and what are the challenges and potential risks? Does such activism have substantive political or material effects, and does this actually matter when the goal is awareness-raising-based activism? Is this type of activism ‘echo chamber’ activism, which does little to address structural inequalities, and if so, is it salvageable to help funnel attention to broader embedded issues?

This thesis has two goals: to raise awareness in the broader community of the need for feminism by feminist activists, and to find a way to centralise the issue of preventing violence against women in Australia. The thesis argues that the methods that would most successfully promote a stronger feminist movement in Australia are already available, but that they should be used to create powerful campaigns not dissimilar to those of the scale used in the fight to end global poverty. This thesis investigates and then recommends viable strategies to raise awareness more expeditiously. The strategies under review include the utilisation of the ‘new media’ cultural climate, more campaigning via feminist platforms to increase community awareness, mobilisation using mass media such as television, radio and the Internet, and a wider dissemination of feminist ideas and agendas.

The original contribution of this thesis lies in the testing and analysis of campaign methods and pathways as a resource of information for Australian feminists who want to take women’s rights issues to more central, mainstream spaces. Following an overall

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3 For example, highly organised mass media campaigns incorporating both off and online actions, with specific targets and collective goals around awareness and leverage for continuing actions and supports, utilising grassroots activists and other experts together, as well as celebrity activists such as musicians who participate in large-scale concerts.
analysis of the available Tools of the Zeitgeist, those that are most relevant to feminist activism are identified, and a rationale is provided for their selection. Such methods are often found alongside traditional institutionalised channels, albeit working towards different outcomes. Greater connections between the complex, blurred lines of theory and praxis are shown here to help create a more nuanced discourse from other expert feminists to enter mainstream media spaces without disavowing those feminist voices already speaking in such spaces. It is argued that whilst feminist awareness-raising is advantageously prosecuted through multiple mechanisms (and already is), a ‘multi-pronged’ approach to organised campaigning can increase the possibilities for grassroots activism to invoke a greater form of participatory activism. This approach would work in intertwined ways; many campaigns work on individual levels, whereas this would work on attitudinal changes towards normative understandings of the broader community.

1.4 Defining Feminism for the Purpose of the Research

At the broadest level, rather than using the word ‘feminism’, I prefer to use ‘feminisms’, as the diversity of practical and theoretical positions that women adopt makes it nonsensical to simply use the singular form of the word. To do so would be to examine feminism in a monolithic way and not recognise the differences that exist within and across time, race, nations, cultures, ideologies and circumstances. Less broadly, this means we can recognise a category of women as politically informed feminists, despite the particulars of their political differences, simply by applying an adjective such as Liberal, Radical, Marxist or Socialist. According to Brabazon (2002):

one of the great mis-representations of the women’s movement is the existence of only three waves…I avoid the compression of the waves and seek out the movement of ideas…it would be handy (for critics) if feminism had an understood and agreed agenda. This will never happen. The movement is wide-ranging, volatile and convoluted. This is a strength (p. 7).4

Maddison and Merrindahl (2010) define the (women’s) movement as ‘incorporating feminist organisations (such as the Women’s Electoral Lobby)…and movement groups (…campus collectives), women’s policy machinery and bureaucrats, women’s services, and feminist academics, together with...
Like Brabazon, I also believe that it is this ‘movement’ of ideas that is relevant. Throughout this thesis, ‘feminism’ will mostly be used to mean ‘feminisms’, acknowledging that ‘feminism’ is diverse, complex and multiple. It is ‘and always has been—divided, precisely because it cannot possibly hope to be all things to all women at once’ (Nurka 2013, p. 240). I explore popular and academic modes of feminist discourse because, as Mohanty (2003) articulates:

I want to speak of feminism without silences and exclusions in order to draw attention to the tension between the simultaneous plurality and narrowness or borders and the emancipatory potential of crossing through, with, and over these borders in our everyday lives (p. 2).

It is without binarising feminist modes of articulation, and locating spaces where visibility happens, rather than identifying or promulgating schisms that I am most interested in this work. Most importantly, using the word ‘feminisms’ means that it becomes possible to capture waves of feminist campaigns and branches of feminist thought, as well as vexed debates between women. By ‘feminist campaign’, I refer to any campaign that is organised and identifies as feminist—whether its tactics are to engage attention (e.g., in the media, or of particular individuals, groups or organisations) in person (e.g., protests), online (e.g., letter writing), through sit-ins or using a combination of various strategies. Feminist campaigns are political, social, educational and/or cultural activism, whereby the goal is feminist outcomes regardless of the particular feminist ideologies subscribed to by the organisers of such a campaign. Campaign types are unlimited; some may be funded by, or aligned with, larger organisations or other bodies, or they may be run by unaligned individuals. However, the key identifier of a feminist campaign is that the goal is to agitate for a form of change or a disruption in harmful normalising practices. I concur with Maddison and Sawer ((eds), 2013), who argue that ‘cultural activism and discursive political engagement should also be recognised as important and valid activism in and of feminist ideas and collective identities expressed in public discourse, informal interactions, and cultural pursuits’ (p. 172). I concur with this definition.
themselves…these means of engagement can be highly accessible, creating room for debate and contestation among a wide range of women’ (p. 51).

Feminism, women’s rights and gender equity are in varying states of emergency globally and are not being addressed with enough mainstream attention. ‘Mainstream’ is increasingly difficult to define, but by ‘mainstream’, I appropriate the definition given by Dubriwny (2013), who says that mainstream is her ‘shorthand for indicating the pieces of discourse I have analyzed are widely available and are more often than not positioned to appeal to the general public or at the very least to a broad cross-section of the public’ (p. 7). Such an appeal to the mainstream is necessary when oppressions of women, in their many forms, remain predominantly naturalised and marginalised. I argue that an increase in mainstream visibility of feminist issues such as gender-based violence can help to centralise and increase public discourse quality and resistance about such urgent issues.

This approach does not mean that oppressions are not being fought at both the material and discursive levels by feminists, activists, educators, governments and certain industries. However, violations of the human rights of women—particularly through gender-based violence - continue to need urgent attention if they are to be denaturalised and thereby destabilise the status quo. Celebrity feminists and celebrity activism, including celanthropy and communicative technologies for such campaigns, are critically undervalued. The egocentric motivation of overtly populist celebrities is such that the idea of recruiting the Tools of the Zeitgeist for more profound ends is often given cursory attention or overlooked completely. While I agree that ‘feminists must not poach an evangelist-like zeal from the pseudo messiah of the day’ (Brabazon 2002, p. 7), it is not necessary to entirely dismiss the potential of some celebrity figures, as ‘celebrity = impact on public consciousness’ (Rojek 2001, p. 10).

1.5 Feminism and the Media
This research engages the mediasphere in order to better understand its strengths and drawbacks. It signals the need for more scholarly research into the benefits of embracing the activism of popular feminist campaigning while also remaining cautious about making it the sole public face of feminism. Media incorporates a range of communication systems and technologies (e.g., television, radio, print media, mobile phones and the Internet). There is uncertainty surrounding the definition of media because media is constantly evolving (O’Shaughnessy & Stadler 2012).

This research makes an original contribution to the field by suggesting activist campaigning pathways for Australian feminists to take women’s rights issues to more central, mainstream spaces by employing the most relevant Tools of the Zeitgeist. It also recognises that it is advantageous to have a more nuanced discourse from experts, including more academically trained feminists, in mainstream media spaces without disavowing those more populist feminist voices already speaking in such spaces. The figure of the ‘celebrity feminist’ was theorised by Wicke (1994 in Landes (ed.) 1998) and has been the subject of scholarly debate (e.g., Taylor 2008, 2014a; Lilburn, Magarey & Sheridan 2000). This thesis further develops these debates by arguing that the celebrity and popular media feminist is unexplored as a campaign figure in critical literature. A ‘multi-pronged’ organised campaigning approach can increase the possibilities for grassroots activism to invoke greater forms of participatory activism at a community level—virtual or otherwise. For these purposes, some grassroots campaigning methods have been ‘trialled’ for this thesis in order to ascertain what may or may not be useful.

This thesis provides cautions from action research and scholarly investigation. It does not propose a specific communication-based mass awareness campaign (or multiple

5 The term ‘mediasphere’ was coined by Hartley (1996), who followed on from Lotman’s definition of the semiosphere. Hartley explains:

The semiosphere is the whole cultural universe of a given culture, including all its speech, communication and textual systems such as literature and myth. The mediasphere is a smaller ‘sphere’ within the semiosphere, and includes all the output of the mass media, both fictional and factual. The mediasphere, in turn, encloses the public sphere, and the ‘public sphericules’ that seem to have proliferated within it. The idea is that the public sphere is not separate from but enclosed within a wider sphere of cultural meaning, which is itself mediated as it is communicated back and forth from the cultural to the public domain (p. 140).
campaigns under one umbrella); rather, it advocates for certain creative, technological techniques to involve feminist drivers for change in order to help engage and potentially mobilise communities towards focused change agitation. This campaigning approach in the Australian context is unique in its capacity to expand and redeploy some of the methods that are frequently used in other mass awareness campaigns, such as those used to help end extreme poverty. However, the approach also uses academic and expert feminist drivers in conjunction with popular feminists, celebrity activists, celanthropist partners and ‘new’ technologies.

1.6 Violence against Women and Activism

According to the United Nations (UN, n.d.) gender-based violence has reached pandemic levels globally. In 2013, the World Health Organization (WHO) revealed that ‘physical or sexual violence is a public health problem that affects more than one third of all women globally’ (WHO 2013). Flood and Pease’s (2009) research demonstrates that ‘attitudes have been of central concern in relation to violence against women. Attitudes play a role in the perpetration of this violence, in victims’ responses to victimization, and in community responses to violence against women’ (p. 125). Indeed, feminism has been ‘the social movement with the most impact on community norms regarding violence against women’ (Flood & Pease 2009, p. 136). In line with the UN’s UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign, the Australian Human Rights Commission’s (2010) Gender Equality Blue Print and the Department of Social Services’ (2010) National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, as well as many other governments, community groups, organisations and individual activists and scholars around the world, this thesis argues that there is an urgent need for more cultural attitudinal change campaigns. In 2014, VicHealth published a major Australian study entitled The national community attitudes towards violence against women survey, which revealed that while there have been some improvements in

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6 Gender-based violence is a violation of human rights, and the term is often used synonymously with violence against women, as most gender-based violence is inflicted by men against women. Given that not all violence is separate, and is thus intersectional, it is difficult to categorise different types of violence. Violence against women includes domestic, sexual violence and rape, forced marriages, honour crimes, trafficking and forced prostitution. Much gender-based violence is ‘vastly underreported’ globally (Palermo, Bleck & Peterman 2014, p. 602).
attitudes towards violence against women in Australia, there are considerable areas of concern. For example, since 1995, fewer people believe that violence is mainly perpetrated by males against females, and between 2009 and 2013, fewer people understood that violence against women was common (VicHealth 2014, p. 1). Although it is not the only factor in violence prevention, attitudes are paramount (alongside challenging certain societal norms that frame and form harmful beliefs that may lead to violence against women) (Flood & Pease 2009). Larger-scale feminist-led campaigning to raise consciousness is critical at a time when ‘post-feminist and even third wave writers have been routinely shown to…consciously distance themselves from (second-wave) feminism’, and when its ‘forms of feminism [are] no longer believed to be in vogue including women’s consciousness-raising’ (Taylor 2011, p. 80). This thesis argues that using collective campaigning (larger-scale consciousness-raising) is imperative for public mobilisation from mass awareness, which may lead to mass participation at a time when the dominant discourses of neoliberalism and postfeminism mean a reduced focus on collective campaigning for such issues, and there has arguably been an evacuation of substantive feminist politics in some areas as a result. This has ironically occurred while there has been an increase in the volume and speed at which feminist discourse is occurring in the Australian mediasphere and political arenas. This signals both an opportunity and a need for targeted campaigning about critical feminist issues such as gender-based violence. Moreover, while not restricted to this type of campaign target focus, it is suggested that the methods argued for in this thesis could be advantageous for such campaigns. As such, this thesis makes an important contribution in the applied context.

It is argued that these serve as complementary tactics to help raise awareness about key issues, such as the pervasiveness of violence against women and victim blaming in media and political discourses. Further, they encourage people to engage in greater, more substantive, activism over time. It is almost impossible to agree on the agenda, but focusing on violence against women, which is at pandemic proportions globally, is a vital cause for all feminist agendas, even though there is not enough awareness of the

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7 The term ‘consciousness-raising’ is commonly associated with Second Wave Feminism as a form of political activism, and it can be used interchangeably with ‘awareness-raising’.
key issues. Suggestions have been made in this thesis to increase the veracity of the conversations and to add to the multiple methods and voices that aim to shift the dominant paradigm. Mass awareness campaigning, which is one part of the activism continuum, comes with caveats: that such campaigning should be treated as a component of a multi-pronged and ongoing approach, with careful negotiation with actual experts; and that such campaigning is entrée-level and does not stand in the place of policy or substantive engagement. Rather, it exists as one part of a longer narrative, as ‘many activists are struggling towards goals that lie some distance into the future…real and lasting political change cannot be achieved unless the culture—people’s values, beliefs and opinions—is changed along with it’ (Maddison & Scalmer 2006, p. 84).

1.7 Forms of Activism and Activism Tools of the Zeitgeist

This thesis recognises myriad possibilities for feminist activism, organisation and participation. It proposes avenues through which feminists may increase visibility by understanding and being prepared to use, or accept the use of, the Tools of the Zeitgeist with greater boldness, frequency and strategic application to activist goals. These tools include communicative technologies within the media culture, such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, blogs and more formal media outlets and, on a larger scale, the phenomenon of pop culture celebrity, with its attendant celanthropic activism, and the figure of the celebrity feminist.

A greater understanding of both the zeitgeist and its tools is important to this thesis, but these tools should not be uncritically accepted. The goal is to analyse what is available to Australian twenty-first-century feminists within the zeitgeist, and to ascertain what has utility, what needs to be approached with caution and which parts need to be discarded altogether. Having a range of tools to apply to activism is an important aspect of twenty-first-century feminisms. The plurality of the current zeitgeist should augment rather than marginalise traditional cultural feminism or academic feminisms.

A neoliberal ideology of individualism has resulted in a reduced focus on structural inequalities and the need for collective action. Such a statement potentially ignores that ‘neoliberalism’ is a heavily loaded term and something of a catch-all that, as Stuart Hall suggests, is often, ‘reductive, sacrificing attention to internal complexities and geo-
historical specificity’ (2011, p. 706). However, this thesis is securely historicised in the early twenty-first century and well aware of the ‘internal complexities’ of modern feminisms. Hall further insists that neoliberalism can have at least a ‘provisional conceptual identity’ and that it must be recognised ‘that naming neo-liberalism is politically necessary to give the resistance to its onward march content, focus and a cutting edge’ (Hall 2011, p. 706, italics added). Therefore, in the interest of political necessity, the term ‘neoliberal’ throughout this thesis will be understood to contextualise the analyses of feminisms, feminists and activism.

It must be acknowledged that not all foci of feminist activism are equal or as urgent, and feminists will continue to disagree about what constitutes the ‘right’ forms of activism, what the focus of such activism should be and whether resistance is even necessary. However, this thesis cautions against allowing that lack of agreement to continue to create atomised feminist activisms that are devoid of any collective politics, or that are characterised by a loss of recognition for the ongoing need for structural change. Despite calls for individual ‘solutions’ to structural problems, it is imperative to create both effective campaigns to raise awareness of collective feminist issues and issues that are specific to some. Mainstream awareness-raising activism should critique, converse with and interrogate its relevance for broader community engagement with plurality.

Currently, and as I will explore throughout this thesis, much of the feminist discourse in the popular domain problematically reinforces the dominant paradigm rather than challenges it. The problem is how to position debates about structural change when the embedded dominant ideologies are individualism and neoliberalism (see Bulbeck 2012). Despite this, media-based feminism holds value in its methods, which can still be recuperated for more resistant feminist activism. Such methods are often an entrée—a bite-sized (or byte-sized) piece only—that may initiate a broader, substantive engagement with feminist concerns by acting as an ‘access’ point to critical involvement in multi-pronged campaigns. The goal of better understanding the Tools of

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8 Additionally, Bulbeck (2010, p. 22) writes that during the 1990s, the ‘combination of neoliberalism and social conservatism led to condemnation and further marginalisation of vulnerable social groups’, especially as socialist and radical strands of feminism weakened.
the Zeitgeist is to enable broader, bolder feminist agitation and action, and a renewed recognition of the power of the collective. Although it is often not sustainable, boldness can be reiterated so that it gradually creates a shift in the cultural imagination. Claiming feminist identity is a ‘deliberate political act’ (Henry 2004, p. 7), and awareness campaigns may increase feminist identification, preferably while also acknowledging diversity and difference.

This thesis acknowledges and works with the potential of popular feminism, recognising that it is getting something ‘right’ in terms of its capacity to employ methods that successfully engage audiences. This thesis therefore explores how the ‘audience’ phenomenon may be best recruited and utilised for more—and sometimes better—feminist activism in Australia. The power of addressing audiences rather than individuals is much clearer as a characteristic strategy of mass audience campaigns such as Kristof and WuDunn’s (2009) *Half the Sky* book and movement. Such campaigns need to be better understood by Australian feminists who are interested in mass awareness campaigning; therefore, this thesis analyses not only individual feminists who already use the Tools of the Zeitgeist as their method, but also the *reception* of mass awareness campaigns that successfully take advantage of the Tools of the Zeitgeist to raise awareness and create leverage.

In Australia, we need to first move towards recognition of the methods for resonating with and engaging the twenty-first-century zeitgeist, and then towards the reception of those methods by more Australian feminists (rather than just media feminists) so they can be collectively positioned to advocate (though not uncritically) for diverse goals. In this thesis, I argue for a better understanding and a deliberate deployment of the relevant Tools of the Zeitgeist (celebrity philanthropy and activism, celebrity feminists, and mainstream, online and social media) to enable increased activism and awareness of a range of feminist issues and some key common concerns, such as violence against women in its many forms. To strengthen feminism, it is first necessary to reach outside the feminist social movement and build community, and then to leverage for greater support from the mainstream media, governments and industry. Australia needs renewed feminist-led awareness, or consciousness-raising, and even large-scale campaigns that have not been seen in recent Australian feminist history, to target mainstream audiences.
Australia is at a nexus of increased feminist visibility; thus, opportunities to organise, challenge dominant cultural attitudes and mobilise across diverse feminisms are present. A positive increase of ‘surround sound’ could take place in the quality of feminist discourse generated in the mediasphere about the movement in Australia. Such a vision understands activism to be far more than individuals signing petitions, although it is a start. Activism is an increasingly contested concept; as Martin, Hanson and Fontaine suggest, it is ‘a precursor to political action that transforms a community, develops a formal organisation, or extends in scale to reach social networks beyond the initial embeddedness of the instigating activist’ (2007, p. 79).

1.8 Thesis Structure and Chapter Overviews

Before engaging the methodology and methods used in this thesis, it is necessary to outline its content and structure so the broad methodology is better understood. After this Introduction, there are three sections that are each specific to a large body of literature of its own: celanthropy and celebrity activism, Australian feminist activism online and ‘celebrity feminism’ in Australia. Each of these sections has two chapters. The first chapter in each section reviews the relevant literature in order to contextualise the subsequent chapter of analysis. Although it would be possible to combine these three small literature reviews into one large literature review and place it as the second chapter, some of the relevance of the literature to the analysis may be lost in this way. Therefore, in the interest of clarity with such a broad literature base, I have opted for a less traditional structure. Following these three sections, there is a concluding chapter that analyses the outcomes of the research and suggests further directions for study while reflecting on the challenges of this project. The chapter overview and structure of the thesis are set out below.

The introduction provides an orientation to the direction of the thesis, along with a statement of the key research question, the argument, thesis structure, chapter overviews and engagement with the methodology and methods.

Section 1: Celanthropy and Activism

Chapter 2: Talking in the Zeitgeist: The T-shirt Revolution?
This chapter engages with and introduces the scholarly debates and literature relating to celanthropy and celebrity activism and their potential uses for feminist activism in Australia. Although it is not a new phenomenon, celebrity activism has recently experienced rapid growth, becoming a field of study of its own within the emerging field of Celebrity Studies and the more established field of Cultural Studies. Visibility through connection to a ‘cause’ is now almost synonymous with celebrity as both an expectation and a method to sponsor leverage for individual celebrity ‘brand(s)’. While acknowledging the somewhat problematic nature of the proliferation of celanthropists and other types of celebrity activists pursuing ‘charity’ and ‘aid’ as self-interested pursuits, I discuss the appropriation potential of promoting such figures for feminist activism in Australian campaigns. Is celebrity activism a viable mechanism for feminist activism to convey urgent mass awareness that women’s rights issues continue to be grossly underrepresented and undervalued and to help recruit activists to broader feminist movement(s)? The fetishisation of celebrity and the changing nature of political engagement both suggest that this may be so.

**Chapter 3: Half the Sky Movement: Possibilities and Problems of Mass Awareness Campaigning Techniques and Celebrity Activism**

This chapter examines the movement sparked by Kristof and WuDunn’s (2009) *Half the sky* in order to test the feasibility of using the mass awareness campaigning platforms set in place by the authors. *Half the sky*, which focuses on creating a global grassroots movement to assist women in the developing world, has unquestionably had a broad cultural effect. In its 25th hard-copy printing since its release in September 2009 (<halftheskymovement.org>), the book has received publicity from philanthropic celebrities and public figures such as Oprah Winfrey, Bill Clinton, Angelina Jolie and the Gates family.

While acknowledging that these methods (and indeed some of the movement’s premises) are not without problems, this chapter asks whether these techniques should be employed more often by Australian feminism, regardless of nuances and differences within the campaign target (such as in campaigns about violence against women or those that raise awareness about victim blaming). This chapter focuses on the methods and reception of the campaigning style, maintaining that in the current cultural climate, celebrity activism and other methods utilised are among the most effective methods for
communicating with and to mainstream audiences in order to shape dominant views. However, whether this type of engagement can impair dominant paradigms by entering the cultural imagination, regardless of ‘cause’ or ‘issue’, is more complex; rather, it assists in adding to a broader cultural conversation. This chapter also raises concerns about philanthrocapitalist assistance as a campaign driver.

Section 2: Australian Feminist Activism Online

Chapter 4: Online Grassroots Activism: A Literature Review

Chapter 4 draws upon scholarly work from various disciplines, with reference made to literature relating to Media Studies and Cultural Studies, as well as the work of scholars working at the intersections of Sociology and Internet Studies. In examining the effects of Twitter in the 2009 election protests in Iran, Burns and Eltham (2009, p. 302) assert that ‘different actors will use new technologies for their own ends: understanding and anticipating such different uses is critical’. The ‘actors’ examined in this section of the thesis—specifically in the next case study chapter—are principally feminist activists (such as myself) who began their activism journeys as ‘sole’ or ‘small-group’ operators; that is, ostensibly unaligned institutionally. The rise and convergence of technologies such as the Internet and mobile devices in the digital or hyper-connected era have significantly affected how ‘activism’ is currently conducted. This thesis is concerned with the efficacy of this activism as a feminist awareness-raising method.

In this chapter, I review the relevant academic literature to enable the scrutinisation of online petitions and the use of Twitter and Facebook by such ‘actors’ in order to consider the effect of digital technologies on feminist activism in Australia. The following questions will be answered throughout the chapter: What is it about online activism that may be useful to Australian feminists, and what are the challenges and potential risks? Does such activism have substantive political or material effects, and does this actually matter when the goal is awareness-raising-based activism? Is this type of activism ‘echo chamber’ activism, which does little to address structural inequalities, and if so, is it salvageable to help funnel attention to broader embedded issues?

Chapter 5: A Case Study of Feminist Activist Interventions in Queensland Party Politics: #sackgavin: A King Hit
Chapter 5 analyses a specific grassroots feminist online activist campaign in Australia. In 2011, it came to light that a (then) Queensland Liberal National Party (LNP) candidate, Gavin King, had written the following in his capacity as a journalist in 2008: ‘if a woman drinks to excess during a night out on the town, is she partly to blame for being raped or assaulted? As uncomfortable and difficult as this question is, the answer surely is yes’ (King 2008, n.p.). Despite political pressure calling for King’s dis-endorsement, at first this issue received little attention from mainstream media or from many relatively ‘well-known’ feminists when activists brought it to their attention. Frustrated by the lack of interest given to the issue of a rape apologist potentially being voted to public office, I began (with another person) an online, explicitly feminist, campaign. The campaign attracted considerable attention from the mainstream and online media in Queensland after more than 5,000 signatures had been gathered, and (then Leader-in-Waiting) Campbell Newman’s Facebook page was ‘bombed’ for 48 hours by citizens calling for King’s dis-endorsement. The King issue remained in the media sporadically for several months leading up to the Queensland state election. The campaign highlighted ways to ‘manage’ an activist project, and demonstrated that the outcomes—while not always consistent with the original goals (King subsequently became an MP and Assistant Minister in the Newman government)—may be of value in disrupting normalising discourses surrounding victim blaming. It also highlighted many tensions that are often associated with grassroots activism, such as the attempted silencing and dismissal of myself by others. Ultimately, the King campaign, with the hashtag #sackgavin, emphasised the need for more collective and more visible feminist activism. This chapter offers a qualitative self-reflexive analysis of the #sackgavin campaign, and more broadly, it provides an interrogation of online feminist political interventions and silencing.

Section 3: Popular Media Feminisms and Feminists in Campaigning

Chapter 6: Celebrity Feminism, Media and Soundbytes: A Literature Review

Wicke (in Landes (ed.) 1998) argues that ‘celebrity feminism…is a new locus for feminist discourse, feminist politics, and feminist conflicts, both conflicts internal to feminism and feminism’s many struggles with antifeminist forces’ (p. 387). It is not my intention to provide a detailed re-reading of Wicke’s important work on ‘celebrity
feminism’ (e.g., Taylor 2008; Lilburn, Magarey & Sheridan 2000); rather, the central aim of this chapter is to conceptualise a critical space through which to examine the relevance, efficacy and value of celebrity feminism to broader feminist activism, and the contribution of these public faces and voices of celebrity feminists within the Australian mediasphere.

This chapter presents a literature review of ‘celebrity’ so that celebrity feminism itself is better defined in relation to other forms of celebrity. Three concepts are introduced: the palatable; the unpalatable; and the tensions between them, both around and within celebrity feminists, which result in what can be called the ‘unpalatable–palatable’. I argue that the tension that supports the unpalatable–palatable is often embodied within celebrity feminists as well as within their commentary, and this tension allows them to ‘succeed’ in the mediasphere. That is, they are able to occupy mainstream ‘space’ because they often invoke ‘palatable’ neoliberal sympathies to engage with that which neoliberalism itself finds ‘unpalatable’; alternatively, they are palatable within an otherwise often unpalatable neoliberal and postfeminist cultural climate. This is a complex configuration because I also define ‘unpalatable–palatable’ as the need to appeal to mainstream audiences via celebrity feminists while agitating for change. Such an appeal is a nexus for visibility, but it can be difficult to consume if a substantive feminist politics is evacuated through the format and medium. This is not the ‘fault’ of the feminists or the medium, but merely an acknowledgement of the zeitgeist. Although popular media and celebrity feminists are potentially viable cultural and political figures in organised, large-scale feminist campaigning, they are largely critically unexplored, especially in a campaigning context. This chapter also focuses on the role of the media in the effect of, and effect on, feminists compared to other forms of celebrity, the escalation of celebrity feminism, and its strengths and weaknesses.

Chapter 7: Celebrity—Media—Popular Feminists and Unpalatable Palatable Tensions

This chapter reviews contemporary, publicly ‘visible’ feminists within the Australian media landscape. These celebrity feminists do not equate to homogeneity or collectivism; however, there are commonalities and predictabilities, such as white, middle-class, heterosexual and ‘safe’—those whom I call ‘palatable’. These popular Australian feminists, Mia Freedman, Melinda Tankard Reist and Dannielle Miller, are
‘authorised’ to speak in the Australian mediasphere; they are predominantly seen as relatable, and they often, but not always, create a *sameness* of feminist discourse. I also look towards those whom I call ‘the outliers’ or ‘unpalatable’ feminist commentators: Helen Razer and Catherine Deveny. This chapter examines whether there has been a dilution of feminist politics and less substantive engagement, and if so, whether celebrity feminists are driving and/or contributing to this apparent distillation, which Dr Leslie Cannold alluded to on the Australian television programme *Q&A*:

> I kind of worry that I’m going to lose activists to fight Brazilians and other sorts of things that they find offensive instead of getting on board with fighting the thing that is—instead of the proxy, the actual thing that’s the problem: the violence, the inequality, work/family issues. These are really the things, I think, that are affecting women’s lives (Cannold 2011).

I question if—heavily promoted by, and promotional for, some of the celebrity feminists in this chapter—*Destroy the Joint* lacks focus, and if it is morally entrepreneurial and non-discriminatory with regard to the issues it presents. Is it presenting a liberal feminist conveyor belt of ‘issues’? Media commentator Razer (2012) has raised concerns with comments such as ‘Oh my fuck. Between campaigning for marriage and against old radio announcers, activism these days is as edgy as an Anne Geddes calendar’. This chapter looks towards the neoliberal postfeminist cultural climate, rhetoric and the use of ‘brand feminism’ that some feminist celebrities use to market and commodify their businesses; however, it acknowledges that many of these celebrities provide access that is not ordinarily available to non-media identities. As such, I ask whether there is a net worth in utilising some of these celebrities in Australian feminist mass awareness campaigning.

**Conclusion and Future Directions for Research**

**Chapter 8: Devouring the Zeitgeist**

This chapter summarises and then analyses the strengths and weaknesses of each section. It reflects on the current activist climate potentially being or becoming a ‘conveyor belt’ for a neoliberal feminist agenda, but it seeks to recuperate a ‘net worth’ approach. It challenges the notion of ‘preaching to the choir’ with regard to mainstream feminist mass awareness in Australia, but it acknowledges that there is potential for—
often-unavoidable—partial de-politicisation of the issues because of the populist elements of campaigning.

This concluding chapter also suggests future directions for research and reflects on the challenges of the project. As previously stated, this thesis is not a thesis about violence against women. Instead, I make suggestions as to why gender-based violence is a serious and urgent feminist target for more cultural attitudinal change campaigning. This thesis regards feminist activism as a continuum where there are different activists for differing purposes. The key questions centre on: What do they contribute? What is missing? What do they fail to contribute? Does it compensate? What does digital activism provide that celebrity feminism and celebrity activism do not? It analyses which types of campaigns need which tools, and it makes suggestions for a mass awareness approach.

1.9 Methodology and Methods

This is an interdisciplinary feminist study; that is, it understands interpersonal and systemic relations to be shaped by uneven power relations that often disadvantage women. The fundamental premise that underlies feminist projects and debates is that women’s voices and positions need to be heard in all of their diversity. Women’s understandings regarding identity, needs, social equity, substantive equality and justice can be understood in pluralistic ways across time and place, and even in the same place simultaneously. Examining power relations in the political, domestic and public spheres, and understanding the ways in which representation works, are paramount to understanding the notions of agency and its deployment. Feminist theory highlights the masculinist foundations, which are privileged in models of subjectivity (Irigaray 1985; Weedon 1987). Feminist practice should, at least initially, be ‘at odds with what already exists so that we may say “that’s not it” and “that’s still not it”’ (Kristeva in Marks et al. 1980, p. 137). The need for this has not disappeared.

As an interdisciplinary thesis, this work does not comfortably fit within a single discipline. However, the overarching field is Feminist Cultural Studies. This is where the research is most easily located because, according to Taylor (2005), Feminist Cultural Studies ‘signals a form of self-consciously politicised criticism that works to render visible the gendered power relations of various modes of signification’ (p. 16).
Given its inherent political stance, this thesis draws upon scholarly and popular sources. Feminist Cultural Studies:

refers to a set of intellectual engagements that aim to call attention to women’s cultural experiences…that is situated at the intersection of women’s studies and cultural studies, both of which are intimately tied to the possibility of political change…feminist scholars in cultural studies turn their attention to the everyday lives of women (Meagher 2005, p. 269).

I do not binarise the academic and the popular, so Feminist Cultural Studies is an appropriate field through which to frame and inform this research.

Feminist research is also at pains to self-consciously locate the self in knowledge acquisition in order to account for bias and interpretation. The alternative is to speak with a detached, pseudo objective voice that is omniscient. Not only do I address issues as personal to myself, but I also insert my own experiences into this thesis. I see this thesis as part of my personal journey as a feminist. My understanding of feminism began formally in university in the early 1990s. I studied feminist philosophy and became particularly interested in the work of Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva and, later, Judith Butler. I became politically active in a feminist context and later, after many years of work, started to think about how I could best combine the academic and the activist, realising that they are not mutually exclusive. I then wrote my Honours thesis on access points into the complex philosophical work of Butler.

Later, my feminism became more informed by the practical experience of campaigning, activism, working within large organisations and through travel. While I never moved away from feminist theory, I became attracted to writing an interdisciplinary doctorate where I could move more into Feminist Cultural Studies while also being able to conduct action research, undertake critical self-reflexive work, observe participants and conduct scholarly analysis.

Not surprisingly, given these premises, the overall methodology of this thesis is qualitative. There is no single qualitative methodology; it is ‘diverse, pluralistic and in some cases even ridden with internal contradictions’ (Jacob in Sarantakos 2005, p. 36). Constructionism and interpretivism form the theoretical foundations of qualitative research methodologies. Constructionism is the belief that there is no objective truth or
reality, that there is an individual and collective generation of meanings, and that people construct meaning in interactions with objects. Interpretivism is the recognition that humans interpret the world from within their own contexts. Therefore, qualitative methodology is both pluralist and relativist.

The definition given by Stanley and Wise (1990) for ‘relativist’ is the one that I am most aligned with, as they acknowledge that the term is used in many ways: ‘we define “relativism” as an insistence that, although there is “truth”, judgments of truth are always and necessarily made relative to the particular framework or context of the knower’ (p. 40). The data collected are open to interpretation—especially the participant observation undertaken in the petition action research.

The strength of this type of research is that it does not hold truth as stable and fixed, and it therefore expects people to make meanings in different ways. This provides a nuanced, contextualised foundation for analyses. Different outcomes in diverse positions are ‘normal’ expectations for qualitative research, and meaning making must incorporate the factors that create identities in the first place. The main downfall, which is a necessary one, is that so many possibilities and variables could overwhelm the research and/or researcher. As there is no singular way of addressing the research question, and there is ‘no certain or absolute knowledge against which the truth of everything can be measured…it has to be made believable (as)…it is easy to class feminist knowledge as unscientific, biased and lacking as authority’ (Ramazanoglu and Holland 2002, p. 2). Feminist research can be dismissed on such grounds if the value of qualitative research is not fully recognised, or is only strategically admitted. The idea that reality resides in the human mind, and that humans occupy the central positions of the research, means that objectivity can be difficult to gauge in the qualitative model for research. Indeed, it may be that objectivity can be set aside where perceptions govern behaviours and where values drive responses. Qualitative research enables researchers to ‘drill down’ further to create better understandings of people and society by including perceptions and values as part of the research, and by including the perceptions and values of the researcher.

A qualitative methodology needs to be supported by data-gathering tools, or methods, that support an interpretive approach. In and of themselves, methods are not ‘feminist’, as Stanley points out: ‘there is no one set of methods or techniques, or even broad
category of types of method…which should be seen as distinctly feminist’ (Stanley (ed.) 1990, p. 12). Rather, the epistemology and theoretical domain drive the use of the methods and direct the use of the tool to feminist goals.

This thesis uses two key methods: textual analysis, and action research involving a petition and self-reflexive notes such as those that would be used for an autoethnography. I applied textual analysis to evaluate information from a number of sources, including mainstream media such as television, newspapers, radio and magazines, the online mediasphere (predominantly in Australia), and scholarly publications. With regard to reviewing #sackgavin in Chapter 5, and occasionally other online campaigns in Twitter (e.g., #mtrsues and #destroythejoint), I did not conduct statistical research into datasets of Tweets sent or retweets. Rather, I conducted a thematic overview of the textual content of Tweets and Facebook conversations. I examined media discussions generated and a sample of Tweets, retweets and Facebook, where celebrity activists and celebrity/popular media feminists communicate. This is in line with the growing number of scholars of Internet Studies who support qualitative methods to conduct Internet research (e.g., Baym 2000; Turkle 1995; Boyd 2008). Like feminists, such scholars are also prepared through their methods, and through self-reflexivity, to discuss the way in which Internet Studies troubles its own situatedness. Even the method of removed observation was essentially recruited to and subsumed within textual analysis, as many engagements were in textual form online.

To balance the potential subjectivity of interpretation involved in textual analysis, I also used action research. As defined by Reason and Bradbury (2001), action research is:

a participatory, democratic process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes, grounded in a participatory worldview which we believe is emerging at this historical moment. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities (p. 1).

Reason and Bradbury (2001) also regard action research as ‘working toward practical outcomes…to produce practical knowledge that is useful to people in the everyday conduct of their lives’ (p. 2). The petition was the information-gathering tool for this
part of the thesis, and this was consistent with the goals of the practical application of the research to hopefully assist other feminist researchers in the limitations and benefits of petition-based campaigning.

In the interests of monitoring subjectivity, I also maintained a self-reflexive critical analysis of my experience conducting action research in the #sackgavin campaign. Thus, it was a type of autoethnography in the definitional sense, as I self-reflexively analysed my own experiences as a participant observer within the milieu of online feminist activism. The research also engages feminism in the mediasphere and, as a working document, reviews some literature on the scholarly discourse around social media, social media activism and petitions. As I was located in the action research, this all helped me to better understand myself and to monitor and engage with the media to, for example, write social media profiles. I was able to better conduct and evaluate the action research and develop my identity as an activist feminist researcher, continuously and consciously informing the sense of my situation within the broader feminist discourse and community. The critical analysis also involved textual analysis of the media coverage of the petition.

With regard to the Gavin King petition (#sackgavin; Chapter 5), the use of an online petition was selected in order to find out what type of support existed for making politicians more accountable to feminist priorities. This is not new, but it has become more popular:

since the 1990s, internet-mediated research has been gradually gaining ground in the Social Sciences due, in part, to the expanding use of the internet by public and private organizations and individuals for numerous purposes. Among them, online petitions are often used nowadays to garner support on an issue (Briassoulis 2010, p. 715).

At the time of the petition related to this research (2011), Change.org was the world’s fastest-growing petition platform, and it had only recently been set up in Australia. Other petitioning/campaigning groups (e.g., Getup.org.au) had already established a reputation in Australia, but they did not work with individual user-generated campaigns at that time. Change.org provided a ‘free’ platform for individual users, and it took only minutes to set up a petition. The autonomy was predominantly with the user, and an additional benefit was that when accessed and signed, it would generate an email to the
‘target’ of the petition, thus highlighting the responses (although this could be blocked by the target). The petition I created (#sackgavin) was one of the first in Australia initiated via Change.org, although the platform already had an overseas reputation.

Although researchers sometimes categorise the gender and geographical location of the petition’s signatories, I did not. I wanted to increase signature numbers to gain political and mainstream media attention in Queensland, and perhaps Australia, by raising awareness of the issue. Signatories to petitions:

- offer both objective/quantitative and subjective/qualitative information as in the case of conventional research instruments such as survey questionnaires and interviews...
- Comments may be the most valuable data, depending on their quality’ (Briassoulis 2010, p. 716).

For the purposes of the Gavin King petition, I was more interested in textually analysing the comments for thematic responses to the object of the petition. I found that readers’ comments in various forms of media and in the petition created more research points for consideration. These included the dangers and reality of trolling, the need for collective campaigning groups so individual social media profiles were not potentially targeted, and additional thematic concerns raised by the issue of the petition itself.

In a project this complex, there are bound to be some challenges relating to the selection of data-gathering and design methods. One challenge was that there is no linear trajectory to conversations, comments, statuses and Tweets, and at times of high activity, several threads may be in action simultaneously; therefore, apart from the petition response itself, it is difficult to determine which comments initially drew people to the site. The online environment is non-static, so extreme diligence is required for observation. This can be very time-consuming and distracting. Observing closely to ‘view’ who is speaking about feminism on the Internet, and developing their profile or one’s own profile as a participant observer, is not easy to govern. Internet research presents a large volume of detail and content, which cannot be easily discarded or ignored in the initial phases. For example, all conversations, status updates and readers’ comments must be read and categorised.

The research also changed considerably from its beginning. It began with an exploration of what ‘being a feminist’ might mean to younger Australian women. As such, I
conducted 60 interviews and began to organise a forum, and I interviewed several ‘celebrity feminists’ in Australia. My focus changed when I read *Half the Sky* by Kristof and WuDunn (2009) shortly after it was released. Within six months, the book was in its twentieth print after appearing on *The Oprah Winfrey Show* television program. The authors were ‘serious’ celebrity journalists, having received Pulitzer Prizes for previous work, so they also had their own ‘audience’. I was impressed by how quickly a movement could be sparked, and I wondered about the cultural reception of such a book and the use of celebrities and social media to reach younger generations of potential feminists. While I was deeply concerned about the idea of the ‘rich’ Westerner assisting the ‘poor’ in the global south, I decided to travel to India to research one of the methods advocated by Kristof and WuDunn.

After I had undertaken this ‘voluntourism’, I faced a significant methodological challenge, as I realised that this work did not belong in my thesis, and I had lost a lot of time discovering its misplacement. Thus, I needed to find a way to make use of something from that discovery phase without actually becoming mired in East–West relations, which, although important, were not my domain and, if pursued, would far exceed the ethics clearance I had acquired. Therefore, I decided to keep my focus on Australia and examine the methods popularised by the *Half the Sky* movement.

Despite these challenges, which are mostly generic, the qualitative methodology remains accompanied by methods that are well aligned with the goal of the thesis: to better understand and evaluate methods of communication that are prevalent in the twenty-first-century zeitgeist in order to determine their usefulness to a more fully and vibrantly engaging people in the Australian feminist movement.
Section 1: Celebrity and Activism

Chapter 2: Talking in the Zeitgeist: The T-shirt Revolution?

…It has been said that celebrities serve the same function that ancient gods did, but there is a difference. People created gods to explain things—lightning, death—that they could not understand. We worship celebrities because they’re simple focal points in a world in which we have too much information…if the most fatuous celebrity plants himself near a problem, he may embarrass himself. But at least someone will see it. And someone will film it. And a few of us may, little by little, be moved to change it (Poniewozek 2005, n.p.).

…I think part of the work of feminism is to admit that aesthetics, that beauty, that fun do matter. There are lots of very modern political movements that have caught fire in no small part because of cultural hipness (Martin 2010, n.p.).

2.1 Introduction

Colin Firth, a British actor who has experienced global celebrity, wrote an opinion piece in The Guardian newspaper about celebrity activism. Despite his personal dislike for celebrity activism, he explained some reasons why it can be beneficial for awareness-raising:

Why do you have to hear it from an actor? I have a profound dislike of activism. I don’t enjoy hearing dispatches from the crisis zone delivered by actors and rock stars. I get no joy from fundraising events, op-eds, posters, speeches, slogans…If your profession gives you a public voice, you have a new relationship with those who don’t. Your voice becomes a cherished commodity. Not for its merits but for its sheer volume. You may have nothing to say, but those who do—the wise, the desperate and the better informed—all clamour to make use of your media connection (Firth 2009, n.p.)

Discussing the responsibility of celebrities to use their voices through their privileged positions, Firth alludes to their commodification for more than their performances. He
argues that the voices of some celebrities are of value for disseminating information into the public sphere because of the reach they possess as a form of leverage. Firth’s reasons for stating his personal dislike, and his objection at thinking of this as a potential form of exploitation, are irrelevant because celebrities have been invited ‘to be a firsthand witness’ to disasters, and global events, for example (Firth 2009, n.p.). However, the pressure upon many celebrities to speak on social, political and environmental issues may be embedded in the job requirements of those who possess fame, and therefore a unique vocal volume and range.

Peter Andre, a British-Australian singer and performer, has experienced reasonably minor celebrity due mostly to the success of a couple of songs in the 1990s/early 2000s. He also met his (now ex) wife, glamour model and author, Katie Price, on UK reality program, I’m a Celebrity, Get Me out of Here! (2004). As a couple, they conducted a significant part of their romance through their own reality television programs (Katie and Peter and Katie and Peter Stateside) where the public were invited to be voyeurs into their ‘every day’ domestic sphere. Their joint celebrity couple brand resulted in a spectacle wedding, the births of their children, and ultimately, their break-up; these events were all witnessed by the public. The celebrity appeal of both Andre and Price increased as individuals and as a couple, and then non-couple, as the fascination with the performance of their ‘ordinary’ lives continued. Marshall argues that ‘in order for celebrity to “work”, there has to be some commonality of experience. Celebrity requires a knowledge and para-intimacy of individuals that depends on sophisticated communication networks that connect the people to the “thronged”’ (2006, p. 19). So Andre and Price’s celebrity moved from what they were initially known for (singer and glamour model) due to the greater para-intimacy; this para-intimacy between the audience and the celebrity couple increased their fame. As Turner asserts, the celebrity’s personal life ‘will attract greater public interest than their professional life…once they are established, their fame is likely to have outstripped the claims to prominence developed within that initial location’ (2014, p. 3).

9 Price used the pseudonym ‘Jordan’. She initially was known by this name as she used it while first achieving fame as a “Page Three” topless glamour model in the UK’s The Sun tabloid.
In 2012, Andre was asked to present a talk and provide career advice to 600 students at the historic and prominent University of Oxford Union. The Union describes itself as ‘the world’s most prestigious debating society, with an unparalleled reputation for bringing international guests and speakers to Oxford…aiming to promote debate and discussion not just in Oxford University, but across the globe’ (Oxford Union). Previous speakers at the Oxford Union have included the Dalai Lama, Mother Teresa, Stephen Hawking, Richard Dawkins, Jon Bon Jovi, Michael Jackson and Madonna. Compared to his predecessors at the Union, Andre’s celebrity was unremarkable. He does not hold the status of ‘celebrity supernova’ (Rojek 2012, p. 1) like stars such as Madonna or Michael Jackson. This provokes the question: What could Andre, who is arguably, at best, a c-grade celebrity and reality television identity, bring to the Oxford Union? Criticism in the media ensued: What sort of career advice would someone like Andre have to contribute to some of the finest university students in the world, and potential future leaders of industries and governments? Andre was mocked by the media, demonstrating how the celebrity is both devoured by, and an object of repulsion in the very media that, in part, made the celebrity itself. A journalist pondered what sorts of questions Andre might have been asked at the Oxford Union. For example, ‘we're assuming all those questions were particularly structured versions of the ones we ask him every day – like ‘are you back with Jordan’ and ‘how much do you like chocolate again?’ (Wheeler 2012, n.p.). Andre’s addition as an Oxford Union speaker is noteworthy because it raised questions about the authenticity, type and credibility of Andre’s celebrity, and the response to his inclusion was indicative of a hierarchy in the celebritisation system.

There are many more famous celebrities and a large part of Andre’s fame was derived from reality television and his romantic relationship; these both superseded his celebrity as a singer. Some other celebrities are able to speak about complex issues that are relevant to humanitarianism and politics, and these may have been seen as more suitable. However, if an institution such as Oxford University is going to utilise the services of a celebrity, why use a relatively ‘average’ one? Andre is not a humanitarian or political celebrity, rather he and his ex-wife were known for courting trivial controversy. Andre’s inclusion was also significant because of the response from the Union itself, which seemed to resist the idea that if something is popular, it must
therefore be *less than*, or ‘dumbed down’. Indeed as Mark Greaves, Oxford University Union spokesperson implies, it is a reflection of the zeitgeist, as when asked to justify Andre's appearance, he told British newspaper, *The Sun that* Andre is ‘one in a line of a wide range of speakers. We are definitely not dumbing down, we are just trying to reflect the 21st century and will keep inviting important people. Celebrity culture is here to stay’ (‘Peter Andre to give Oxford address’ 2012, n.p.).

André’s inclusion is representative of how the ubiquity of ‘celebrity culture permeates media and cultural life. It is found in the political arena, the literary circuit, and the boardrooms of big business and software companies’ (Redmond 2014, p. 4). Andre’s involvement was thought to be deserving of attention by Oxford University, which is a traditional upholder of ‘high culture’ side of the binary; however something around the type of Andre’s celebrity attracted an audience from within the prestigious halls of the one of the most celebrated universities in the world. Whatever it was that Andre was thought to bring, celebrity culture resonates with the zeitgeist in significant ways because ‘everyone has an opinion on celebrity since it is the actual material out of which contemporary life is experienced and understood, for better or for worse’ (Redmond 2014, p.5).

### 2.2 Structure of Section

This chapter comprises the introduction and literature review to this section that centres on celanthropy and other forms of celebrity activism. This is focused upon so that an evaluation for future directions may be made about their potential uses for feminist mass awareness campaigns in Australia. It introduces some of the key scholarly debates and literature that inform the subsequent chapter about some aspects of the *Half the Sky* movement. In this section, I scrutinise the efficacy of celanthropy, celebrity activism and advocacy, and philanthropic capitalism (philanthrocapitalism) as potential strategies to help address the urgent need for feminisms and feminist activism amongst broad audiences. I argue that utilising celebrity activists as voices in campaigns is one of the most expeditious methods through which to raise public awareness in large and diverse audiences, that there is still an urgent need for feminisms worldwide as women’s rights continue to be grossly underrepresented and undervalued in multiple ways, and that the
varied and complex problems faced by women must be more publically recognised and actively dismantled.

2.3 Celebrity

Celebrity is a difficult signifier as ‘celebrity is everywhere acknowledged but never understood… [it] is one of the adhesives which, at a time when the realms of public politics, civil society and private domestic life are increasingly fractured and enclosed in separate enclaves [it] serves to pull those separate entities together and do its bit toward maintaining social cohesion and common values’ (Inglis 2010, p. 4). Holmes and Redmond (2010) agree with Inglis about the lack of clarity in a definitional sense as ‘celebrity’ is challenging to define as a term in that it is ‘slippery and varied in its connotations’ (p. 4). However Boorstin (1971) argues that ‘the celebrity is a person who is well-known for their well-knownness’ (p. 58), and Rojek (2001) claims that ‘celebrity = impact on public consciousness’ (p. 10). Rojek (2001) categorises celebrities into ‘types’: ‘ascribed’ (e.g., through lineage such as that of certain royals whether Hollywood or ‘real’ royals); ‘achieved’ (‘stars’ earning celebrity through talent); and ‘attributed’ which is when ‘celebrity is not exclusively a matter of special talent or skill’ (p. 18). The contemporary celebrity is an object of public discourse rendered ‘accessible through Internet sites, biographies, newspaper interviews, TV profiles, radio documentaries and film biographies’ (Rojek 2001, p. 19). Celebrities often embrace para-social relations with their audiences, so the relationship is one-sided (Rojek 2012, p.137). As Turner (2014) notes that while the ‘exorbitance of celebrity’s contemporary cultural visibility is unprecedented…We are still debating, however, what constitutes celebrity’ (p.4). Turner, Bonner and Marshall (2000) attribute this, in part, to the various media methods and forms in which the celebrity appears (p. 9). Poniewozek, in the epigraph to this section said, ‘celebrities serve the same function that ancient gods did’ (2005, n.p.). Rojek (2012, p.120) similarly argues that ‘celebrity culture has filled the vacuum left by the waning of organised religion’ and he examines the privileged positions that celebrities occupy by inhabiting political wealth, power, and connections. He labels this ‘frontierism’ as it is the ‘zone occupied by celebrities…on the edge of society’ (2012, p. 188). As the frontier is characterised by access to the media, other forms of power and ‘temper tantrums’ (Rojek 2012, p. 188), it is, according to Rojek connected to megalomania.
Turner, Marshall and Bonner (2000) examine the means through which celebrity and celebrity culture is produced. They explore ways in which the public searches for authentic moments with celebrities (p. 20). One way non-celebrities can now connect and search for such authenticity with ‘celebrities’ is via new media. Celebrity is constructed and highly mediated in order to be seen as interpersonal. Redmond (2014) describes celebritisation as ‘the celebrity metronome’ which ‘functions like a mechanical metronome moving in and between media platforms, social interactions, and ritualised events’ (p.2). Indeed the ways in which politics is now conducted has changed significantly. What is now deemed as ‘acceptable’ line blurring between public offices and elected heads of government, for example, and the private worlds of individuals, has altered dramatically. A useful way to look at this blurring is the way in which Redmond (2010) conceptualises ‘liquid celebrity’ by following on from Bauman’s concept of liquid modernity (p.82). According to Redmond, liquid celebrity is the ‘cornerstone of liquid modernity’ (p. 82). Redmond (2010) uses the figure of Barack Obama to describe the liquid celebrity who:

promises this solidity yet streams in and out of material view, unable to fix or properly propagate their communion beyond triumphant spectacularism….powerfully seductive and decidedly empty because it echoes the instantaneous (instant) way in which all lives are increasingly led (p. 82).

2.4 Celebrity Studies

Celebrity Studies is a growing academic discipline; it is, as Turner notes, ‘one of the growth industries for the humanities and social sciences over the last decade’ (2010b, p.11). He states that even within disciplines that have no ‘virtually no theoretical interest in, or any methodological approaches appropriate to, the analysis of popular culture’ (2010, p.12), that celebrity culture has become a serious object for scholarship, though its ‘heartland… [remains] within media and cultural studies’ (Turner 2012, p.12). Celebrity Studies now has a peer reviewed journal, Celebrity Studies, which began in 2010, and its inaugural international conference was held in Melbourne in 2012 with scholars from fields such as media, cultural studies, sociology, literary studies, psychology and internet studies, for example, gathering to contribute to the
burgeoning field. Turner states that ‘one of the inevitable consequences of undertaking academic work on celebrity is being asked repeatedly – by journalists, by one's colleagues, sometimes even by taxi drivers - why you would do such a thing’ (2014, p. 144). The reason why celebrity is a field of academic endeavour ties into why celebrity matters more broadly to better ascertain if celanthropy, celebrity endorsements, and celebrity activism offer anything other than additional exposure (for the celebrity as well as the cause), and as leverage to gather media space about an issue to a mass awareness campaign. Redmond argues that:

Celebrity matters because it exists so centrally to the way we communicate and are understood to communicate with one another in the modern world. Celebrity culture involves the transmission of power relations, is connected with identity formation and notions of shared belonging; and it circulates in commercial revenue streams and in an international context where celebrated people are seen not to be bound by national borders or geographical prisms’ (2014, p.2)

As stressed by Turner (2010, p. 14), the status of celebrity is also a ‘cultural formation that has a social function’ contributing to the creation of expectations that many have of everyday life.

2.5 Celebrity ‘leadership’ and ‘activism’

While Celebrity Studies is a developing field, the academic literature around celebrity activism and leadership within the field itself is as t'hart and Tindall observe ‘given almost no coverage in celebrity literature, which is scattered across disciplines such as cultural studies, media and communication studies, sociology and social psychology, with political science contributions modest in number and scope’ (2009, p.4) However academic interest ‘about celebrity politics [reflects] the widespread belief that it is a growing phenomenon’ (Marsh, ‘t Hart & Tindall 2010, p. 322).

There is more than one type of celebrity activist. According to t’Hart and Tindall (2009) there are four types of celebrity activist: celebrity advocates; celebrity endorsers; celebrity politicians; and politicians turned celebrities. They allege that celebrity advocates are more likely to be involved in their causes, attempting to influence policy changes, rather than only being attached to the charity or supporting a politician like a
celebrity endorser might do. Thus celebrities like Angelina Jolie, Bono and Bob Geldof may be seen as celebrity advocates as they are heavily involved in not only charities but longer-term involvement in policy development and change, rather than providing ‘lip service to a cause for publicity reasons’ (Marsh, ‘t Hart & Tindall 2010, p. 323). Celebrity politicians are celebrities who have become politicians (e.g., Clint Eastwood, Arnold Schwazzegner, and in Australia, Peter Garrett). Politicians turned celebrities are politicians whose ‘public behaviour, purposeful association with celebrities, and/or private life alter his public persona beyond the traditional political sphere into the celebrity sphere’ (‘t Hart & Tindall 2009, p.38). There is another type of celebrity activist: the celebrity philanthropist or ‘celanthropist’. These are celebrities who not only use their ‘brand’ and time to endorse a cause, they spend their own money on causes they endorse.\textsuperscript{10} The term “celanthropist” was first coined by Time Magazine (Poniewozek 2005, n.p.). It and “Philanthrocapitalist” (philanthropic capitalist) are according to Bulbeck (2009), ‘clumsy neologisms to describe the charity engagements of billionaire celebrities and capitalists, such as George Soros or Bob Geldof’ (p.2). Rojek asserts that celanthropy is a growing field, and that celebrities are ‘foot soldiers’ battling for public space often through connection and engagement with humanitarian concerns (2012, p. 26). Green and Bishop (2008) pinpoint three crucial factors that celanthropists such as Geldof and Bono have created: money, publicity and that they ‘turned a generation into activists’ (p. 204). They argue that celebrities ‘can grab the attention of the public like nobody else, giving them a powerful pulpit from which to advocate change’ (Green & Bishop 2008, p. 197).

\section*{2.6 Examples of celebrity activism}

Rojek (2012) argues that while the celebrity is the subject of ridicule by media that ‘feed off celebrity stories’ (p. 25), it is an error to dismiss the phenomenon. The same can be argued for the focus of this section, the figure of the celanthropist (celebrity philanthropist), and other types of celebrity activists. The list of celebrity activists is\textsuperscript{10} A consideration of using celanthropists is that some use charity for taxation benefits. This discussion is outside the scope of this thesis. For further discussion, please see Rojek (2012; 2013) and Bishop and Green (2008), for example.
seemingly endless, as celebrities front almost every ‘cause’ possible, and indeed, there seems to be an endorsement t-shirt, wristband, ribbon or other piece of marketing/promotional material alongside each campaign. However very few celebrities, if any, participate in or front large-scale mass awareness campaigns about gender based violence prevention in Australia. As such, consideration of the use of feminist celanthropy (celebrity philanthropy), and broader forms of celebrity activism in a mass awareness feminist campaign series, is valid and timely.

Celebrity activism, while certainly not a new phenomenon, has experienced rapid growth and some transformation in recent history, especially due to the increasingly ubiquitous nature of celebrity culture. It is now commonplace for celebrity activists including celanthropists to participate in campaigns and political processes. According to Rojek (2011), even though many people would erroneously associate the Live Aid campaigns of 1985 with the commencement of celanthropy, Live Aid was when such celebrity activism ‘shifted gear from campaigning to active planning and management’ (p. 69). Before this, for example, despite actors in early motion films being mostly nameless (Botrick 2002, pp. 1-3), audience interest gradually developed until actors were formulated into stars, transformed into 'eroticised, fetishised icons' (Botrick 2002, p. 4). Therefore the impact of celebrity to encourage, endorse and guide consumer behaviour and consumption was capitalised by many organisations. During the peak of the civil rights movement, for example, music was used as a tool for peaceful resistance, community bonding, and social commentary and as an expression of world views (Huddart 2005, p. 31).

In contemporary history, there has been an increase in celebrity activism. For example, iconic actress, Elizabeth Taylor, was a pioneer in lending her face and name to AIDS activism; Audrey Hepburn created a legacy of children’s charity work; there was the 1984 Band-Aid (where a ‘charity supergroup’ of British and Irish singers sang to raise awareness and money for the famine in Ethiopia); then came the 1985 Live Aid. Bob Geldof produced the Live Aid concerts in Philadelphia and London, which were broadcast in Australia, South East Asia, Japan, North America and Europe. The concerts became the world's largest telethon, raising almost US$150 million and bringing the plight of starving Ethiopians to the attention of 2 billion viewers, challenging them to
respond (Huddart 2005, p. 36). Not without significant criticism about the appropriateness of Western celebrity intervention using the latest iteration of the Band-Aid song, ‘Do they know it’s Christmas time?’, co-creator, Bob Geldof’s retort was ‘It’s a pop song, it’s not a doctoral thesis. They can f*** off’ (Grow 2014, n.p.). The inference here is that too much intellectualising of the ‘issues’ prohibits action. The formula of engaging celebrity musicians and televising highly emotive images to encourage donations subsequently 'changed the face of international fundraising' (Huddart 2005, p. 37). The increasing frequency that celebrities respond to humanitarian crises arguably contributes to public engagement and philanthropic behaviour, although not without criticism. Another high profile example of a large-scale campaign was Make Poverty History. It was formulated in the early 2000s, and is a coalition of aid and development agencies in a number of countries which aims to raise awareness of different issues pertaining to extreme poverty prevention, but predominantly focussing upon Millennium Development Goal eight which centres on trade, aid and justice. Make Poverty History hosts multiple events, and uses celebrity endorsers and celanthropists as well as philanthrocapitalists to promote the issues via multi-media broadcasts, concerts for example. It was, according to Nash (2007) ‘historically unprecedented…a campaign that took place not just through but in the media’ (p.1).

Actress, Angelina Jolie, is not only one of the most famous women in the world; she is currently the Special Envoy of UN High Commissioner for Refugees, António Guterres. Actors George Clooney, Matt Damon and Brad Pitt are representatives for the “Not on our Watch” organisation to help stop the genocide in Sudan. Sean Penn and Brad Pitt were regularly photographed doing aid work on the ground in Haiti after the devastating earthquake in 2010. They would contribute not only their time and fame to seek extra help for the plight of Haitians needing donations to rebuild their homes and lives, but also their finances as celanthropists to help rebuild the city. An increasingly visible advocacy and activism non-government organisation, the Global Poverty Project, headed by Australians Hugh Evans and Simon Moss, engages with philanthrocapitalists such as Bill Gates (the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation) and celebrity advocates like Hugh Jackman. They have created the highly visible “Global Citizen” concerts and campaigns utilising celebrity endorsers, advocates, celanthropists and philanthropists to help create, promote and perform in the concerts in Central Park, New York. Like the Live Aid and Make Poverty History campaigns, the Global Citizen concerts rely upon musicians, as well as other types of celebrity to help leverage support for the cause to apply pressure to various governments regarding foreign aid. The Half the Sky
Movement headed by celebrity journalists, Sheryl Wu Dunn and Nicholas Kristof regularly uses celebrities and philanthrocapitalists such as the Gates family and Oprah Winfrey. Winfrey even has a phenomenon named after her: The ‘Oprah Effect’ which refers to the power and influence of her endorsement potential. For example, when Winfrey was on daily television, she had ‘Oprah’s Bookclub’ where she promoted authors and their works. It was widely known that almost all books endorsed by Winfrey became immediate best-sellers (Minzesheimer 2011, n.p.). Other high profile celebrities who endorse a variety of causes include Beyoncé Knowles, a pop star of global recognition, who uses her celebrity to advocate for gender equality, and Academy Award winning actress, Geena Davis, who heads a self-named research institute on gender in media. Lady Ga Ga works for the homeless, AIDs and many other issues. One of the most internationally recognisable celebrity activists is Irish singer, Bono. He works on raising awareness about issues pertaining to extreme poverty, aid and trade. He is involved in (currently) 36 charities. Celebrity supernova, Madonna, has a charity, “Raising Malawi” which aims to help children affected by extreme poverty. Celebrity advocacy, endorsement or philanthropy for example, is not limited to journalists, politicians, or performers such as actors. Celebrity sports stars such as Tiger Woods and David Beckham head charities. Woods provides a case-in-point for questioning what happens when celanthropists lose their positions of power and influence (that is, they are no longer regarded as beneficial for the cause). Lenkowsky asks ‘what goes up can come down…What happens if your celebrity loses his or her good name? Think of all the charities that were scrambling after Tiger Woods had his misadventures’ (2014, n.p.). This illustrates that there is always a level of risk involved with regard to any celebrity reputation and the longevity of association with a cause.

Celebrity advocates are celebrities who are known for what they ‘say’ as well as for what they do. In a world where celebrity culture becomes ‘increasingly blurred with more ‘serious’ forms of news, and where gossip about the banal, the trivial and the

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11 Tiger Woods, American golfer, is one of the world’s most famous and well paid sporting stars. He was one of the most marketable celebrities, endorsing numerous products, causes and companies. In 2009 he was exposed as a serial cheater, despite the family values he espoused. This infidelity infamously caused the loss of many sponsorships and endorsements.
perverse are reported alongside political news’ (Marsh, t’Hart & Tindall 2010, p. 322), more celebrities take on the ‘role’ of celebrity ‘activist’ as becoming inordinately visible through connection to a ‘cause’ is now almost synonymous with celebrity as both an expectation, and as a method to sponsor leverage for individual celebrity ‘brand(s)’ as ‘we live in a world where fame cannot be retained without continuous publicity’ (Huliaras & Tzifakis 2010, p. 261).

2.7 Celebrity ‘busy-bodies’

West (2007) argues that ‘media fascination with famous spokespersons drains attention from experts with detailed knowledge, and risks the skewing of civil discourse towards solutions which may not represent effective long-term remedies for policy problems’ (p.2). Similarly, as Rojek argues, global events which use celebrities to endorse, or generate publicity can ‘divert moral energy from the questions of institutional change’ and this can be problematic in people believing that the ‘power of the people’ can to ensure larger scale reform (2013, p.27). There are however some celebrities who undertake actual research, and commit significant time and effort to causes. They are described by Marsh, t’Hart & Tindall (2010, p. 323) as those who ‘tend to be more active and more committed policy seekers’ (for e.g., Angelina Jolie, Bono, and Bob Geldof). Hundloe (2008) argues that while:

today we are sceptical of when the next Hollywood celebrity rushes to Africa – with an entourage of cameramen and publicists in tow that had Bono been nothing more than a rock star and mindlessly idle when not performing he would not have dragged politicians into his camps. He studied, he read…he has become far more knowledgeable of poverty and the environment than the world leaders who have come to count on him (p. 213).

Hundloe may overstate Bono’s contribution, and indeed there is much criticism in the mediasphere about Bono particularly as a celanthropist (West 2007); however celebrity activists often do possess differing levels of knowledge and experience on issues and some will act merely through a level of self-interest. Rojek (2013) writes that celanthropists are ‘self-appointed global ‘big citizens’. They are unelected and mostly accountable. Yet they have the ear of many elected world leaders and the widespread support of the public’ (p. 129). Moreover, they can be fraught as strategic campaigners
as they are emblematic of temporary solutions that could potentially add to some issues. This is particularly the case when we narrow the object of the campaign. For example, it can be highly problematic for large-scale campaigns using Western celeanthropists to intervene in issues in the developing worlds as ‘these celebrity pied pipers’ (Rojek 2013, p. 115) become the ‘celebrity-as-rescuer ideal’ which attracts much media and audience attention (Haynes 2014, p. 25). According the Haynes, issues such as human trafficking are seen by celebrities as ‘sexy’, and the attention they bring to causes can cause the public to believe they are experts (2014, p. 25).

The aesthetics of humanitarian communication have undergone substantial changes in contemporary history, and can be recounted as a history of the aesthetics of suffering. Early examples of humanitarian communication rely on 'shock effect' appeals – that is, the representation of suffering in its pure reality, in which victims of suffering are fetishized (Hall 1992, pp. 257-280) and dehumanised, activating a 'pornographic spectatorial imagination between disgust and desire' (Lissner 1979, p. 23). This, in turn, can reinforce inequities and power relations between the West and the world(s) and people it Others.

2.8 Compassion fatigue

There are undoubtedly elements of ‘compassion fatigue’ (Moeller 1999). Moeller describes how global disasters mean persistent need for aid and charity from individuals. She deploys the hospital emergency room as a metaphor to compare as ‘triage of emergencies does not necessarily mean that the sickest case gets the first and most help’ (1999, p.1). She describes how ‘compassion fatigue’ occurs when problems are omnipresent, not easily fixable, or recurring. For example, the African famines in 1984-1985 took over one million lives, and attracted the attention of celebrities, the media and the public the world over in large-scale concerts and awareness raising strategies, yet when the problems were not solved long-term, and the crisis struck again in 1991, similar attention was not raised. Moeller (1999) argues that ‘the problem has returned full force might seem a slap in the face of philanthropy’ (p.2). That is, there are too many issues to fix, and people cannot guarantee that their philanthropy (whether on a
large or small scale) will help, and they become overwhelmed by guilt and compassion, in socially sanctioned campaigns.

Although shock-effect appeals has had arguable success, humanitarian organisations have experienced a popular resistance known as compassion fatigue, in which audiences are left feeling powerless, with 'a sense of the situation so utterly incomprehensible that we cannot bear to think about it' (Cohen 2001, p. 194). Rather than enabling the call to public action on suffering, the campaigns are sometimes diluted by 'bombarding' audiences with guilt-inducing material that only serves to make them feel 'miserable and guilty' (Cohen 2001, p. 214). In response to the public backlash associated with compassion fatigue, the aesthetics of humanitarian communication shifted from the representation of sufferer as victim towards 'positive image' appeals with a focus on the dignity and potential of the sufferer. During the 1990s, Oxfam (1991) ran a series of positive image campaigns, including Save the Children which personalised the sufferers and also the donors, emphasising the potential role of the benefactor rather than the implied presence of a persecutor (Chouliaraki 2010, p. 9). Optimistic imagery in humanitarian communication aims to empower audiences, thereby assuaging helplessness toward detached - Other- suffering. However, as with shock effect campaigns, positive-image humanitarian appeals have also been heavily criticised as they often over-simplify the multifarious issues that result in suffering and injustice, as well as the nature of the relationships between governments, non-governmental organisations, donors and victims. This lack of education for audiences arguably limits the potential for sustainable social change, serving only to imply an immediate positive outcome as a direct result of donor contributions, thus creating misrecognition that the issues are resolved.

Celebrity culture is a complex phenomenon when it comes to accounting for why people take notice of what celebrities say and do. As Poniewozek (2005) argues:

there are plenty of reasons for celebrities to do charity: guilt, faith, personal suffering, ratings,…but perhaps above all is the need to rationalize the weirdness of celebrity…more interesting than why celebrities take up causes – and tougher to answer – is why the rest of us pay attention to them ( n.p.).
While celebrities can bring both money and awareness, celanthropy has also attracted much negative criticism with its potential to 'distort social priorities by influencing philanthropy and government spending' (Huddart 2005, p. 48). This is considered negative because of reasons such as the influence celebrities can have over public policy. The commodification of celebrity activism can be hence seen as a threat to the creditability and sincerity of the issue. Furthermore, the idolisation of celebrities can reinforce societal hierarchies, and the status of the celebrity as hero. Indeed, as argued by Brainard and Chollet (2007), past mistakes will be repeated if celanthropists fall ‘prey to the Christopher Columbus fallacy: just because it is new to you does not mean it is truly new’ (2007, p. 2).\textsuperscript{12} Rojek is concerned with celebrity ‘vamping’ (that is, taking on too many causes and thus eroding public ‘trust’) and cites Bono, the lead singer of famous Irish band, U2, as an example of someone the public may view as having charity fatigue (2012, p. 79). He also discusses the ‘absentee charity head’, and asks how Bono, for example, can head so many charities (2012, p.80) and maintain his career among the top musical acts in the world when he is likely to be touring for most of the year.

West (2007) contends that it is crucial to be aware that:

\begin{quote}
increasingly, politics has become a matter of public performance. Advocates get judged more by their ability to deliver crisp sound bytes than by their substantive knowledge…it is far easier to go to the famous and get their opinion than to seek out voices of less prominent people who will actually know more (p. 8).
\end{quote}

For example, Angelina Jolie is now almost as well known for her connection to the plight of refugees and the UN as she is to her acting career. Beyoncé Knowles penned an essay on gender equality for the Shriver Institute that was arguably of an undergraduate university student level; however, Beyoncé’s reach is far greater than that

\textsuperscript{12} The ‘Christopher Columbus fallacy’ could also be said of some popular media-celebrity feminists who are untrained in feminist history (see Section Three). There is a certain amount of rehashing of old debates about agency/oppression that has been occurring in the mainstream mediasphere in Australia, and while the velocity of discourse has increased, the actual newer conversations are mostly, I would argue, driven by the unpalatable feminists, rather than the safe and palatable.
of most Gender Studies students and academics (Knowles 2014). The essay was widely shared in social and mainstream media, and comments such as the following example were not uncommon:

It’s official, ladies. Beyoncé isn’t only your imaginary best friend, she’s also your favorite imaginary women’s studies professor. Just when you thought your one-sided relationship with her couldn’t get any better, Beyoncé wrote a feminist essay entitled, ‘Gender Equality is a Myth.’ If this makes you want to go back to school and write about the movement that will ultimately be known as Beyoncism, ‘the interdisciplinary study of how to make feminism the coolest thing ever,’ you are not alone (Plank 2014, n.p.).

Whether it matters if the essay is undergraduate standard is a point for consideration, but if the argument is that it is about entry-level awareness, then Beyoncé has contributed something of value. Some have criticised Beyoncé’s sometimes contradictory messaging, and thus the issue of authenticity is raised. Her song lyrics have been seen as incongruous, for example, to the message she writes regarding gender equality. Nikki Davis, presenter for Enlighten Education, points out that Beyoncé has included lyrics, rapped by her husband, Jay Z, about Ike and Tina Turner in a song, ‘Drunk in Love’, and that ‘in this super sexy number about how much you have sex with your husband, you somehow let him start making comparisons with Ike and Tina – a notoriously violent relationship and one which almost killed her’ (Enlighten Education 2014, n.p.).

Nash (2007) argues that inherent to the success of all social movements is ‘cultural politics’ so that ideas may be challenged and to recruit others from outside the movement. Bulbeck (2009) discovered that while mainstream politics does not appeal to young people in Australia, they are interested in alternative pathways to civic engagement. Bulbeck’s (2009) study revealed that unlike much of the ideology against capitalism and the patriarchy of second wave feminists engaged in street activism, many young feminists now ‘argue there is no sin in attracting or giving money; indeed it is essential’ (Labaton & Martin 2004, pp. 287–288)’ (p. 10). Bulbeck (2009) acknowledges that while:

cheesecloth might be passé, sociological literacy is even more necessary in the contemporary neoliberal climate. Money might be necessary to fund civic intervention but cash alone will not ‘make poverty history’ (p. 10).
Bulbeck (2009) contends that while philanthropy and celanthropy can raise attention and donations, transformation is built on multiple approaches. This is a key point that this thesis raises for overall mass awareness campaigning.

2.9 Celebrity heroes

Celanthropy and other types of celebrity activism are problematic if the attention is focused on the celebrity rather than on the concern, and if the issue is then viewed through the lens of the privileged celebrity and in opposition and distance to the public, and the foci. As Marshall writes, ‘celebrity becomes the lens through which we understand a variety of issues, disciplines, and concerns’ (2006, p. 5). The story then becomes the celebrity rather than the issue or the people needing help, so that the story no longer features ‘the suffering other’ (Fain 2008, p.1). Some forms of celanthropic activism can create a binary with saviours and the Othered ‘poor’. This concern with some campaigns using celebrity activists is with the possible formation of the ‘hero narrative’ (Fain 2008, p. 6). The danger is valuing certain lives, and lifestyles as the normative, the desirable, the ideal way of living and the ‘representational danger is that domination of corporate and/or political interests will inhibit reflexivity, exalt a singular worldview and ultimately render this kind of campaign a mere pawn in the “pincer of capitalism” (Silverstone 2007, p. 34 in Fain, 2008, p.11). Celebrities as commodities are used to ‘sell’ concern and the campaign and ‘in such a way as to invite the audience to consume them’ (Fain 2008, p. 7): that is, creating an illusory relationship between the celebrity and the consumer individual. By focusing on the individual ability to ‘help’ (e.g., with the sale of the charity arm bands or t-shirts endorsing a ‘cause’), it ‘presents a misleading notion that all power and agency rests with the individual, neglecting to recognize how structures and systems can enable and disable agency’ (Fain 2008, p.8).

Much of the literature around celanthropic activism centres on the notion of the privileged Westerner attempting to save the poor Other (for e.g., see Mooney-Nickel & Eikenberry 2009; Littler 2008; Louise Davis 2010). What is also questionable is that images and narratives driven by celebrities can become incomplete truths. What therefore is often engaged in is the transformation of reality into images which reinforces what Jameson (1998) calls ‘the logic of consumer capitalism’ (p. 20), or as Theroux points out, ‘white celebrities busy-bodying in Africa loom especially large’ (2005, n.p.). However, the focus of this thesis is solely about the potential of recuperating celanthropic action/promotion in Australia as a part of a strategic mass
awareness campaign about violence against women, predominantly. This does not mean that criticisms around, for example, ‘awareness raising’ and celebrity involvement, will not be raised, and are not sometimes valid. For example, when the power dynamics that allowed the celebrity to reach their position of privilege are not confronted (Mooney-Nickel & Eikenberry 2009) as there is a lack of distinction between the benevolence and the market surrounding the philanthropy (i.e., profit and care both become depoliticised). However, the campaigns I advocate for are not ones centring on Western women ‘saving’ other (and in turn, sometimes Othering) women from the developing world. As Rojek (2012) argues ‘for many of our fellow citizens, celebrity media news is the only news that matters. It is easy to dismiss these developments as insignificant and symptomatic of deeper problems in this culture. It is a mistake to do so’ (viii). While Rojek (2012) believes that ‘it would be perverse to deny celebrities the right to care, or to label them all as fakes’ (2012, p.viii), there is a degree of megalomania with this celebrity appointment. He questions who gives authority to these people as they are unelected (and ultimately, therefore unaccountable), but contends that people are able to ‘spot a dud' (Rojek 2012, p. viii) and does not position people as without agency.

This thesis asks how feminists can use the mediasphere, which is currently saturated by celebritisation, for the benefit of the Australian feminist movement. It also questions whether seeking and gaining mass publicity for the feminist movement – specifically around the issue of violence against women - evacuates its politics, and whether moments and actions must be highly visible by necessity to engage support. The following chapter’s primary focus is a case study of the movement sparked by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn’s book, Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide (2009) which uses celebrity activists, including some celebrity feminists, ‘new’ technologies and the media to engage grassroots activists to the movement. The validity of these Tools of the Zeitgeist is explored to ascertain their relevance for an Australian mass awareness campaign.
Chapter 3: Half the Sky Movement: Possibilities and Problems of Mass Awareness Campaigning Techniques and Celebrity Activism

...The danger today is precisely a kind of a bland, pragmatic activism. You know, like when people tell you, oh my God, children in Africa are starving and you have time for your stupid philosophical debates. Let’s do something. I always hear in this call there are people starving. I always discern in this a more ominous injunction. Do it and don't think too much. Today, we need thinking (Zizek 2012, n.p.).

...It is not enough any longer merely to entertain. Leading celebrities must now save the world by establishing charity foundations, do fieldwork in the world’s hotspots and browbeat presidents and prime ministers to do their bit (Rojek 2012, p. viii).

3.1 Introduction and Structure of Chapter

The primary focus of this chapter is the movement sparked by Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn’s (2009) book, *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. This chapter explores the validity of some of the mass awareness campaigning techniques utilised by the authors of *Half the Sky*. These tactics include celanthropy and other forms of celebrity activism, online and social media, and the use of philanthrocapitalists to engage mass awareness via the mediasphere. This research acknowledges that these methods—and indeed some of the movement’s premises—are not without some problems; however, this chapter asks whether utilising predominant currencies for popularisation, such as those employed by Kristof and WuDunn, would embrace what I call the ‘Activism Zeitgeist’. Can and should these techniques be employed more often in an organised manner if they are currently among the most viable strategies for mass awareness campaigning and activism regardless of nuances and differences within the campaign target? This chapter does not predominantly focus on the objects of the *Half the Sky* campaign, but rather on the methods and reception of the campaigning styles and approaches, arguing that the cultural phenomenon of the celebrity activist should not be dismissed. The chapter then explores the profiles of celebrity journalists Kristof and WuDunn, including whether they were necessary for
the movement’s ongoing success in the mainstream mediasphere and among audiences. It then specifically examines some of the key methods the authors promote for popularisation: celanthropy (with a specific focus on Oprah Winfrey, as she is a global phenomenon who embodies the role of philanthropic capitalist and celanthropist), celebrity activism, social media and online presence.

### 3.2 *Half the Sky*: A Book and a Movement

#### 3.2.1 What is *Half the Sky*?

The *Half the Sky* movement began with a book published in 2009 by celebrity journalists Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn. The book became an international bestseller and sparked a global movement. Kristof (2009b) posted on his Facebook page that the ‘Oprah Effect’ helped to create this popularity:

‘Half the Sky’ has just made the latest NYTimes best-seller list, while Bill O’Reilly (who had been one ahead of us) has dropped off. Think of it as a victory for the world’s women. Meanwhile, the Oprah effect continues: ‘Half the Sky’ is still No. 4 on the Amazon nonfiction list.

The book is currently in its twenty-fifth hard-copy printing since its release in late 2009 (www.halftheskymovement.org/), and Oprah Winfrey’s assistance in its marketing success has not been the only factor in the book’s popular reception. Kristof and WuDunn are both celebrated journalists with a combined platform that few journalists experience. The combination of the journalists’ own celebrity, the ‘Oprah Effect’, the use of celanthropists and other types of celebrity activists to promote the book and the movement, and the use of technologies such as social media and games have ensured that *Half the Sky* has remained firmly in the mediasphere since its inception.

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13 As mentioned in the introduction, the movement that runs in tandem with the book is called the *Half the Sky* movement. Throughout this thesis, both are referred to as *Half the Sky* unless a specific distinction is required between the book and other parts of the movement.

14 The ‘Oprah Effect’ refers to the power and influence of Oprah Winfrey’s endorsement potential.
Half the Sky focuses on creating a global grassroots movement to assist women in developing countries. The movement’s website declares that it is ‘cutting across platforms to ignite the change needed to put an end to the oppression of women and girls worldwide, the defining issue of our time’ (www.halftheskymovement.org/pages/movement). It aims not only to raise awareness of women’s rights violations, but also to educate people on how to become activists and volunteers in the cause. It traverses multiple platforms, including video, websites, blogs, educational tools (e.g., games) and social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest and Instagram). Its use of celebrities (celanthropists and celebrity feminists) and multiple media channels has ensured its broad cultural effect in a relatively short period. For example, it has received considerable publicity from celanthropists and other celebrity advocates, including Oprah Winfrey, Bill Clinton, Angelina Jolie and the Gates family. Since its release in 2009, supporters of the Half the Sky movement have donated approximately US $5 million to organisations advocated by the Half the Sky website. These non-government organisations are predominantly located in the countries facing the issues that the organisations seek to address. More than one million people have played the Facebook Half the Sky game, and around 1,500 university campus advocates have screened film and education sessions about Half the Sky (www.halftheskymovement.org/pages/movement). In 2012, a PBS television series produced a documentary on the book. It followed the book’s authors as well as ‘A-list celebrity advocates’ (www.halftheskymovement.org/pages/film) such as internationally famous actors Meg Ryan, Diane Lane and Eva Mendes, who travelled to 10 countries (e.g., Afghanistan, Pakistan, Liberia, Somalia and Cambodia). In these countries, the celebrities and Kristof would meet, interview and tell the stories of women and girls. This in turn amplified the effect of the book’s publicity. With the aim of inspiring grassroots assistance from ordinary people in the developed world, the authors travelled to villages to speak with and record the stories of local people affected by sex slavery, gender-based violence and maternal mortality. In an interview with actor Ashley Judd, Kristof said that ‘one of the greatest challenges is how to reach beyond the choir’ (Judd 2010, n.p). One such way that the authors of Half the Sky have successfully done this is through the use of celebrities. For example, as the celebrity was interviewing the celebrity journalist, the exposure and visibility of the movement, the journalist and the actor all increased. Like effective celebrities, successful celanthropists rely on parasocial relations or ‘the notion of presumed intimacy between strangers’ (2012, p. 124). In Half the Sky, this is apparent in how Kristof and the celebrity activists connect to
grassroots activists via social media, inviting them into the world to join the movement. Indeed, the idea is that ‘we’ are all doing this ‘together’.

Kristof and WuDunn employ several techniques and structures within their book. These are mainly presented through emotional narratives but also contain some scholarly research and statistics. They create personal, often shocking, narrative journeys of the lives of women who have survived extreme oppression such as gender-based violence (e.g., sexual assault, genital mutilation, sex slavery, acid scarring and honour killings), lack of education, death in childbirth and extreme poverty. They inform readers that:

it appears that more girls have been killed in the last fifty years, precisely because they were girls, than men were killed in all the battles of the twentieth century. More girls are killed in this routine ‘gendercide’ in any one decade than people were slaughtered in all the genocides of the twentieth century (Kristof & WuDunn 2009, p. xvii).

The authors discuss and examine maternal mortality, women in warzones in Afghanistan, sex trafficking in India, and honour killings in Pakistan (Kristof & WuDunn 2009, p. 116). They frame the high level of death in childbirth in many developing parts of the world as a health issue as much as a human rights issue, as with all of the other issues discussed in the book. There is a type of emotional pornography in Half the Sky through viewing the suffering through the lens of the Western ‘saviour’. According to Chouliaraki (2010), it can be regarded as ‘a critique of the social relationships that the imagery of suffering establishes in the course of proposing a certain emotional connectivity between spectator and sufferer’ (p. 4).

However, Kristof and WuDunn also present issues of survival as successes. They recount stories of individual women who have succeeded over their circumstances—not to be lauded as heroes, but rather as a matter of survival. Quentin Bryce, Australia’s (then) Governor General, referred to Half the Sky in a public speech to demonstrate her beliefs regarding equality and development. She said that ‘it is harrowing reading. But it is not a story of victimisation. It is about transformation, emancipation, and empowerment’ (Bryce 2010, n.p.). Neoliberal discourse is apparent in Bryce’s wording, as is the focus of Half the Sky itself: that individuals are not victims and thus are somehow able to transform and become empowered. This can effectively deny the wide-ranging social, political and cultural specificities embedded in the issues
surrounding gender-based violence and extreme poverty, for example. As Connell (in Braedley & Luxton 2010, p. 35) describes:

neoliberalism is certainly a project of change and transformation, but it is not revolutionary…Neoliberalism shifts the balance between dominant groups and lets in new energy and new claimants to power and privilege, without much disturbing the overall systems of inequality or the ideologies that sustain them.

The book is, additionally, partly an activist handbook with ‘solutions’ that are presumably offered to help alter the situations of women in developing parts of the world, one person at a time. For example, theories promoted by the authors include the benefits of micro-credit. They state that ‘microfinance has done more to bolster the status of women, and to protect them from abuse, than any laws could accomplish. Capitalism, it turns out, can achieve what charity and good intentions sometimes cannot’ (Kristof & WuDunn 2009, p. 187). The authors present a neoliberal approach, with a focus on entrepreneurialism, self-help and individual solutions to embedded social, cultural and economic issues. The overarching aim is to empower women in the developing world to help themselves (often with the assistance of a ‘benevolent other’ in the West), and in turn, their local communities and families.

Kristof and WuDunn assert that the movement should focus on four issues: maternal mortality, human trafficking, sexual violence and discrimination against women and girls. The tools they believe would most beneficially address these critical challenges ‘include girls’ education, family planning, microfinance, and “empowerment” in every sense’ (Kristof & WuDunn 2009, p. 246). Kristof and WuDunn (2009) allege that

15 Half the Sky has a section entitled ‘Four Steps You Can Take in the Next Ten Minutes’ (2009, pp. 251–252). They are:
1. By going to a website (www.globalgiving.org or www.kiva.org, for example), one can open an account and they link people so that the donator can directly give or provide microloans to the recipient or the organisations.
2. Direct sponsorship of a girl or woman through Women to Women International, World Vision, Plan International or American Jewish World Service.
4. Join the CARE Action Network at www.can.care.org. They state that ‘this kind of citizen advocacy is essential to create change. As we’ve said, this movement won’t be led by the president or by members of Congress, any more than their historical counterparts led the civil rights or abolitionist movements—but if leaders smell votes, they will follow…history has repeatedly shown that where our values are at stake, leadership must come from ordinary citizens like you’ (2009, p. 252).
Grassroots activism and money spent on the ground is far more likely to create urgent change, and that it is a matter of survival. Brainard and Chollet (2007) believe that many past mistakes and old ideas are repeated if celebrity activists fall ‘prey to the Christopher Columbus fallacy’ (p.2).

16 **Half the Sky** at times presents as new that which is not. For example, they contended that the ‘microcredit revolution is sweeping the developing world’ (Kristof & WuDunn 2009, p.29). Rather, the Grameen Bank, started by Muhammad Yunus in 1976, pioneered microcredit as early as 1983 (www.grameenfoundation.org/about).

They argue that a grassroots movement campaign is needed that joins ‘feminist organizations and evangelical churches and everyone in between…Ideally these would be coordinated with similar efforts from Europe, Japan, and other donor countries, but if necessary they could start as American projects’ (Kristof & WuDunn 2009, p. 246). Kristof and WuDunn (2009) include a ‘What You Can Do’ activist section (Chapter 14), which advocates what can be viewed as a form of individualist, positive psychology and the production of neoliberal subjectivity in an attempt to recruit the reader to help the (poor) other. For example, the authors argue that ‘while the main motivation for joining this global movement is to help others, the result is often to help oneself’ (Kristof & WuDunn 2009, p. 198).

**Half the Sky** encourages a style of activism and invites people to join the cause to collectively fight poverty and extremism by educating and empowering women and girls to help themselves. The authors tell readers: ‘We hope to recruit you to join an incipient movement to emancipate women and fight global poverty by unlocking women’s power as economic catalysts. That is the process under way—not a drama of victimization but of empowerment’ (Kristof & WuDunn 2009, p. 8). There is an emotive evangelical, vigilantism in this approach, and this Western notion of progress is controversial. As Fain contends in her research, celebrities used in the ONE campaign (Make Poverty History) were a ‘part of the objectification of the poor who are largely absent in the mediation of poverty’ (2008, p. 2). This concept echoes the Enlightenment principle that if people are informed, they will act accordingly. Again, this reinforces

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16 The ‘Christopher Columbus fallacy’ is an idea that something is new when it is not.
individual solutions and, as Cohen (2001) states, ‘solidarity with the miserable’ (p. 185).

The key criticisms of Half the Sky’s types of targets relate to the use of celebrity ‘busy-bodies’ (Theroux 2005, n.p.) to intercede in the global south and, in turn, the encouragement of others to do the same—that is, the re-creation of problematic tropes that privileged Westerners impose values and solutions from the outside, and that enterprising do-gooders are encouraged to intervene (e.g., via microfinance, voluntourism, participating in debates, hosting film screenings and generating discussion about the problems). Kristof and WuDunn (2009) assume authority and use their positions—probably with good intent—to advocate for individual solutions to much larger historical, social, cultural and economic issues. Simple solutions such as video games and donations fail to recognise the embedded structural issues that create and perpetuate gender inequities and intersectional concerns. Issues of Western cultural imperialism, volunteer tourism and care ethics are all issues that are relevant to Half the Sky.

3.2.2 Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn

Kristof and WuDunn are married celebrity journalists who had pre-existing platforms before Half the Sky. As Marshall (2005) notes, ‘journalism itself has become part of the celebrity system in its own power hierarchies’ (p. 27), and within this system, columnists such as Kristof are highly ranked as journalists. Kristof was educated at Harvard and Oxford universities and is a well-known twice-weekly opinion piece journalist with the New York Times. He has a powerful identity and platform that he has crafted independently as a spokesperson on issues such as maternal mortality, sex slavery and women’s economic development. He has been called the ‘the Indiana Jones of our generation of journalists’ (Schuker 2006, n.p.). WuDunn previously worked at the New York Times as both a journalist and editor. She is an energy specialist and an expert in finance (having worked as a senior lecturer in business at Yale University and for large investment banks such as Goldman Sachs) and philanthropy.

Kristof and WuDunn are both well-known figures within the fields of international journalism and human rights. They have published three bestselling books together (www.halfttheskymovement.org/pages/nicholas-and-sheryl), and they won a joint
Pulitzer Prize for their coverage of the Tiananmen Square massacre in 1990. Kristof also received a Pulitzer Prize for his coverage of human rights abuses in Africa and Asia. As Zelizer notes, ‘the practice of “rewarding” good journalism has become so entrenched that many news stories are tailored to fit specific prize categories. Receiving awards for journalistic work, such as the Pulitzer Prize, has become a goal in and of itself’ (2010, p. 76). Further, the book ‘has emerged as a journalistic medium that perpetuates the celebrity status of its authors’ (Zelizer 2010, p. 76). Kristof writes for the New York Times blog prolifically, and uses social networking sites such as Twitter and Facebook, both personally and for Half the Sky. On Facebook, Kristof has more than 625,000 followers (as at December 2014). He engages with his audience directly and often poses debates and answers questions on his social media sites. The authors’ existing platforms as credible journalistic authorities, Pulitzer-Prize-winning celebrity journalists, bestselling authors, and particularly Kristof’s high-profile role as a writer with the New York Times, put them in an ideal position to launch Half the Sky. The inclusion of the constructed celebrity images of the journalists (particularly Kristof), ongoing celebrity endorsements (most notably by Winfrey) and continuing celebrity involvement has ensured the ongoing success of Half the Sky.

In particular, Kristof’s high profile makes him not only part of the story, but the hero of the narrative. This form of ‘politics has become a matter of public performance’ (West 2007, p. 8) that is played out in the pages of the reputable New York Times, via the accumulated cultural capital of celebrity journalists, their partnership with multiple celebrities and philanthrocapitalists, and through various communicative technologies.

3.2.3 Celebrity activism and the ‘White Saviour Industrial Complex’

Half the Sky’s ongoing success has been significantly derived from the cultural capital of the celebrities used in the campaign. It utilises the four types of celebrities noted by ‘t Hart and Tindall (2009): celebrity advocates, celebrity endorsers, celebrity politicians and politicians turned celebrities. In combination with celanthropists and philanthropists, these ensure the hyper-visibility of the campaign. Kristof (2008) used his opinion editorial in the New York Times to address criticisms about using celebrities for campaigns, stating that ‘of course, there are smart celebrities and dumb ones’ (n.p.). Indeed, as Rojek (2012) contends, people can ‘spot a dud’ (2012, p. viii).
The *Half the Sky* website (and to a lesser extent, the book) heavily features celebrity activists. On the website, a tab for ‘Actors/Advocates’ lists the celebrities involved. The audience is invited to sort these by issue (e.g., gender-based violence, education, sex trafficking) and by advocate. There are video links to many celebrities speaking about their views on gender equality. These feature high-profile actors such as Meg Ryan, Eva Mendes and Diane Lane, models such as 1980s supermodel Christy Turlington, political celebrities such as Hillary Clinton, religious leaders such as Desmond Tutu, philanthrocapitalists such as Melinda Gates, and celebrity feminists such as Gloria Steinem.

A key issue with *Half the Sky* is the ‘white saviour industrial complex’ (Cole 2012, n.p.). According to Cole (2012), this is when privileged people (often white) with good intentions go into communities that are not their own and attempt to save others. Cole (2012) argues that ‘The White Saviour Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege’ (n.p.). The visibility of Kristof’s high profile makes him a white, male saviour. As Moshenberg points out, ‘if you’re black and a girl, in a place like Sierra Leone, you better have the phone number of a prominent White American Male. You need Nicholas Kristof’ (2012, n.p.). In 2004, in a highly publicised brothel raid, Kristof controversially purchased a girl in Cambodia in an attempt to rescue her from sex slavery (Kristof 2004, n.p.). Within one year of being returned to her village, the girl shocked her rescuer when she returned to the brothel (Kristof 2005, n.p.). Kristof had failed to articulate an understanding of the ‘structural issues at play and explore the causes of why this and other “rescued” women have returned to their previous lives’ (Haynes 2014, p. 28).

Rojek (2012) compares the figure of the celanthropist with the myth of Icarus, as the ‘frontier nature of celebrity culture perpetuates and enlarges narcissistic characteristics in stars and stargazers’ (p. 142). He contends that while many people have benefited from celanthropic labour, the criticisms directed towards it are sometimes justified—for example, a lack of expert knowledge and the “one world” ideology that supports Third World relief which recreates the colonial narratives (Rojek 2012, p. 142). Hence, the figure of the ‘celebrity know-alls’ becomes emblematic of both the capitalist machine and colonial configurations. In terms of Kristof and WuDunn and their fellow celebrity ‘saviours’, good intentions of charity may exist; however, there is a notion of
supremacy and a lack of substantial understanding of the history of problematic relations in terms of social welfare between people of colour and their ‘white saviours’ from elsewhere.

3.2.4 Oprah Winfrey

Oprah Winfrey is one of the wealthiest and most powerful women in the world. She regularly appears on the Forbes magazine list of the most powerful celebrities (Pomerantz 2013, n.p.). She was listed as number one in Time Magazine’s (2006) list of ‘100 People Who Shape Our World’ (p. 48), which also featured Hillary Clinton and Pope Benedict XVI. Until the conclusion of her show in 2011, Winfrey had the most popular, highest-rating daytime talk show in history, The Oprah Winfrey Show (‘Oprah Winfrey fast facts’ 2014, n.p.). The ‘Oprah Effect’ ‘regularly turns books into best sellers, products into must-have holiday gifts, and social issues into political movements’ (Glynn et al. 2007, p. 228).

In 2011, in a highly publicised series of events, Winfrey toured Australia with approximately 300 of her audience members from the US. According to many observers, it was potentially the greatest public relations exercise for Australian tourism, and Tourism Australia compiled a report detailing the effect of the ‘Oprah Effect’ on Australian tourism (Tourism Australia 2011). After the first of her Australia television specials aired in the US, donations to the Queensland Premier’s Flood Appeal increased by $20 million in one night in January 2011 (Vickery 2011, n.p.). The effect of the Oprah brand on politics tells a similar story. Barack Obama was the first politician publically endorsed by Winfrey in 2007, and many people believed that Winfrey’s endorsement of Obama was critical to his campaign. Economists Garthwaite and Moore attempted to quantify Winfrey’s effect on the Obama campaign, and ‘the results showed a correlation between magazine sales and the vote share obtained by Mr. Obama, and extrapolated an effect of 1,015,559 votes’ (Stelter 2008, n.p.). People take their political ideas from a variety of platforms; for many, Winfrey has been a powerful source of and for information. However, as claimed by Cloud (2014), ‘Winfrey’s program, network, magazine, and other media products constitute an empire in which hers is the dominant voice’ (p. 43).
Winfrey’s television programs formed her celebrity, but her appeal and interests transcend the media. She is not just a celanthropist; she is a ‘super-rich philanthropist [who] works in partnership with the Gates foundation’ (Bishop & Green 2008, p. 9). In 2005, as a philanthrocapitalist, she was ranked as the ‘thirty-second most generous American philanthropist, reporting that she had given away $303 million’ (Bishop & Green 2008, p. 198). It is indisputable that the Oprah brand is a marketing sensation, and her cultural effect transcends that of many other celebrities; however, she is a ‘cultural icon for a neoliberal era’ (Peck 2008, p. 17). This can be seen not only in the use of private capital to remedy larger structural issues (e.g., buying schools and becoming the saviour), but also in the use of self-help, personal responsibility, performative hyper-emotion and para-intimacy with audiences. ‘Oprah’s Book Club’ played a key role in the initial publicity that Half the Sky received, setting off an avalanche into the broader global mediasphere; however, the valorisation of extreme wealth and privilege, and the domination of such voices in targeted campaigns, is a consideration for campaigners who may be writing mass awareness campaigns in the Australian context.

3.2.5 Social media and technologies

The Half the Sky movement is heavily reliant on technologies and online and social media to ensure its ongoing popularity. As mentioned, Kristof has a pre-existing social media profile and platform through the New York Times blog, his column, his previous awards and profile, and his multiple media channels, such as Twitter (more than 1.5 million followers), Facebook, Pinterest, YouTube and Google Plus. This co-exists with the movement’s communicative technology channels, as well as WuDunn’s. Thus, Half the Sky is not only promoted via the official Half the Sky website, but also via the celebrity journalists, celanthropists and other celebrity activists, and in partnership with the many non-governmental agencies and sponsors/endorsers of the movement. A Half the Sky Movement Facebook game was created in 2012 (attracting 1.1 million players to date) in conjunction with ‘Games for Change’, a social enterprise that claims the game can catalyse ‘social impact through digital games...believing the game could raise awareness of important issues amongst a generation that’s becoming more and more social media-dependent’ (www.halftheskymovement.org/pages/movement).
The *Half the Sky* website appears to be a simple one-stop-shop of ‘solutions’ that are aimed to help ‘us’ help ‘others’. For example, players can choose a recipient to assist with microcredit loans from the *Half the Sky* documentary by clicking on the recipient’s image, or they can volunteer with non-government organisations in the developing world that are advocated by the *Half the Sky* movement. *Half the Sky*’s actions also include ‘becoming a campus ambassador’ or a ‘community ambassador’ and spreading the message around the community by holding book and film nights, and connecting via social media with other supporters of the movement.

Kristof, and to a lesser extent, WuDunn, travels with celebrity activists to countries in the developing world where, for example, he (or they) *and* the celebrities live-Tweet their brothel raids in which they attempt to ‘rescue’ victims who have been sold into slavery. The intersection of celebrity journalism, shock effects, social media and the use of celebrities contributes to the high profile of the movement and of the issues they raise. Celebrity endorsement via Tweets, as well as other types of endorsements, such as people, brands, ideas, concepts, products and causes (such as the brothel raid example used by *Half the Sky*) is:

regularly used…it goes without saying that they also make consummate use of the PR-Media Hub…in mounting a campaign in the viewfinder of public consciousness (Rojek 2012, p. 23).

The publicity that *Half the Sky* receives because of the celebrities on location with Kristof, and their combined uses of social media, ensures maximum public visibility and, in turn, the promotion of the movement and celebrity profiles. However, the cultural contexts, notions of privilege, celebrity ‘do-gooding’ and individualist solutions are questionable. The popularisation methods are advantageous when used with caution (i.e., the movement should be driven by the needs of the target, as an entrée only, and not regarded as the solution).

### 3.2.6 Privilege, accountability, mis(uses)

Overall, the *Half the Sky* movement is an important case study regarding what may be of benefit in terms of tactics, and what should be avoided. The celebrity as rescuer is dubious, as ‘the aspiration for one person to save the world suggests a degree of self-
importance that borders on megalomania. Who elected these people to speak for “us”? What accountability do we have over them?” (Rojek 2012, p. ix). Additionally, the celebrity should only be the awareness raiser, not the policy expert or the discourse dominator or driver, as this may divert attention from the issue to the celebrity’s fame. Further, the celebrity privilege should not be underestimated in a mass awareness campaign, as they ‘gain access to free advertising, but all—despite [usually] having to donate money themselves—[are] also represented by mainstream media as concerned charitable beings’ (Louise Davis 2010, p. 97).

The overarching strength of a larger-scale campaign like *Half the Sky*, which uses celebrity, social media and other powerful figures as campaign conduits, is that it is about the power of addressing audiences rather than individuals (although *Half the Sky* seeks individualist solutions, the types of campaigns advocated by this research would work on cultural and attitudinal change). While *Half the Sky* has undoubtedly had broad cultural effects and raises awareness of the problems faced by many women in the developing world, it is imperative that the capitalist framework, issues of cultural imperialism and Western notions of progress and intervention are not overlooked. The neoliberal culture often prevents an understanding of the causes of the problems, which are institutional, political, cultural, social and layered with agenda and history. This is why the mass awareness campaigns advocated for in this research are not ones where intervention is advocated. Awareness raising must focus on the causes as well as the resulting effects and possibilities for the future if issues such as violence against women are moved to more central locations in the Australian mediasphere and the cultural imagination.

A significant issue is that celanthropy can practice philanthropy to market and valorise the industries that drive celebrity and excessive wealth—‘the leftovers of which are repackaged as philanthropic action’ (Mooney-Nickel & Eikenberry 2009, p. 982). However, there are some advantages to celebrity endorsements, such as awareness raising and the fact that ‘celebrities have the potential to be more neutral than politicians or politically motivated NGOs’ (Haynes 2014, p. 26). In terms of the privilege of access, when asked about gaining access to people in government and business at the highest levels to promote her celanthropist interests, Angelina Jolie responded that ‘people answer my calls’ (Bishop 2007, p. 7). Kristof (2011) said that ‘here’s a paradox: We’re finding authentic leadership these days not from our nominal leaders in
Washington but from unelected (and mostly unelectable) figures whom we like to deride as self-indulgent narcissists’ (n.p.). This differs from Rojek (2012), who labels some celebrities as ‘unofficial life coaches’ (p. 14) and claims that they lecture the public without them noticing. However, Kristof (2011) alleges that people are so disillusioned with politicians that they are looking for ‘moral leadership from—brace yourselves—Hollywood’s “most beautiful people”’ (n.p.). He claims he was ‘rather scornful of celebrities dabbling in humanitarian causes’ (Kristof 2011, n.p.) and then outlines how and why he has changed his position as a journalist with expertise in humanitarianism. He states that:

one of the perennial problems for humanitarian crises is that no one pays attention, and so these crises never get resources. That’s partly a problem of the news media, especially television, and partly a problem of politicians who just aren’t interested in distant problems that don’t have quick-fix solutions. But celebrities carry a spotlight with them’ (2008, n.p.).

The illumination that celebrity activists can provide is of interest to this research in terms of an Australian mass awareness campaign.

Mooney-Nickel and Eikenberry (2009) reason that philanthropy blurred with ‘consumption and celebrity fails to signify anything other than consumption and celebrity’ (p. 984). Thus, the transformative potential towards social change is largely invalidated. While believing that it is a flawed ‘solution’ and is not on the path to emancipation, Mooney-Nickel and Eikenberry (2009) hesitantly acknowledge that sometimes it may be better than nothing (p. 984), but the better way to use it is not by giving money, but by giving voice and by giving time to organisations that ‘challenge the current system that creates ever more inequalities in society’ (p. 985). This is a position that this research advocates. Celebrity activism can be advantageous because of the popularisation of particular ideas, but at the cost of further avowing the capitalist system that supports the celebrity culture because, unfortunately, celebrities are firmly part of the ‘capitalist mode of production’ (Rojek 2012, p. 26). While it is important not to overstate its capacity to cure societal ills, to disavow the celebrity activism zeitgeist as always superficial is to create a binary that privileges high culture.

One of the greatest potential issues with regard to celanthropy is for the celebrity as a spokesperson dominating public debate and driving the discourse, and the idea that
celebrity endorsement is required in order to give something attention: it becomes ‘charitainment’ (Poniewozek 2005), and if something goes out of ‘trend’, the issue is no longer regarded as pertinent. This noise creation, or surround-sound media saturation, much like ‘slacktivism’ (see Section Two), can risk an evacuation of the politics of the issue to become empty signifiers. However, if these Tools of the Zeitgeist are ways that some people not only consume, but also receive, such knowledge, there is arguably a ‘sticking point’ (Wicke in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 404) worth pursuing. This type of campaigning style (not the target of Half the Sky, but some of the methods popularised within the movement) follows the principle that something is better than nothing, and that there will be a net worth that recuperates (some of) the window dressing.

If an awareness campaign in Australia about violence against women that explicitly aims to change cultural attitudes can promote awareness, then the recuperation potential has a net worth. Bulbeck (2009) argues that ‘sociological literacy is even more necessary in the contemporary neoliberal climate’ (p. 10). While starting-point awareness will never replace substantive knowledge and ongoing multi-level efforts, an awareness campaign in Australia that deploys celebrity activists would not replace the need for such literacy; it would be envisaged as an entrée to more substantive feminist political engagement. Hence, it is important to have the right types of key drivers (e.g., actual specialists who work with celebrities and celebrity feminists) to create campaigns to target damaging, culturally embedded attitudes about women. Celebrities are the ‘foot soldiers to win the public over to predetermined campaign messages’ (Rojek 2012, p. 26).

The acknowledgement remains of possible problems such as political dilution. While recognising the somewhat problematic nature of the proliferation of celebrity activists consuming charity and aid as self-interested pursuits, there is recuperation potential in terms of issue illumination for some forms of feminist activism in Australian mass awareness campaigns if deployed carefully. As with digital activism and celebrity feminists in campaigns, this comes with a caveat: this is entry-level feminism, and it is not appropriate for all styles of awareness campaigning or targets, as Half the Sky arguably demonstrates. Moreover, it is not always an appropriate form of intervention; for example, access to privileged celebrity activists can be problematic and highly negotiated (although social media has altered this somewhat, digital divides are also a consideration). Additionally, similar to ‘development celebrities’, as Goodman and
Barnes (2010) note, other celebrity activists often use ‘new media’ in tandem with material practices.

Like any type of activism, as a method through which to disturb normalising cultural, social and political discourses, feminist uses for celebrity activism such as celanthropy is part of a process of incompletion. There are multiple approaches to activism, and many intersect. Feminist celanthropists and celebrity feminist activists can sometimes collaborate with others and articulate that which others cannot (e.g., those who may be othered or who have no voice or privilege to speak in mainstream media cultures). Although caution is needed, celebrity activism—if used only as one part of a strategy—can assist in enabling a level of mass awareness and engagement in the mainstream. Further, raising media attention in ways that have been utilised by Kristof and WuDunn, for example, can create leverage to lobby governments and businesses to move women’s rights issues to a more central place on the stage and help promote participatory activism and civic engagement as a serious activism Tool of the Zeitgeist.

This thesis argues that this type of populist campaigning is sometimes a valuable form of feminist activism to add to broader-scale consciousness-raising. It is not a moving on from other resistance or agitation, and it does not mean disengaging from philosophical thinking about the underlying causes. As Zizek (2012, n.p.) states, ‘we need thinking’. There have been arguments made that public engagement needs to move on from ‘transactions towards transformations’ (Darton & Kirk 2011, p. 10). That is, the focus should be more on supporting people towards engaging in longer-term actions rather than encouraging simplistic, one-off transactions. To dismiss celanthropic figures in ‘the colonization of celebrity culture in everyday life’ (Rojek 2012, p. ix) invokes the idea of privileging as authentic only some ways of consuming appropriate knowledge and participating in meaningful debates. This thesis does not deny that broader structural inequalities and intersectional issues should be the key concern; however, as Martin asserts, there is currency in a certain measure of ‘cultural hipness’ (2010, n.p.). Mass awareness campaigns do not need to be packaged to evacuate politics; rather, there is a need to be vigilant about which types of celanthropists and other celebrity activists to use in a feminist large-scale awareness campaign. Further, organisers should make clear arguments about key goals, such as whether financial contribution and donation goals supersede awareness goals. Additionally, the campaigns that this research argues for are not humanitarian campaigns working to help a ‘poor’ other;
rather, they are only seen as entrée-level political campaigns to work in tandem with experts who are already working on critical issues, such as gender-based violence prevention, to help centralise the issue in Australian public discourse. Moreover, it infers that there is a continuum of awareness about certain issues, and is—most probably—an induction.
Section 2: Australian Feminist Online Activism

Chapter 4: Online Grassroots Activism: Literature Review

…The MSM and those in power. Politicians and governments—seek to hold the centre, but the Internet and the social-media world is a cyclone. It is a centrifugal force spinning control away from the centripetal forces of the establishment that is seeking to manage and formalise it (Jericho 2012, p. 4).

…it is popular, yet too easy, to claim that everything is different in a world of Facebook and Twitter. Old practices and patterns continue to thrive in new media. However, social media blur boundaries between presence and absence, time and space, control and freedom, personal and mass communication, private and public’ (Baym & Boyd 2012, p. 320).

4.1 Introduction

In this section of the thesis, this introductory chapter reviews some of the relevant interdisciplinary scholarly work from the fields of Social Media and Internet Studies, as well as Media Studies and Cultural Studies. It is acknowledged that ‘the growing literature on social media and communication covers a wide range of methods, and an equally wide range of disciplines’ (Bruns et al. 2012, p. 15). Here, I examine activism in the context of feminist campaigning using, primarily, online petitions and social media. I do not examine the use of online feminist blogging discursive activism (see Shaw 2012 for an exploration of such activism).17 Chapter 5 presents a case study of feminist activist interventions in Queensland party politics. It is predominantly a self-reflexive critical analysis that examines the action research employed in the formation of the

17 Shaw’s (2012) research found that ‘online feminist blogging communities have a central role to play in the development and continuity of Australian feminism. Bloggers are engaged in the active negotiation of feminist politics’ (p. 232).
#sackgavin campaign. In Chapter 5, I narrate and analyse my own practice in a grassroots, mainly online campaign that was led by a colleague and myself in 2011 using the online petition platform of Change.org.

## 4.2 Research questions and context

The key research questions in this section are:

1. Is online grassroots feminist activism—that is, activism that begins without the support of traditional organisations to help drive such activism—a viable strategy for Australian feminist campaigning? What are its risks and benefits?
2. Is the creator of such activism important? Are such campaigns potentially more effective when promoted or endorsed by feminist celebrities?
3. Does such activism have substantive effects, and does this matter when the goal is awareness-raising-based activism? Is this type of activism ‘echo chamber’ activism that does little to address structural inequality, and if so, is it salvageable to help funnel attention to broader embedded issues? Is this action ultimately undoing ‘real’ activism, and is it ‘slacktivism’?

Taylor (2008) contends that ‘social movements such as feminism have always relied heavily on the publicity afforded by media technologies’ (p. 11). Taylor’s (2008) work on the media event surrounding Australian writer Helen Garner’s (1995) *The First Stone* argues that ‘the *First Stone* media event represents one of the highest points of visibility in the history of Australian feminism and print media’ (p. 11). Since the media event that Taylor referred to, the velocity of feminist media discourse has increased in the Australian mediasphere. This is arguably evidenced by—but certainly not limited to—developments in online communicative technologies facilitating the emergence of highly visible online activist campaigns. For example, feminist campaigns primarily run (or originated) in the online and/or social media environments have

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18 *The First Stone* media event refers to the attention given to feminism in the Australian media after Helen Garner’s ‘non-fictional’ work, *The First Stone* (1995), was published. Garner’s book was about sexual harassment at a University of Melbourne residential college. It provoked intense and ongoing debate, contestations and commentary in various formats both in and out of the mass media about feminism itself. For further information about the ‘media event’ erupting from Garner’s work, please see Taylor (2008).
included the #destroythejoint, #vilekyle and #sackalan campaigns,\textsuperscript{19} which have been highly visible in Internet-driven activism in Australia. The #destroythejoint community arose from the controversy surrounding comments made by Australian broadcaster and ‘shock jock’, Alan Jones, about women in leadership positions in Australia, such as (then Prime Minister) Julia Gillard. These campaigns furthered public debate, and noise around the issues was illuminated because of the celebrity status of the targets of the campaign, as well as securing high-profile support from celebrity feminists. Destroy the Joint subsequently became a collective group that outlived the initial campaign, and it has become a well-known online activism group in Australia. It has come to represent a marker of a feminist activist moment in Australia. I contend that while it has opened possibilities in Australia for online activism, support, numbers and organising for feminists, it is at times problematic because of the velocity of the issues it raises, and because it could be seen as a form of feminist vigilantism. As such, on occasion, it is at risk of becoming an echo chamber employing a reactive and repetitive paradigm. This does not mean that it is not a community of potential, as it offers an alternative way to ‘speak back’ to, for example, the ‘old’ media by using the ‘new’ media. Further, it can help credentialed voices to get information back differently through collaboration and coalition in a multitude of activism, and it has currency and validity that could be utilised for a broader campaigning model. However, as Taylor (2011) notes, ‘it is important to be wary of the celebratory rhetoric often surrounding new media technologies’ (p. 81).

The rise and convergence of technologies such as the Internet and mobile devices in the digital or hyper-connected era has affected the way that much activism is currently conducted. It is the efficacy of this activism as a feminist awareness-raising method that concerns this thesis. This research does not consider all, or even most, feminist activism to be influenced and formed by digital means; rather, it seeks to examine the effects of the use of digital technologies in the formation of activism—especially as access, usage and connectivity increases. Recently, online petition platforms through groups such as

\textsuperscript{19} The #vilekyle and #sackalan were viral Twitter hashtags used in activist grassroots campaigns by feminists to highlight sexism by Australian radio ‘shock jocks’, Kyle Sandilands and Alan Jones. Both campaigns involved change.org petitions to seek sponsors for each radio program to withdraw their support for Sandilands and Jones’ programs.
Change.org have gained prominence in Australia and elsewhere. The key problem with groups such as Destroy the Joint and the proliferation of online petitions is that it can easily turn outrage into a form of activism that may lack focus and end up being a conveyor belt of reaction rather than an entrée to other forms of action. However, this thesis contends that there are multiple possibilities for both Destroy the Joint and activists who want to engage with the diversity of feminist activism to organise around funnelling opportunities to create an activist-led mass awareness campaign around urgent issues such as the pandemic of violence against women. The main argument of this thesis centres on feminist solidarity in Australia and the creation of mass awareness campaigns similar to those created in the fight against global poverty and in environmental movements.

4.3 Trolling:
In the UK, an online campaign to have Jane Austen’s image appear on the British 10-pound note have been successful. The campaign, which was run by feminist Caroline Criado-Perez, sparked uproar and resulted in rape threats and a torrent of e-abuse by trolls against Criado-Perez and UK Labour MP Stella Creasy, who supported her campaign. Trolling is the act of Internet harassment. One definition is that trolling is ‘deliberately trying to distress someone online but usually just to disrupt and often anonymously. It is frequently inflammatory and abusive’ (Nicol 2012, p. 3). Herring (2002) calls this ‘cyber-violence’, and her research demonstrates that ‘cyber violence shows a similar pattern’ to physical violence, where men are ‘disproportionately the perpetrators’ (p. 188). The cyber-hate campaign against Criado-Perez and Creasy has been regarded as one of the most frightening hate campaigns online (Yaqoob 2013, n.p.). This kind of ‘e-bile’ (Jane 2012a) is not uncommon behaviour online, with relative anonymity resulting in people acting in ways they often would not offline. Many feminists have taken action to address gendered abuse through campaigns such as those on Twitter and in broader social and online environments such as Hollaback and the Everyday Sexism Project. These campaigns involve ‘talking back’ to trolls and other sexist harassers to create solidarity among activists, as well as to not reinscribe the silence of victims or to silence activists. The Everyday Sexism Project began in 2012 to document everyday examples of sexism. It began in the UK but receives contributions from around the world (http://everydaysexism.com/). Hollaback is an online campaign aimed at ending the street harassment of women (http://www.ihollaback.org/about/).
Both projects involve speaking back on social and online media, and both have attained global media attention.

4.4 Digital Divides

Bennett (in Van De Donk et al. 2004) is interested in the ways in which ‘digital communication networks may be changing the political game in favour of resource-poor players who, in many cases are experimenting with political strategies outside of conventional national political channels such as elections and interest processes’ (p. 144). He finds that the ‘internet is implicated in the new global activism far beyond reducing costs of communication, or transcending the geographical and temporal barriers found in other communication media’ (Bennett in Van De Donk et al. 2010, p. 164). Debates about the efficacy of online activism are increasing with the alleged ubiquity of the Internet in everyday functions. Digital divides are a key consideration when examining activism that is mediated via the Internet. Digital divide refers to the gap between those who can access the Internet regularly and those who cannot. There is evidence that the divides are shrinking; however, it is important to recognise the current digital divide that exists throughout Western and non-Western countries, which directly affects what can be considered true democratic outcomes from populations’ use of digital technologies (Internet World Stats 2014; Green 2010). Castells (2010) makes arguments about the control of the Internet by elites and the spatial inequalities that exist in accessing the Internet (p. 377). Thus, it is important to acknowledge the disparities not only in terms of access, but also in a person’s capacity to use digital technologies (Selwyn 2004, p. 346).

4.5 Online activism

Earl and Kimport (2011) argue that activism that is conducted online differs from, and is advantageous to, more traditional activism because of decreased costs and the ability for activists to not be physically together. Over time, this can decrease reliance on more formal organisations. The authors contend that it is ‘people’s usage of technology—not technology itself—that can change social processes’ (Earl & Kimport 2011, p. 14). They examine what it means to be a “‘five minute activist”—someone who participates in various online actions such as online petitions—versus being a longtime activist—
someone who organizes and/or participates in street protest over time’ (Earl & Kimport 2011, p. 15). They do not disavow the contribution and experience of the ‘five-minute’ activist, and they explore this with regard to decreased activism costs (Earl & Kimport 2011, p. 15). Bennett and Fielding (1999) contend that activism is changing because of five-minute activism. Earl and Kimport (2011) also use the term ‘lone-wolf organizers’, which refers to people who organise themselves or who lead dramatically small teams. Earl and Kimport (2011) frame the ‘Continuum of Online Activism’ (p. 12) in three ways: e-mobilisations (using the Internet to organise activism offline), e-tactics (e.g., petitions, email and the use of both online and offline methods of activism) and e-movements (activism that only requires online engagement) (p. 12).

In light of the questions often posed by researchers about the potentiality of lasting effects of online activism, Earl et al. (2009) group scholarly responses into three categories: ‘no lasting effect’ (Diani 2000; Tilly 2004), simple accentuation (Myers 1994; Fisher 1998; Bennett in Van De Donk et al. 2004) and more fundamental change (Earl & Schussman 2003, 2004; Bimber et al. 2005), ‘although most research supports simple accentuation’ (p. 426). According to Earl et al. (2009), the first group believes that online formations cannot be sustained because they are not substitutes for physical connections between people. The second group lies in the middle, arguing that online activism can be pragmatic to organise offline actions because of the speed of communication that is enabled via such technologies. The last group views the Internet as a place of promise for activism in and of itself. Earl et al. (2009) argue that these antithetical findings predominantly result from researchers studying differing types of Internet activism (p. 428).

Leading Internet scholar Morozov (2011) coined the term ‘the net delusion’ (p. xvii), which ‘start[s] with a flawed set of assumptions (cyber-utopianism) and act[s] on them using a flawed, even crippled, methodology (Internet-Centrism)’. He argues that ‘internet-centrists like to answer every question about democratic change by first reframing it in terms of the Internet rather than the context in which that change is to occur’ (Morozov 2011, p. xvi). Although this thesis does not examine the effects (or possible effects) of the Internet with regard to authoritarian regimes like Morozov does, in this section of the thesis, Morozov’s ideas are somewhat recruited to caution against feminist activism becoming too ‘Internet-centric’ and bound in cyber-utopianism.
Examining the ‘Google Doctrine’, Morozov (2011) argues that ‘networked intimacy may have also greatly inflated popular expectations of what it could actually achieve’ (p. 5). He argues that there are more effective ways to solve social and political issues than using cyber-utopianism, as utopianism distracts people from realistic goals (Morozov 2011, p. xv). Burns and Eltham (2009) examine the effects of Twitter in the Iranian election events and crisis, and while acknowledging its potential for political organising, they offer warnings similar to Morozov about human rights abuses and intelligence gathering. Morozov’s (2011) arguments binarise the Internet and its potential for activism at times as much as other people’s arguments glorify it. The Internet’s potential to act as the ‘spark’ to help mobilise activists, start conversations and recalibrate debates is apparent, although not in every context. In much the same way that celebrity feminists and other forms of celebrity activists, such as celanthropists, can spark change, Internet activism can be a conduit to engagement, but it should not be the only tactic.

Gladwell’s (2010) essay entitled ‘Why the revolution will not be Tweeted’ raises doubts about the potential of the Internet to enact social change, asking: Are ‘people who log on to their Facebook page really the best hope for us all?’ (p. 2). He argues that social media works around ‘weak ties’ (e.g., keeping in touch with acquaintances that you would not ordinarily see in ‘real life’; see Gilbert & Karahalios 2009; Granovetter 1973), and that this can be a ‘wonderful thing…but weak ties seldom lead to high-risk activism’ (Gladwell 2010, p. 6). He believes that social media can increase participation but decrease the effort required to bring about substantive change. That is, he contends that people will participate if they are not asked to invest too much (e.g., by signing a petition). Using the example of people signing up online to donate bone marrow, which is not ‘trivial’, Gladwell makes the broader argument that it ‘doesn’t involve personal or financial risk…it doesn’t require that you confront socially entrenched norms and practices’ (2010, p. 4). Gladwell (2010) believes that social media can prevent people from other types of participatory activism, such as street activism. He acknowledges that different tools are required for specific forms of activism.

Murthy (2013) specifically examines the power of social media, such as Twitter, as a broadcast tool for citizen engagement. He critically examines Twitter as a communication tool, drawing historical connections with the telegraph. He argues that ‘because tweets can also to be directed to specific individual(s), even if she/he is a
stranger or a celebrity, Twitter is unique in facilitating interactions across discrete social networks’ (Murthy 2013, p. 4). He discusses how Twitter is a “many-to-many” model through both hashtags and retweets…if a tweet is retweeted often enough or by the right person(s), it gathers momentum that can emulate a snowball effect’ (Murthy 2013, p. 6). He agrees with comparisons made by many that Twitter is occasionally viewed as a more open and public type of Facebook, arguing that ‘both mediums are social, tend to elicit regular contributions that are not verbose, and are highly interactive’ (Murthy 2013, p. 7). Murthy (2013) believes that they are very different mediums, and he differentiates between social networks (e.g., Facebook) and social media (e.g., Twitter) communicative technologies. For example, according to Boyd and Ellison (2007), social networks are:

web based services that allow individuals to (1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, (2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and (3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system (p. 211).

While Murthy (2013) believes that social media and social networks are not mutually exclusive, he states that ‘social media’s emphasis is not as “bounded” to communities of friends as social network sites are’ (p. 8). Thus, he differentiates Twitter from ‘Facebook’s friend-centered social network model’ and likens it more to blogs (Murthy 2013, p. 8). He contends that ‘Facebook and other SNS [social networking sites] are structured to leverage stronger ties within a more proximal network, rather than maximising audience reach’ (Murthy 2013, p. 11). Social media is more geared towards the public, and social networking is designed to cater for people who interact offline. Gladwell (2010) contends that the comparatively high-risk activities of traditional activism (e.g., demonstrations and protests) are the only real way to create any meaningful social effects, conversely arguing that the weak social ties and low-risk activism of social media are rendered ineffective. Like Gladwell and Morozov, Murthy (2013) examines Twitter and activism, finding that Gladwell’s argument, ‘though compelling on many levels, creates a strict binary between weak and strong ties. This position forces a choice between the two, when such a choice need not be made’ (p. 103). Karpf (2012) examines the ways in which people mobilise through digital mediums. He does not engage in the utopian ideal of the Internet’s democratising potential, but rather explores the effect of new and cheap methods used by online advocacy groups to engage with their membership.
4.6 Slacktivism

The efficacy of ‘slacktivism’ (‘slacker’ plus ‘activism’) in increasing civic mobilisation is controversial (Shulman 2005; Hindman 2009; Morozov 2009; Gladwell 2010). The term ‘slacktivism’ appears to have been coined by Dwight Ozard and Fred Clarke in 1995 and was originally not loaded with the derogatory meaning it now possesses (Christensen 2011, n.p.). Slacktivism is defined by ‘low-risk, low cost activity via social media whose purpose is to raise awareness, produce change, or grant satisfaction to the person engaged in the activity’ (Rotman et al. 2011, p. 821). Examples of slacktivism and clicktivism include clicking ‘like’ on a Facebook meme or page dedicated to raising awareness about an issue, signing online petitions, sharing a video on Facebook and Tweeting a celebrity to ask for support via a retweet for a ‘cause’. Studies by Lee and Hsieh (2013) find that contrary to critics’ concerns, there is ‘no evidence that performing one form of slacktivism (i.e., signing online petitions) will undermine a subsequent civic activity (i.e., donating to a charity)’ (p. 8). Interestingly, their research indicates that there are scenarios in which slacktivism increased the likelihood of participation in a ‘subsequent collective action’ (Lee & Hsieh 2013, p. 8).

Subsequently, multiple positions have arisen regarding whether digital activism is valuable and of ‘real-world’ significance, or whether it largely constitutes what critics term ‘slacktivism’. For example, the Swedish arm of the United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF) ran a campaign entitled Likes Don’t Save Lives in 2013 (see O’Mahony 2013), and it ran an advertisement questioning the efficacy of ‘slacktivism’ through Facebook, stating ‘Like us on Facebook, and we will vaccinate zero children against polio’. The premise of the UNICEF advertisement was not to disavow the interest or participation of people online, but to highlight that online actions alone are often lacking in creating effective change. As UNICEF Sweden’s Director of Communications, Petra Hallebrant, acknowledged, ‘we like likes, and social media could be a good first step to get involved, but it cannot stop there. Likes don’t save children’s lives. We need money to buy vaccines for instance’ (O’Mahony 2013, n.p.). This campaign utilised the medium that UNICEF was criticising, thereby reinforcing the notion of the power of virality in awareness-raising campaigns.

It is widely believed that social media is an:
inherent part of most activist campaigns today. Yet, their potential to foster political participation and mobilization remains debated. While cyber-utopians insist on the positive contribution of social online-activism to participatory democracy, supporters of the ‘slacktivism’ argument dismiss it as a hedonist activity that carries little societal benefit (Breuer & Farooq 2012, n.p.).

Such debates can disavow the experience of, and participation by, those who are physically unable to be present in offline participation; however, this is further problematised by those who cannot participate because of ‘digital divides’, for example. Lee and Hsieh (2013) conducted an online experiment asking whether ‘participating in online activism reduces people’s subsequent civic participation’ (p. 1). That is, do people ‘slack’ off once they have performed slacktivist actions? Lee and Hsieh (2013) found that people who signed petitions online were ‘more likely to donate money to a related charity, demonstrating a consistency effort’; therefore, the results suggest that ‘exposure to online activism influences individual decision on subsequent civic actions’ (2013, p. 1). This research suggests some potential for the integration of slacktivism as an effective method of raising awareness. In an awareness-only, entrée level campaign, such tactics may be more advantageous with a variety of feminist experts leading the ongoing efforts to leverage additional support.

4.7 Kony 2012

High-profile campaigns such as Kony2012 highlight that online activism requires more than Facebook ‘likes’ or other similar actions. The now infamous Kony2012 campaign has further heightened critical debate on the shifting nature of humanitarian communication in relation to public engagement, and it has increased public awareness of the notions of ‘slacktivism’ and ‘clicktivism’. While slacktivism is not a new concept, the increasing role of social networking sites, for example, in humanitarianism makes it easier to contribute in low-risk, low-cost online activism, which raises questions about the effect this has on the potential for subsequent civic action. The Kony2012 video, which was viewed over 105 million times in less than one week and raised millions of dollars for the Invisible Children, was unlike any humanitarian campaign previously seen. In explaining the approach to the campaign, Kony2012 co-producer Jason Russell asserts that ‘no one wants a boring documentary on Africa. Maybe we have to make it pop, and we have to make it cool. We view ourself as the
Pixar of human rights stories’ (Kron & Goodman 2012, n.p.). Almost immediately after the release of the Kony2012 campaign video, human rights and media professionals responded with criticism regarding the motives, methods and aims of the campaign; according to Beckett (2012), ‘much of the awareness of the video was amplified by the debate it provoked’ (p. 6). The major criticisms of the campaign related to its oversimplification of the problem and the commercialisation of the solution: the film implored audiences to act immediately by sharing the video, signing a petition and ordering an action kit, which were all achievable in a few clicks. It also called on viewers to help Invisible Children target politicians and celebrities, furthering the notion that engaging people who are ‘visible’ will ultimately make the issue obvious in the public gaze. The Kony2012 campaign concept was relatively unique in its approach; it aimed to make Joseph Kony—the perpetrator of the suffering—famous, with the goal being global awareness of the crisis situation in Uganda. A couple of years after the campaign began, Kony has not been located and the crisis situation in Uganda is arguably largely unchanged. Although the campaign was not successful in apprehending Kony or ending the war in Uganda, the phenomenon proved the ability of the Internet to ‘create a self-sustaining, citizen-propelled tidal wave of messaging’ (Beckett 2012, p. 7).

4.8 Real vs. Virtual

Much of the research about online communications has advanced from ‘real versus virtual dichotomy’ (Beneito-Montagut 2011, p. 716), towards conceding the integration of, and potent relationship between, online and offline lives (Garcia et al. 2009). Arguing the need for ethnographers to research online spaces, Murthy (2013, p. 32) notes that people now spend much of their working and social existences in the online environment. Kennedy (2006, p. 861) and Castells’ (2010, p. 387) idea that existence offline is continuous online and that an online user is bound to the desires of a physical self, affirm the significance of recognising that the virtual world is not exempt from reality. Marwick and Boyd (2010) provide an insight into authenticity online and describe it as ‘a localised, temporally situated social construct that varies widely based on community’ (p. 124). Baym and boyd (2012) describe social media as online platforms that ‘mirror, magnify, and complicate countless aspects of everyday life’ (p. 320) because they contribute to the removal of distinctions between ‘presence and absence, time and space…and virtual and real’ (p. 320). Digital technologies and mobile
Platforms have extended the outreach of the Internet and increased opportunities for user connectivity. Goggin and Crawford (2010) identify that youth culture is rapidly engaging with these technologies, which is heightened by the significant use of social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter on mobile devices (p. 225). While social media facilitates expanded avenues for connectivity, it also pressures users with what Crawford (2010) describes as ‘a new kind of noise problem’ (p. 65) and reveals ‘the human limits of attention’ (Crawford 2009, p. 532). Digital technologies are not only providing the means for production and connection, but also an environment that fosters a collective between those who are engaged, and as Chen (2011) argues, ‘at the grassroots level, we have also seen the way a range of applications of the internet have affected the political world’ (p. 1). Thus, this has implications for various activists, including feminists, to organise collectively and strategically. The next chapter presents a case study of my own feminist online intervention. It highlights some of my experiences, concerns and further suggestions for feminist activism in Australia using, for example, online petitioning. The chapter seeks to elucidate whether online activism has real-world efficacy, and whether the somewhat problematic figure of the slacktivist can be recuperated as a legitimate activist without binarising the debates.
Chapter 5: A Case Study of Feminist Activist Interventions in Queensland Party Politics: #sackgavin: A King Hit

…If a woman drinks to excess and is raped or assaulted, is she partly to blame? As uncomfortable and difficult as this question is, the answer surely is yes (King 2008, n.p.).

…Years ago, I wrongly believed that only those with ‘access’ to people and power could successfully take on social change. But I had it wrong. It’s really about accessing what you do have…The connections, which come from community, are the real power, especially when it comes to grassroots organizing (Richards in Baumgartner & Richards 2010 (2000), p. 268).

In examining the effects of Twitter on and in the 2009 election protests in Iran, Burns and Eltham (2009, n.p.) argue that ‘different actors will use new technologies for their own ends: understanding and anticipating such different uses is critical’. In this case study chapter, the actors examined are principally feminist activists (such as myself) who began their journeys as ‘sole’ or ‘small-group’ activists—mostly institutionally unaligned operators. I chiefly scrutinise the creation of online petitions with the petition platform www.change.org and the use of Twitter and Facebook by such actors to consider the effect of digital technologies on feminist activism in Australia. This chapter offers a self-reflexive analysis of a campaign that used the Twitter hashtag label of #sackgavin. It more broadly provides a critical interrogation of online feminist political interventions and the politics of discourses surrounding silencing, exclusionary tactics and victim blame. In this chapter, I both narrate and interrogate my practices as a creator/campaigner. Although this campaign offers some critique about the depth of normalisation of violence against women, it primarily tests the efficacy of employing such online petitions to intervene in entrenched discourses surrounding victim-blaming narratives.

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20 www.change.org will be referred to as Change.org throughout this chapter.
The key issue that this campaign addressed was the gendered nature of victim blame as an entrenched discourse that shifts responsibility from the perpetrator to the victim. The primary goal was to increase awareness and motivate people to take action. Measuring the success of this type of campaign is not quantifiable; however, I judge success in terms of the ‘noise’ created through social, online and mainstream media around victim-blaming. Additionally, I explore the costs invested in terms of time, money and emotions.

5.1 Case Study: What Gavin Did
5.1.1 Background to the campaign

Gavin King was the Editor in Chief at the News Limited newspaper The Cairns Post. In 2008, during his time as a journalist, he authored an article entitled ‘Women Should Play it Safe’ (King 2008, n.p.). In this article, he posed and answered the following question: ‘If a woman drinks to excess and is raped or assaulted, is she partly to blame? As uncomfortable and difficult as this question is, the answer surely is yes’. He continued:

> It’s a sad and obvious fact that a proportion of men, a small but evil pack of bastards, will commit rape regardless of awareness campaigns or pleas from police and women’s groups. These types of men can’t be relied on or trusted to behave appropriately, so women should do everything in their power to avoid vulnerable situations. On many occasions, women wouldn’t have been in these vulnerable situations if they had stopped at just a few drinks, rather than carrying on in a wild binge session.

King’s words were unequivocal and formed part of an ongoing and provocative career trajectory. He did not back away from these victim-blaming comments.

In 2011, the Queensland Liberal National Party (LNP)—one of Australia’s two major political parties—endorsed King as the 2012 state candidate for Cairns. After King’s
endorsement as the ‘Can Do’ man for Cairns, he stood down as editor from *The Cairns Post* to focus on his political aspirations. After King announced that he would be running for state parliament, a blog (www.hillybillywatch.com) highlighted King’s comments on 19 September 2011. Queensland’s major news publication, *The Courier Mail*, published an article on 7 October 2011 after the leader of the Queensland LNP, Campbell Newman, defended King over his victim-blaming comments (Condon 2011). In a media conference, Newman said that he was not aware of the article, but was sure it had been misinterpreted. However, King explicitly defended his column, stating that ‘if you read the whole column rather than one sentence you will see it’s a very sensible column based on a police press release’ (King in Schwarten 2011a, n.p.). It is difficult to deny that King was blaming some victims of sexual assault: those who had consumed alcohol. It was later revealed to a broader audience that King has a journalistic history of provocative comments; therefore, this comment was far from being ‘poorly worded’, as Newman (2011a, n.p.) claimed.

Although this chapter predominantly focuses on his victim-blaming comments, some of King’s other provocative opinions also regularly appeared in *The Cairns Post*. For example, he wrote that ‘China is made up of more than 1.3 billion people, with all manner of interest groups, ethnic clans, freaks and weirdos’ (King 2008d, n.p.). When discussing the baby bonus, he wrote that ‘it is a dodgy money-making scam and a looming social crisis in the Far North, and anywhere else poor people with high libidos reside’ (King 2008a, n.p.). As King attempted to enter the political arena, his pre-political journalism was increasingly scrutinised, resulting in outrage, even from within his own political party. For example, Joel Harrop, former state secretary (2009–2010) of the Queensland LNP, stood down in protest at the Queensland LNP’s endorsement of King. He stated in his resignation letter that King’s ‘misogynistic, women-hating views…are untenable, and I cannot remain the member of an organisation that endorses

21 ‘Can Do’ is the slogan of the then Queensland LNP leader in waiting, and former Mayor of Brisbane, Campbell Newman. He calls himself ‘Can Do Campbell’. In the 2012 Queensland state election, Newman became the Queensland premier.

22 The Australian government introduced the ‘Baby Bonus’ in 2002 as a payment to families of newborn babies, with the apparent goal of stimulating the birth rate after Australia recorded its lowest-ever birth rate in 2001.
a man who spruiks such vile’ (Harrop 2011, n.p.). Harrop (2011, n.p.) also stated to the Australian Associated Press (AAP) that King is like:

the next Pauline Hanson. He is somebody who enjoys shocking or offending people…Either he believes the things he is writing, or he is doing it in order to offend people, which is equally concerning…These are not the sort of people we need in parliament.23

A spokesperson for the Brisbane Rape and Incest Survivors’ Support Centre, Jacqui Hindmarsh (2011, n.p.), told journalists that the comments were ‘horrendous’ and ‘scary’, stating that:

it’s columns like this that perpetuate the myths out there…that if you get drunk, if you have a few too many drinks, you deserve to be raped…no matter how much someone drinks they should never be raped, that responsibility belongs with the men who choose to do that.

In early October 2011, the then Queensland Minister for Women, Karen Struthers (2011a, p. 3212), called for King’s disendorsement, stating in parliament on 12 October 2011 that:

The theme of Sexual Violence Awareness Month this year is ‘ending sexual violence against women is men’s business’. This week I have challenged the LNP candidate for Cairns, Gavin King, who said that women are partly to blame for their rape. These victim-blaming views held by him and other LNP members, like the member for Mudgeeraba, who have failed to condemn those views only serve to scare women into silence, making them less likely to report assaults. The local LNP candidate in my area has sat silent on this issue. I call on him to condemn the victim-blaming views of some of his colleagues and support the safety of local women.

23 Pauline Hanson is a right-wing Australian politician who led her own political party (One Nation) after being disendorsed from the LNP. In her maiden speech in parliament in 1996, she criticised immigration, payments to Aboriginal Australians, political correctness and multiculturalism. She was highly divisive.
Notwithstanding some media attention, the LNP and Newman continued to support King, and the issue was dismissed. Despite political pressure from Anna Bligh’s Labor government calling for King’s disendorsement, the issue received scant attention from mainstream media and from many relatively well-known popular media feminists; this was despite activists such as myself bringing it to their attention. Frustrated by the lack of interest given to the issue of a rape apologist being potentially voted to public office, the re-victimisation that such comments can create and the complicity of the LNP in supporting King, I collaborated with a friend (who did not want her name used at any time during the campaign) and began an online, explicitly feminist, campaign.\textsuperscript{24}

5.1.2 The campaign

Due to the relative silence in Queensland on the King issue, our campaign began—predominantly online—in October 2011. It was an attempt to offer feminist articulations and inhabit public discourse relating to damaging victim-blaming narratives and to seek King’s disendorsement from the Queensland LNP. My name was the only one used on Twitter and Facebook accounts, and when engaging with Change.org and journalists. My colleague performed a significant role and had differing tasks: she created a letter called ‘Dear Gavin’, set up the website and provided both intellectual capital and working experience. We performed different, although collaborative, roles to varying levels throughout our campaign, which we dubbed #sackgavin on Twitter. The aims of the campaign were simple: to strengthen support for King’s disendorsement from the LNP and potentially drafting the laws of the state, and to increase awareness that such victim-blaming is discrimination against women.

This chapter summarises the events of the campaign, describes the methods we employed and evaluates the efficacy of the campaign strategies. I discuss the viability of small-scale grassroots campaigning according to this personal experience. Neither my

\textsuperscript{24} We started the campaign together, although we undertook different tasks. At no time do I speak for the other person, and I do not assume that she holds the same view with regard to this campaign, its progress or outcomes.
friend nor I had membership to any political party and reiterated that this issue was much broader than political alignment or any state or territory boundaries.

5.1.2.1 Campaign methods, events and actions

We had to strategise very quickly at times during this institutionally unaligned grassroots activist campaign; for example, contacting Members of Parliament (MPs) via email and asking for re-Tweets from celebrities and popular media feminists, and people with a social media presence. We also had no allocated budget. We had little knowledge that the #sackgavin campaign would become such a lengthy and emotionally gruelling process, or that it would gain as much media and public attention as it did. We knew that the article containing the victim-blaming comments had been written three years previously, but the timeframe was largely irrelevant to us—especially because we were armed with awareness of King’s history of discriminatory comments. We also knew that it would be difficult to convince a mainstream audience that sexual violence and victim-blaming deserved attention—preferably locally and globally.

5.1.2.1.1 Online petition and Change.org

We decided to use Change.org as our petition platform because it is the world’s largest petition platform, describing itself as:

an online advocacy platform that empowers anyone, anywhere to start, join, and win campaigns for social change. Millions of people sign petitions on Change.org each month on thousands of issues, winning campaigns every day to advance change locally and globally.

Despite being the world’s largest petition platform since 2007, with over 70 million users in 196 countries, Change.org only developed a team in Australia in 2011, led by Nick Allardice. The platform was relatively invisible at the start of our campaign; however, this changed exponentially within one year. The King petition was one of the first run by Change.org in Australia, and almost immediately after this, other hugely popular media-centric campaigns began (e.g., #vilekyle, #sackalan, #destroythejoint).

Each time a person signed the petition, Newman and King received an email from Change.org. I did not receive any direct contact from Newman or the LNP
administration at any stage regarding the petition. It is probable that the targets of the petition simply blocked emails from Change.org.

Before Change.org started assisting us more directly, we had fewer than 1,000 signatures, despite already being very active and the petition being mentioned many times on Twitter (including being re-Tweeted by well-known groups and individuals), Facebook and various other websites. Additionally, online news outlets *The Punch* and *Crikey* ran pieces on the issue, and the online petition was referred to in an article in *The Courier Mail*. We also approached female members of the LNP (e.g., then candidate and now Queensland LNP MP Saxon Rice) in person to seek their opinions about King’s comments when they were doing street stalls. Rice was dismissive, but took our email addresses. We never heard from her again. We emailed elected representatives of the LNP and were met with silence. We distributed flyers at the Brisbane ‘Reclaim the Night’ rally in late 2011, and we engaged in conversations about the issue with most people we met.

Change.org provided assistance with two press releases and helped to organise what I call the ‘Facebook climax’ of the campaign. In conjunction with myself, Change.org wrote a press release and sent it out on the morning when a targeted social media bombardment was planned on Newman’s Facebook page. To do this, Change.org emailed its mailing list to Change.org members to ask if they would assist the campaign by writing a message about King’s comments directly on Newman’s Facebook page. This mailing list was crucial because Change.org’s reach was far greater than our own. On this day, various media outlets were contacted via the press release, with myself listed as the contact person. Throughout the days that followed, Change.org provided advice and support for liaising with the media.

5.1.2.1.2 Punks, drunks and desperadoes: an online t-shirt and tote shop
On the first day of our campaign, we created an online shop called *Punks, Drunks and Desperadoes* (http://punkdrunklove.wordans.com.au/my/boutique).\(^{25}\) The shop name is a play on words from the description that Newman used about the Queensland Labor Party, saying that (then) Premier Anna Bligh was a ‘Sleaze bucket’ and that ‘Queensland today is run by drunks, punks and desperadoes’ (Newman 2011a, n.p.). The shop was set up at no charge in around half an hour. We created custom-made t-shirts and tote bag slogans and labelled it as a ‘T-Shirt and Tote’ e-protest using the following wording:

> In 2008, Gavin King stated that women who drink too much, and suffered sexual violence, have to bear their share of responsibility.  
> In 2011, he is the endorsed Liberal National Party candidate for the seat of Cairns.  
> When questions were put to the leader of the party on the party position, it was dismissed.  
> When frustrated by continued enquiries about his own financial interests, he stated the Government was run by a bunch of ‘drunks, punks and desperadoes’.  
> It is NOT acceptable to brush aside the REAL issues such as sexual violence against women. The comment is not related, but the crux of the issue is this: enquiries into his personal financial affairs are an unacceptable outrage, but to offer no serious response to the outrageous claims made within his own party - fine!  
> This is not about your politics. This is far more serious than that. Irresponsible comments such as these extend the suffering of those who have been violated, often times repeatedly.  
> I have no connection with the Brisbane Rape and Incest Survivors' Support Centre, but will donate any proceeds from this site to their organisation. Where they do real work.  

\(^{25}\) Thus, the shop title is not only a play on words, but also a loose allusion to the 2002 film, *Punch-Drunk Love*. 


People could order directly from the site, with products made to order upon payment. The t-shirts and tote bags had single words or various plays on words used in the political deflection of attention from King’s words; for example, ‘Punk Drunk Desperado’, ‘Sleazebucket’, ‘Punk, Drunk, Love’, ‘Dirt Bag’ and ‘Punk Loves Desperadoes’. Shortly afterwards, I posted a link to the e-shop on my personal Facebook account, started Tweeting about it and sought re-Tweets from Twitter followers such as regular users, celebrities and celebrity feminists. Additionally, I directly messaged almost 100 people from my personal and professional networks, including many well-known public/popular feminists, with a link to the shop and, later, the petition.

5.1.2.1.3 Other feminists—celebrity, popular, media commentators

My colleague and I sent off hundreds of emails to list-servs and well-known identities, including celebrity feminists around the world. Many celebrity feminists were made aware of the campaign. In Australia, some celebrity feminists occupy mainstream and online media space, and as I argue in this thesis, there is an escalating velocity of feminist media commentary (although not always constructive). Although obtaining signatures from feminist activists was difficult, some ‘high-profile’ signatures and several people with large online and offline networks assisted us by re-Tweeting or sharing information, and they emailed or sent us encouragement. However, some did not sign, support or respond, which was confusing at the time. It may have been a form of ‘petition’ fatigue, not dissimilar to the ‘compassion fatigue’ around causes mentioned in Section One (Moeller 1999). It may have been because King was not yet an elected representative; he was a relatively unknown identity, and this was seen very much as a Queensland issue, and particularly a political party issue. When compared with the later campaigns of #vilekyle and #sackalan, and the community that formed around #destroythejoint, the key difference was that for all of these other campaigns, there were celebrity targets, high-profile celebrities and celebrity feminists driving those campaigns publicly (and sometimes benefitting from them). As a target, King lacked celebrity, and I lacked celebrity as a campaigner. Given that not every campaign target will have celebrity or every campaigner will have celebrity status, platforms such as Change.org are crucial in developing surround-sound effects around a campaign (as well as solidarity with campaigners).
Although it was difficult to obtain responses from popular Australian media feminists, some were very supportive. For example, Emily Maguire, Catherine Deveny, Tara Moss, Clementine Ford and Dannielle Miller all responded to emails and re-Tweeted information. However, others did not respond until further media attention was organised in conjunction with Change.org. This was very frustrating, as many Australian media feminists and social commentators with high profiles largely ignored our pleas for assistance and solidarity. This highlighted their privilege and highly negotiated positions. Arguably, it was because they all lived outside of Queensland and therefore had a low level of vested interest. Additionally, there is low visibility of authorised feminist speakers in Queensland’s mainstream media; the hub of media outlets and action in Australia is in the southern states.

We therefore used our networks and amateur online social media experience to engage Carrie Miller, an experienced journalist and doctoral candidate specialising in sexual assault and responsibility, to write a piece for The Punch (2011b, n.p.). It was entitled ‘Gavin King: Victim Blamer and Woman Shamer’. Miller donated her time and expertise and held King to account for stating that he was quoted out of context. She advised King in the article that:

> Despite your clumsy attempts to conflate the issue of responsibility for being assaulted with taking reasonable steps for ensuring one’s personal safety (which is still undue emphasis on a woman’s behaviour), the simple fact is you did say that pissed chicks are partly to blame for being raped (Miller 2011b, n.p.).

She continues to address the individualising of blame:

> The real problem with King’s position and with debates about sexual violence against women in general, is the way they are narrowly framed in terms of individual responsibility…In doing so, we are also doing something much more harmful. We are dodging our collective responsibility by failing to address the ways in which sexism is normalised in our institutions and practices and how this might impact the way women are treated. Sexual violence doesn’t exist in a cultural vacuum (despite what you’ve read, rapists aren’t ‘monsters’ who erupt from nowhere)—the social and structural causes of it are complex and are the subject of ongoing research and debate (Miller 2011b, n.p.).
The piece generated around 200 readers’ comments. Feminism was apportioned with the ‘blame’ in many comments. For example:

This is ridiculous. Everyone is responsible for taking reasonable steps to ensure their own safety. Feminism attempts to take all responsibility away from women, reducing them in effect to beings without agency. Women should be insulted by this (Erick in Miller 2011b, n.p.).

5.1.2.1.4 ‘Dear Gavin’ letter on website

After approximately five weeks of the petition’s existence (alongside many #sackgavin Tweets and emails sent directly to King and Newman), King contacted me via Twitter with an offer to have coffee to discuss our ‘points of view’. Although I thanked him for the offer, we quickly created a website with a letter, ‘Dear Gavin’, which explained why I would not meet him:

Dear Gavin,

This is an open letter, I am sure you won’t mind; you seem to have always liked an audience.

I am writing to thank you for your invitation to coffee in order that you might listen to my ‘point of view’. Unfortunately, I am going to have to decline. You see, the thing is, you’d probably expect me to make the coffee and bring a plate; and as you might well imagine, things have been pretty busy of late. Plus, I don’t think any of us would have much to talk about.

You are either sorry, or you’re not.

And if you are sorry, you’re admitting what you said was wrong.

And if you admit you’re wrong, it would be impossible to disagree with the proposition that is not a good idea to be drafting the laws of Queensland.

See you on the hustings.

Sarah Casey

(http://www.equitycollective.net/)

When questioned on Twitter by King about why I would not meet him to discuss this issue, I responded that it was not my ‘job’ to educate him.

5.1.2.1.5 The Facebook climax
The strategy we worked out with Change.org was to build media momentum leading up to the Queensland political Leaders' Debate between Bligh and Newman. This was to be held on White Ribbon Day (25 November 2011), and it would be an optimal time to attract media attention. We decided that Change.org would send a co-written press release from myself very early on the morning of 23 November 2011 to alert media to the petition. By this time, it had gained considerable signature support through Change.org’s broader mailing list of supporters. This can be seen as both problematic and advantageous. From the morning of 23 November, and continuing intensely for over 48 hours, the petition edged closer to 5,000 signatures. Newman’s Facebook wall was inundated by concerned citizens outraged at the lack of action. Nearly 1,000 comments were posted on Newman’s Facebook wall during this time, and activity continued in the social media world. However, after the press release, the mainstream media took more notice, and the King issue was reported nationally in newspapers and on the radio and television, and I was being contacted as a spokesperson. This was confronting, as I was alone, had no media training and was receiving many calls. Most journalists were professional, except for one, who changed my words considerably, tied the issue together with another matter and then attributed the comments to me. Newman made a short statement on his Facebook wall claiming that he stood by King and that King had apologised.

Newman (2011b, n.p.) released the following statement on his official Facebook page on 23 November 2011:

As I have stated previously, both Gavin King and myself are of the view that no woman ever deserves to be raped.

Mr King has apologised for his blog and admitted that it was poorly worded and that his intention was to warn young women to be careful and look after their own personal safety given the appalling law and order situation in Cairns.

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26 See the evaluation and reflection section of this chapter for further discussion.
27 This number of signatures is unremarkable—especially in light of how much media attention it brought. However, it should be noted that this was one of the earlier petitions in Australia with Change.org, and it was a significant number of signatures at the time.
As a father of two teenage girls I always remind them to be mindful of their personal safety as there are grubs out there who will take advantage of people if they can get away with it.

As is consistently present in victim-blaming narratives, Newman’s statement individualises blame. Women were still being held to account for their own safety, and Newman’s message is contradictory. Further, no such apology could be found despite the petition being operational for several weeks beforehand and several thousand email notifications being sent to Newman and King. To date, the search for King’s apology has been futile. I was never contacted by Newman’s office with regard to the petition, and Newman made no attempts to discuss the situation with me. On 23 November 2011, Dengate and MacDonald (2011, n.p.) wrote in the *Courier Mail* that:

> Within minutes of posting the statement, the LNP leader’s Facebook page was bombarded with dozens of angry comments. Mr Newman again refused to disendorse Mr King later in the day and blamed the irate response across social networks on Labor supporters…[Newman said] ‘I suppose 50 or 60 or 70 Labor party supporters have been asked to make comment on my website’.

In fact, nearly 1,000 comments were made by hundreds of different people on Newman’s Facebook page calling for action to disendorse King.

At this stage, despite weeks of calls to apologise, King was still scarcely addressing the issue of victim-blaming. Instead, even after the media attention, King (2011, n.p.) positioned himself as a victim of political tactics, stating that ‘it’s driven by Labor—we knew they would go to the gutter and we’re not surprised at all’. The calls to disendorse King, along with the petition and the Facebook ‘bombing’ of Newman’s wall, remained in the news for days. It was a leading story on News.com.au on both 23 and 24 November 2011. *The Courier Mail* (2011) conducted a poll asking ‘Should Campbell

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28 The individualising of blame around victim-blaming is entrenched, but another form of blame narrative is being created, for example, around the supporters of the campaign who were labelled as Labor supporters.
Newman move to have Gavin King dis-endorsed as an LNP candidate?, to which 60.28 per cent (of 2,676 people) voted ‘yes’.

Around 90 comments were made on The Courier Mail article on 23 November 2011. While many of the comments were positive, there were also comments directed at myself. For example:

I have not seen the actual wording of King, but there appears to be nothing wrong with Campbell’s statement. Shame on you Sarah Casey! You are as politically biased as you can get a closet political pretender. Out of parental care I have warned my own daughters about the risks of drinking too much when they go out for fear of date rape and other similar consequences. They protested, just like you, you politically devious and immature female. I have seen stupid young girls behaving like drunken sluts at 3am in The Valley when I went to rescue my own daughter on one occasion. Shame on you Sarah Casey. Why don’t you attack the Labor and Greens MP’s when they liberally use the word rape. I think I know why. Shame on you! (‘Amazed of Brisbane’).

Brisbane researcher Sarah Casey started the petition and said she was not politically linked to any party. Not officially anyway I bet. But probably a stooge for labour [sic] or its sub parties ie Get up…they were poorly worded comments by King…who hasn’t put their foot in their mouth before (‘Not Affiliated of Brisbane’).

There appears to be something going on at CM lately as they have being doing a number on Newman with such fervor recently…!! It seems the norm these days to drag everything said to a point of hysteria. When I was young my mother gave us the same advise…drink and lose control and there is always some low life around who will take advantage. He wasn’t saying that every female who drinks deserves it and I think you’ll find ‘Sarah Casey’ needs to come clean about where she really fits into this whole debacle!! (‘Trelawney of CBD’).

Around this time, many abusive emails were sent to my personal email accounts; however, I was also sent much positive and encouraging feedback.
Two trolls targeted me for months on Twitter, and I received vitriolic, abusive emails and prank phone calls from an unlisted telephone number for an extended period, as well as some readers’ comments online regarding the #sackgavin issue.

5.1.2.1.6 Twitter

Twitter is a microblogging tool where users create Tweets of up to 140 characters. Hashtags are critical to grouping, and searching for, Twitter conversations. Hashtags assist in harvesting conversational buzz around a topic. From the outset of any campaign, it is advantageous to develop a hashtag in order to group Tweets. This often assists in creating initial discussion. Hashtags also create an opportunity for the campaign to trend in Twitter and thereby increase viral efficacy. Hashtags should be easily identifiable within the 140-character limit per Tweet. They help to contextualise, categorise and group searches in order to follow particular conversations. The use of hashtags is crucial because they ‘make topical tweets more visible: drawing on Twitter’s search functionality, users can find (and even subscribe to) all tweets marked with the same hashtag—regardless of whether these tweets originate from established followers or previously unknown users’ (Bruns & Burgess 2012, p. 3). In the case of #sackgavin (and more so with later, larger campaigns such as #destroythejoint and #vilekyle), hashtagging was an important way of locating Tweets about the King issue and sharing information. Facebook later introduced the use of hashtags for grouping (post-#sackgavin). This would have increased exposure to the campaign, as many social media users who use both platforms would have had their Tweets also replicated via an automatic link to Facebook.

5.1.2.1.7 Queensland Women’s Legal Service

The day after the main media activity, Newman pledged on television to double the funds to the Women’s Legal Service and provide an extra $250,000 per year. Newman stated that ‘Mr King has apologised, he knows he did the wrong thing. I think it is time to move on for him too’ (in Agius & Cartwright 2011, n.p.). The apology, which could not be located, and the reference to moving on, is a message that Newman used several times regarding victim-blaming and King. The then Deputy Premier, Andrew Fraser, labelled the offer of extra funding as ‘hush money’ (cited in Howells 2011, n.p.).
Various media outlets reported that on the same day, the same service had offered King counselling on his views:

Women’s Legal Service co-ordinator Rosslyn Monro, who was at Mr Newman’s funding announcement, said her organisation did not condone comments of the type made by Mr King. She offered to meet with him so he understood why they were unhelpful (Agius & Cartwright 2011, n.p.).

5.1.2.1.8 White Ribbon Day and the Queensland Leaders’ Debate

On 25 November 2011, White Ribbon Day marked a call to eliminate violence against women. It was also the day on which the 2011 Queensland Leaders’ Debate was held between Newman and the then Premier Anna Bligh. 29 In the debate, Newman paid tribute to two female Brisbane City Councillors who had helped set up the ‘mud army’ during the Brisbane floods in January, stating that it was important to acknowledge them on White Ribbon Day (Brisbane Times 2011, n.p.). The connection between White Ribbon Day and helping during a flood is strange, if not tenuous. It demonstrated that not only did Newman not comprehend the issue of victim blame, the seriousness of King’s comments and the party’s lack of action, but also that he had not researched the relevance and purpose of White Ribbon Day two days after the intense media coverage over the King issue. When asked by journalist Frances Whiting during the debate about his support for King, Newman concluded by again saying that it was time for everyone to ‘move on’ (Brisbane Times 2011, n.p.).

5.1.2.1.9 Stand by your man: King’s wife speaks

29 White Ribbon (n.d.) is:

an organisation that works to prevent male violence against women. It is a male-led campaign that believes that most men are good and that good men abhor such violence. White Ribbon also believes in the capacity of the individual to change and to encourage change in others. Through primary prevention initiatives and an annual campaign, White Ribbon seeks to change the attitudes and behaviours that lead to and perpetuate violence against women.

White Ribbon is different from the type of campaigns I argue for as it is male-led. The campaigns argued for are large-scale, multi-media feminist driven campaigns.
On 27 November 2011, King appeared in *The Sunday Mail* with his wife and daughter (Healy 2011). The article, entitled ‘Wife of controversial LNP candidate Gavin King stands by her man’, was not really about King’s wife at all; rather, it was to frame King as a family man who has a daughter (therefore, he could presumably not be a rape apologist).  

There was an allusion to a pre-existing apology from King when he stated that he had ‘apologised unreservedly’ (Healy 2011, n.p.). We still could not find this alleged apology, despite being engaged with all media connected to the issue. The article, in line with the family values it espoused, did not mention that King had once written in his capacity as a journalist:

> Looking at the waitress as she tried to explain where our food was, I started to wonder what my fork would look like lodged firmly in her right eyeball (King 2008b, n.p.).

In *The Sunday Mail* (Healy 2011) article, King claimed that having his daughter had changed him. Interestingly, after his daughter had been born, he had written an article on 19 February 2011 (King 2011a, n.p.), stating:

> Yes, I am guilty of betraying my blokey brethren by helping women rule the world. My wife and I recently welcomed a baby into the world. I apologise to my brothers-in-arms in advance. We had a girl.

Around 55 readers made comments regarding the article that featured King and his wife (Healy 2011). Once again, there was anti-feminist sentiment and victim-blaming; for example, ‘Bobster of Brisbane’ wrote ‘Don’t give me your feminist views. If women want to be in control after a night of drinking maybe they shouldn’t drink so much’. ‘Geoff’ of Narangba wrote that King was correct in his questioning about women being responsible—at times—for their own assaults:

> In reality, the answer IS ‘yes’. I fail to see the problem in what he wrote. If a male person drinks to excess during a night out on the town, is he partly to blame for being assaulted? The answer again is ‘yes’. That is the reality of life.

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30 Similarly, around the time of the Australian Federal election in 2013, Tony Abbott’s daughters were used in the campaign to presumably demonstrate that he could not be a misogynist, as had been alleged by then Prime Minister Julia Gillard.
Some people become rather promiscuous, after a few drinks, drop their guard and nasty things happen. Again, that is the reality of life. Looks like Queensland labour [sic] are getting very nervous and throwing mud, as usual.

‘Geoff’ also alleged that the campaign was a Labor attack. This theme was persistent in the reader comments in various articles, as was the anti-feminist charge and linking of feminism to a lack of common sense. On 29 November 2011, Karen Struthers, then Queensland Labor Minister for Women, further built the case for broader-spread sexism in the Queensland LNP ranks and referenced the King issue in parliament:

They also will not be impressed with what Campbell Newman has been doing in relation to his members and their views on women. Not only did Gavin King get full backing from elder statesman Martin Tenni last week on Cairns radio; Mr Tenni has also criticised our candidate in Cairns. He called her a schoolgirl. As I said earlier, he also backed Gavin King’s rape victim-blaming comments and said, ‘Good on you, Gav. Congratulations.’ Martin Tenni also said that not many girls get raped in Cairns. Let me tell honourable members that last year there were 653 reported sexual offences in the Cairns region, and the majority of those were women and girls raped by men. Is that ‘not too many’? Is that what they think—that that is ‘not too many’? That is very, very disturbing. Guess what? Eighty per cent of rapes go unreported. Why do they go unreported? They go unreported because many of the members opposite have views that mean women are blamed and, therefore, they do not report them. Campbell Newman leads a team with only 17 per cent of them women (Struthers 2011b, p. 3839).

Despite King being the subject of political debate and several calls for disendorsement, Newman and his team resumed business as usual.

5.2 What Gavin Did Next

In a political climate with an unprecedented swing against Labor, it was almost inevitable that King would take the seat of Cairns. He also became the Assistant Minister for Tourism. King kept the social media channel open to me until he attained power through his election to parliament, and then he blocked me.
Although we believed disendorsement to be a very slim chance, we met the key aim of the #sackgavin campaign: to raise awareness and generate discourse around victim-blaming. We managed sustained media attention, and the campaign indicated broader issues at hand.

In his maiden speech in the Queensland parliament on the 29 May 2012, King’s very first words were:

Inspired by the campaign tactics of the Australian Labor Party, I will start by quoting from one of my old newspaper columns. On this occasion, however, I will endeavour to keep it in context (King 2012, p. 1).

The irony of King inserting himself into the role of victim and the transferral of the perpetrator status to feminists and Labor figures was highlighted in King’s introductory comments. King’s belief, as stated in the 2008 article, alleged that victims of sexual assault are sometimes partly to blame; however, those who become ‘victim’ to those who hold them to account are not responsible for the behaviour that leads to such attacks.

5.2.1 Evaluation and reflection on campaign

As a journalist, King had a professional responsibility for his words. The victim-blaming comments did not occur in isolation; they formed part of a pattern of behaviour around provocative, but harmful and discriminatory, attitudes. In addition, these issues are not ‘political football[s]’, to quote an allegation that King (2011, n.p.) made about the petition and the associated coverage. The LNP, including King, attempted to subsume the concerns about the global issue of victim-blaming into a political party stoush. The evidence consistently indicates that attitudes are critical in combatting violence against women (VicHealth 2014; WHO 2013; Flood & Pease 2006, 2009). The #sackgavin campaign has further demonstrated that these issues are marginalised, and that they need urgent mainstream attention.

I was soon typecast and labelled, among other names, a ‘Labor Stooge’, for speaking out. It did not matter that I had been involved in feminist politics at various levels for more than twenty years, that I was conducting feminist research, or that I had never held any political party membership. Both the LNP and Internet trollers accused me of being
partisan. I discovered that feminist activism that involved any degree of public attention was extremely political, regardless of whether it was associated with party politics.

The dismissal of King’s serious comments, subsequent comments made by people who were distressed about their own histories, and concerns about King’s endorsement, were indicative of the marginalisation of women’s rights issues more broadly. The LNP’s refusal to disendorse King, and a three-sentence statement from Newman in response to widespread condemnation in a petition, in social media and mainstream media attention, revealed much about the lack of real importance given to sexual violence and victim-blaming. 31

Change.org was critical in the moderate intervention of the #sackgavin campaign. It provided the necessary turning point that the campaign needed, and the number of signatures remained low, even though it had been in the media and mentioned in parliament prior to the campaign. After several weeks, Change.org approached me and asked why I was doing the petition, what my motivations were and how I thought the organisation could help the campaign. Change.org was collaborative and inclusive and offered free assistance. This was imperative, as we had no campaign budget and no access to the large networks that Change.org did; however, we had access to social media. The key benefits of using a platform such as Change.org is that it is free for users, is easy to navigate and is popular with people who have never campaigned before. Although Change.org was then relatively new to Australia, it was extremely useful for gaining not only signatures, but also attention. If well-known people such as popular feminists and other types of celebrity share petitions, they can become even more effective tools for mobilising the public to act. However, there are concerns about slacktivism, petition fatigue and signatures becoming empty signifiers with little offline (or real-world) action post-signing. Nonetheless, these types of petitions can assist with

31 This may have been because the targets of this campaign were too narrow, and Newman may have been trying to set an example—as Leader in Waiting of the LNP—that they would not have decisions affected by public pressure through (predominantly) mainstream, online and social media.
networking and organising further activism (e.g., as seen in the Destroy the Joint movement).\(^{32}\)

An issue with many petition platforms—not only Change.org—is the sending of petitions by the platform to their already-converted audience via their mailing lists to target people who have signed similar petitions in the past. While this often creates media coverage (because larger numbers can help apply pressure), it can conversely appear that the issues are bought and sold alongside mailing lists, and therefore does not equate to organic action. Such concerns need to be carefully negotiated by activists. Another important issue with using petition platforms is the corporatisation of such platforms. As Change.org is free to use, it might appear that it is a not-for-profit organisation; however, it is a corporation that calls itself a social enterprise: ‘the use of business for social good’ (Change.org). It operates by selling mailing lists and advertising, and it also sponsors some petitions, which means that agenda-setting is often driven by both the audience and Change.org. Whether this matters is a question that activists need to address. For me, it did not matter, as the net worth (i.e., media attention for the issue and increasing conversation around victim-blaming narratives) outweighed such concerns.

Since the #sackgavin petition, Change.org’s Australian presence has grown exponentially. The #vilekyle, #sackalan and #destroythejoint campaigns gained more traction than the #sackgavin campaign. This was arguably because, for example, they centred around two non-political, visible and established media commentators who were already highly divisive within the Australian mainstream media, and both of these campaigns attracted the support of many popular media feminist commentators and other celebrities. The #destroythejoint campaign continues to experience success in

\(^{32}\) Destroy the Joint was a very effective online activism group that began in retaliation to comments by divisive talkback radio host, Alan Jones, who claimed that women are ‘destroying the joint’ when the then Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, stated that societies are unable to reach their full potential if women do not participate in the political life of a society. Destroy the Joint was a: highly successful feminist mobilization [that] promptly took place on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube under the rubric ‘Destroy the Joint’. The Facebook campaign was dedicated to people ‘who are sick of the sexism dished out to women in public life in Australia, whether they be our Prime Minister or any other woman’. Its witty images of women destroying the joint ‘using only their gender’ attracted a large following (Sawer 2013, p. 113).
terms of mainstream visibility, and the petition with Change.org was later taken on in partnership with GetUp for greater audience reach. Destroy the Joint has subsequently become a feminist activist group beyond a single campaign. For example, the *Destroying the Joint* anthology (Caro (ed.) 2013) featured many of the popular feminist commentators discussed in this thesis. The book is contentious for various reasons, as discussed in Section 3, but mainly because this book could have been seen as co-opting the grassroots activism of the original #destroythejoint activists who were driving the campaign. Some of the popular feminist commentators are businesspeople who had little to do with the original campaign; it could therefore be regarded as an appropriation of the movement and the hard work of other, lesser-known activists. Conversely, it could be argued that they helped enable greater long-term sustainability for Destroy the Joint as a whole, as well as a demonstration of my broader point regarding #sackgavin: that the campaigns are not the ‘owned’ by the originating campaigners, but in many ways they become the collective capital of the campaigners. Although full control is not possible (or even desirable) once the campaign is released on the Internet and beyond, it is still important to have strategic planning in the early stages, while operating with a level of flexibility. For example, online activist groups such as Destroy the Joint could evacuate their politics of meaning if they take on too many issues/smaller concerns, in much the same way that a celanthropist could ‘vamp’ issues. Hence, careful strategising and consultation with feminist experts is advantageous.\(^{33}\)

As a predominantly solo activist, I could not bring to the #sackgavin campaign what Bishop and Green (2008) would suggest a celanthropist (and, I argue, a feminist celanthropist or celebrity activist) would offer: branding or high levels of access.\(^{34}\) As in

\(^{33}\) This does not mean that one has to be a specialist to be a feminist; there is no authorising body for feminists. What I mean here is that there are experts in particular interest areas. For example, it would be advantageous to consult with social workers in the area of violence against women in relation to campaigns about prevention and awareness.

\(^{34}\) In Section 1 of this thesis, I argue that celanthropy and other forms of celebrity activism are among the most expeditious methods for communicating to more mainstream audiences, regardless of the cause or issue, because of both the fetishisation of celebrity and the changing nature of political engagement. It can be highly problematic and controversial; for example, it may have considerable use for some forms of feminist activism as a complement to other activist strategies in certain campaigns. It does not disavow other forms of (often invisible) feminist activism, and it would predominantly act as a tool for public visibility, voice and leverage. Celebrity feminism and/or celanthropy/celebrity activism can become potent means when working in conjunction with less privileged activist subject positions; for example,
Sections 1 and 3, I argue that the zeitgeist jigsaw can sometimes give celanthropists and celebrity activists more generally, as well as celebrity feminists, a viable form of currency in campaigning for feminist activist agendas. However, their deployment can be fraught. Thus, I signal a need for careful, strategic negotiation by feminist activists. Similarly, I did not have media, popular or celebrity feminist status. It also highlighted that although coalitions could be built, reaching the privileged celebrity feminists was at times complicated. Although this type of activism can valorise and further elevate the already-heard voices of the privileged, they are already figures in the mediasphere and, as such, they have greater access and reach. Engaging feminist celebrities for activism can therefore be highly effective for lesser-known activists.

The ‘Dear Gavin’ letter could have been seen as a controversial tactic that was divisive and perhaps further provoked King’s refusal to cooperate with our request for an apology. It had a marginal effect, if any, on the campaign’s overall success. On Newman’s Facebook wall (and to a lesser extent, in Twitter), many stated that an apology (should it exist in any unqualified form) would not suffice. There is a considerable difference between saying that something was ‘poorly worded’ and stating that it is, without qualification, wrong. There was an overwhelmingly consistent theme in the comments that action should have been taken much earlier. The truth, or otherwise, of the existence of the apology compounded the problem.

As a campaigner, I was unprepared for the emotional cost of others’ trauma. For example, hundreds of people commenting on Newman’s Facebook page shared personal stories of sexual violence and victim blame. Later, Newman (or the team operating his Facebook page) deleted the majority of these comments, thus demonstrating another silencing of survivors who had spoken out, as well as those with genuine interest in protecting all victims. The campaign therefore inadvertently contributed to the further marginalisation of dissent.

individual, unknown and thus often invisible activists. This does not equate to less visible activisms being less viable or relevant; however, I argue that for larger campaigns or urgent media responses, the use of feminist celanthropists and/or celebrity activist feminists can help speed the awareness-raising process.
Speaking out demands personal resilience to the abuse of trolling and cyber-bullying. Such abuse can feel like, and qualifies as, a form of violence in itself. Jane (2012a) defines e-bile as ‘the extravagant invective, the sexualized threats of violence, and the recreational nastiness that have come to constitute a dominant tenor of Internet discourse’ (p. 2). She further describes how:

In traditional media studies we are taught there is a top-down approach to power and that the internet provides a democratic space. But my research is showing vitriol and rape threats are being used in cyberspace as a rhetorical technique that can result in a form of grassroots oppression (Jane 2012a, n.p.).

Jane (2012c, n.p.) also argues that there is much ‘scholarly silence’ around ‘e-bile’ and that, ‘far from being a technology-related moral panic—e-bile constitutes a field of inquiry with a pressing need for recalibrated scholarly intervention’. Opposition to e-bile is emerging as the problem becomes more visible. For example, in 2012, media personality Charlotte Dawson was a highly public victim of trolling on Twitter. Dawson was hospitalised after being ‘relentlessly and horrendously bullied’ (Grant 2012, n.p.). Corrine Grant was one of many Australian media personalities who publically defended Dawson and addressed trolling. Grant (2012, n.p.) continued with a reflection about the Zeitgeist:

It’s a pretty rotten indictment on the so-called social media ‘revolution’ that we now consider a good day as being one where no-one rips into us on Facebook or Twitter. You know what that should be? A normal day. In a normal day, being personally attacked for your political beliefs, your chosen profession, your sexuality or your gender simply shouldn’t happen. It didn’t happen to me before social media took over. Abuse was limited to people actually saying it to my face, yelling at me from an audience or writing me a letter.35

Multiple techniques are used to silence feminists who speak in the media. The ability to speak out, while highly privileged, is not without a level of risk. While e-bile (Jane 2012a) is not restricted to women, Jericho’s (2012) research into the Australian political

35 Charlotte Dawson committed suicide in 2014 after more cyber-bullying. Although it is impossible to attribute her cause of death to cyber-bullying, many did so (Needham 2014, n.p.).
blogging scene argues that it can affect women—especially higher-profile women—more than men, and that:

the one adverse reaction that women certainly suffer from disproportionately—and the more high-profile the women, the more it occurs—is abuse. The Internet has long been a wild place, where all who seek to make comments have to suffer the misfortune of coming across a troll who cares not for logic or reading, or intelligent thought, and is there purely to abuse (p. 75).

Celebrity feminists Dannielle Miller and Melinda Tankard Reist have also used media to discuss the increasing e-hate trend. On Mamamia.com.au, Miller (2012) describes how other female media commentators, such as Emily Maguire, Nina Funnell and Karen Brooks, have experienced personal—and sometimes dangerous—abuse. Miller came out, not in defence of Tankard Reist regarding the #mtrsues issue, but about the ‘torrent of e.hate she has received online since instigating legal action against blogger Jennifer Wilson’ (Miller 2012, n.p.). Tankard Reist (2012, n.p.) describes her experience:

I receive, through Twitter, email and my blog, threats of violence and sexual abuse. Explicit descriptions of what a man (anonymous, though identifying as male) would like to do to me. And a couple of death threats…there is so little engagement with or critique of my arguments. Instead, aggression and intimidation seem to have become generally accepted as a legitimate means of making a point, especially since the advent of new media forms.

Indeed, in my brief and first-time experience of e-bile, I concurred with Jane’s assertion that ‘toxic and often markedly misogynist e-bile no longer oozes only in the darkest digestive folds of the cybersphere but circulates freely through the entire body of the Internet’ (2012a, p. 2). Speaking out at the intersection of politics and women’s rights was particularly volatile, although it is, as Jane’s (2012) research also theorised:

While e-bile has a number of distinctly gendered dimensions, both the authors and targets of e-bile cross all manner of political divides: this is not a campaign engineered by the Right against the Left or vice versa…E-bile episodes may be triggered by disagreements over divisive subjects such as politics, religion, or sexual preference, but participants rarely engage substantively with each other’s positions (p. 4).
As a result of the #sackgavin campaign, I have a newfound respect for feminist media commentators, and the confusion I initially felt around some of them not instantly offering to assist the campaign is much more complex and less dogmatic, despite their occupation of relatively privileged positions. Trolling, e-hate and e-bile (Jane 2012a) thrive in environments where there is a lack of accountability, distance and relative anonymity for abusers. I used to believe that media identities should speak out regardless, and that the privilege of position and power meant that a failure to speak was irresponsible. Ahmed (2010b, n.p.) writes on ‘feminist killjoys’—a label that emerges from being a feminist and speaking out, because as feminists ‘in speaking up or speaking out, you upset the situation. That you have described what was said by another as a problem means you have created a problem. You become the problem you create’. In being a ‘feminist killjoy’, I was labelled by trolls as the problem. The #sackgavin campaign was reasonably contained, and I did not—and do not—have a media identity. The consistent and apparently worsening attacks endured by many of the established media commentators and activists are damaging. What I endured was relatively mild; however, it made me revisit my beliefs about feminist participation in the media. Consequently, some months later, when the #sackalan and #destroythejoint campaigns had occurred, I was relieved when feminist online campaigning in Australia became more collective and visible. A key issue for me was being the only ‘name’ associated with the campaign in the media. I felt very vulnerable at times, and while there was someone else ‘behind the scenes’, the exposure of one’s name as a solo activist was sometimes disturbing.

5.2.2 Online activism and slacktivism

The debates about online participation in causes invoke binarised tensions about the real world versus the virtual world and concerns about whether online participation translates to material change, action or awareness. The effect of the Internet on participation in political, social and cultural movements is fervently debated within many academic disciplines, including Sociology, Cultural Studies, Internet Studies and Social Movement Studies. Social media and Internet applications such as Twitter and Facebook help users to create and drive content on the Internet, and often in the mainstream. For example, Twitter has ‘significantly weakened the mass media’s existing dominance…of political issues in the public sphere’ (Bruns 2007, p. 12). In this way, social media has room for more actors who may lack access to mainstream media.
This should not be overestimated, as the value of slacktivism is highly contested. While cyber-utopians insist on the positive contribution of social online activism to participatory democracy, supporters of the slacktivism argument dismiss it as a ‘hedonist activity that carries little societal benefit’ (Breuer & Farooq 2011, p. 1). Such comments disavow the worth of politics, experience and online participation by many who are unable to be physically present. Murthy (2011) raises concerns about the digital divide among marginalised groups, asserting that:

there remain persisting digital divides in many Western countries which keep marginalized and vulnerable populations away from Twitter and are generally amplified by Web 2.0. Though new social networks and communities of knowledge are supported by Twitter, they are strongly socioeconomically stratified…it is critical that we look beyond the Zeitgeist of Twitter and similar mediums as its cool, en vogue gloss masks the fact that Twitter is highly stratified (p. 786).

Similarly, much of the tweeting about the King issue was being done by a relatively small number of people. This is where larger groups such as Destroy the Joint may have been useful. In the case of the #sackgavin campaign, the utility of Twitter was marginal simply because it was largely not seen as a global or even a federal issue; additionally, the peak of the action occurred before the Queensland state election campaign was in progress. Although we grouped #sackgavin Tweets with general feminist hashtags and hashtags about victim blame, Slutwalk and some of the commonly used local state political Tweets, we could have used these strategies more.

Given that sharing e-petitions, notes about causes, online discussion groups, and Tweeting and re-Tweeting require little real-world participation, they have been referred to by names such as ‘slacktivism’ and ‘clicktivism’, and users have been labelled ‘keyboard warriors’ or ‘slacktivists’. Wherever possible, I argue for a multi-pronged approach to overcome the belief that digital participation is the only form of activism necessary. Albinsson and Perera (in Close (ed.) 2012) argue that it is critical to recognise that:

one must be careful to avoid painting all online activists as slacktivists because we found several individuals who limited their activism effort to the online environment yet contributed significantly to the cause in terms of spreading messages and posting online content (p. 117).
Easier access to politicians, celebrities and businesses has been made possible through new technologies. Miller (2011a, n.p.) argues that this can increase what she calls ‘leftie spam’:

Anyone can involve themselves in social justice issues just by forwarding an email or logging onto Facebook, this type of hypocrisy has reached a new level. Leftie spam, as I call it, proliferates in the electronic public sphere. People think by sending a group email or re-posting a 420 character manifesto some naive undergraduate student composed about the evils of homophobia or climate change or Rupert Murdoch that they’ve done their civic duty. They then send it to all their Facebook ‘friends’ who then re-post it themselves until it finally gets back to the student who posted it in the first place.

When referring to slacktivism, Miller (2011a, n.p.) describes it as ‘the way being a left-wing, social justice advocate has become a lifestyle choice for some’. Such labels are ‘aimed at describing online support of political or social causes as an activity that has little or no practical effect other than for the satisfaction of the person engaged in it’ (Breuer & Farooq 2012, p. 3). Although I am more optimistic than Miller (2011a) and Morozov (2011, p. xvii), I remain cautious about ‘cyber-utopianism’ and argue against ‘Internet-centrism’.

The #sackgavin campaign, while not successfully attaining King’s disendorsement, helped to create a greater level of awareness about the issue of victim-blaming in Queensland politics. This campaign was but one moment in a much larger narrative. It is important not to overestimate the effects of such campaigns (even much larger ones, such as Destroy the Joint), as Kony2012, for example, revealed a case study in the way that ‘Cyber-utopians attribute [social media] with quasi-magical virtues such as promoting participatory democracy and a transnational culture of public deliberation and civic mobilization’ (Breuer & Farooq 2012, p. 1).

Social media can be an important mediator for, and facilitator of, activism. However, overestimating its potential use at the cost of other forms of participation is problematic. The Destroy the Joint campaign has maintained momentum in social, online and mainstream media (and offline as well) since its emergence in 2012. While it is a significant development in Australian feminist collective online activism, it can be seen
as taking on too many issues and thus potentially draining its political and media efficacy at times (see Chapter 7). Other campaigns that began online, such as March in March and the Occupy movement, have been successful in mobilising people to take offline actions. Conversely, Kony2012 experienced initial online and mainstream global media impact, but it soon dissipated under widespread allegations of extreme slacktivism (Kron & Goodman 2012, n.p.).

5.2.3 Victim blame

The comments that sparked the #sackgavin campaign now effectively inhabit the victim-blaming genre. The underlying problem of focusing on the victim’s behaviour is that it capitalises on narratives that have been historically pervasive in pointing towards individual responsibility for socially excused behaviour. It encourages victims to blame themselves and thereby secures normalising discourses about sexual violence. Endorsing a candidate for a political party who publicly and explicitly blames victims, refuses to acknowledge the severity of the issue and then blames the issue on party politics is damaging to both victims and cultural narratives maintaining the status quo. The issue was not properly resolved and thus continues a ‘culture of resignation in which violence is normalized’ (Thapar-Björkert & Morgan 2010, p. 32).

Flood and Pease’s (2009) research revealed that:

attitudes have been of central concern in relation to violence against women. Attitudes play a role in the perpetration of this violence, in victims’ responses to victimization, and in community responses to violence against women. With good reason, attitudes have been a key target of community education campaigns aimed at preventing violence against women (p. 125).

Further, research indicates that ‘women’s responses to their own subjection to violence are shaped by their own attitudes and those of others around them’ (Flood & Pease 2009, p. 126). The key reason I participated in the #sackgavin campaign was because sending the message that someone who espoused sexist and victim-blaming views (and then stood by those comments for the amount of time he did) was a suitable candidate for political office was harmful to attitudes surrounding sexual violence and victims. Research has consistently revealed that:
In relation to sexual violence particularly, it is argued that women are often blamed or seen as complicit in the sexual offenses against them (Berns 2001; Corrin 1996; Hague 1998; Lamb 1996; Lea 2007; Maynard 1993; Morgan 2006). The attention and questioning therefore shifts toward the women rather than to men’s violence. Thus, an environment of victim blaming and normalization of violence is created in which women feel unable to report crimes of violence against them (Thapar-Björkert & Morgan 2010, p. 38).

5.2.4 Silencing, exclusion tactics and anti-feminist readers’ comments

In addition to ‘Labor stooge’ and other accusations that I personally received, I began receiving prank phone calls, which continued for almost one year, as well as abusive emails. I was regularly accused of being a troll, even though I used my name. At times, it was confronting and frightening. However, I was aware that these were techniques to silence and exclude, and that:

it is common for women of all ages and ethnicities to remain silent to everyday sexism, causing a discrepancy between their private and publically expressed opinions…This discrepancy between wanting to say something and not saying something can be described as self-silencing (Swim et al. 2010, p. 494).

According to Flood and Pease (2009, p. 127), self-silencing is taught through both social norms and media representation. Victims often do not speak up because of ‘their perception of others’ attitudes: They fear they will be blamed by family and friends, stigmatized, and the criminal justice system will not provide redress’ (Flood & Pease 2009, p. 127). It was crucial for the #sackgavin campaign to continue as an explicitly feminist ‘speaking back’. McLellan (2010, n.p.) asks:

What do we do when what we say is continually misrepresented and when our voices are continually ignored and silenced? The answer is clear: We just keep on speaking. We speak in spite of the silencing. We speak through the silencing, believing that women who desperately need to hear the voice of fairness and equality will hear us and feel supported.

McLellan’s (2010) comments support my own view that such campaigns are part of longer narratives in an activist continuum. While the minimising of concern about King’s endorsement by the LNP was a form of complicity in the victim-blaming
narrative, and a further lack of understanding about the composite of sexual violence and victim-blaming, the campaign simultaneously highlighted anti-feminism.

As anti-feminist positions were displayed across social and mainstream media readers’ comments about the King issue, I began to think more about silencing when asking why more people were not standing up against this issue. When I understood that ‘although self-silencing may appear to be a choice, it is done within a social context that can impose negative consequences for speaking one’s voice…Anticipating these reactions may be a reason why people do not confront discrimination’ (Swim et al. 2010, p. 494), I was able to better understand the ‘why’ among the ugly and irrational anti-feminist bile (Jane 2012a).

5.2.5 ‘You’re not going all Andrew Bolt on us, are you?’

After the campaign, I was asked by a left-leaning acquaintance if I was ‘going all Andrew Bolt’ for repeatedly voicing during and after the campaign that we needed to collectively do more to prevent rape apologists—and those who remain complicit in their efforts to gain power—from entering political office.36 The inference from my acquaintance was that I was being extreme and uncompromising in my point of view and that, although I am left-leaning, I was being as dogmatic as someone like Andrew Bolt, and that I should therefore now resign the issue.

Although it was not consistent with the goal of disendorsing King, the #sackgavin campaign was successful in other ways. Firstly, it remained in the media for some months in Queensland. It is critical to draw attention to, and create noise around, issues such as victim-blaming. King has subsequently remained relatively quiet in the media, and no discriminatory comments have been made about victims of sexual assault to date (this was perhaps cemented when later campaigns, such as #vilekyle, #sackalan and #destroythejoint, occupied media attention about other, better-known, sexists). Although it took some time for the issue to be acknowledged by the LNP (though it was

36 Andrew Bolt is an Australian right-leaning media commentator and journalist. He is known for his provocative and unflinching viewpoints.
never adequately resolved), King as an individual and the LNP as an organisation are certainly not isolated in their lack of understanding of the issue. While I do not advocate condemning or ‘calling out’ every potentially offensive comment or opinion held by high-profile people, the King issue was important because of the political nature of his status, rather than being a case of what can often occur in the social and online mediasphere, which Australian feminist blogger Jane Gilmore (2013, n.p.) calls ‘meaningless outragegasm’.

Campaigns such as #sackgavin are not owned or even run by one person. I always regarded the #sackgavin campaign as a collaborative effort that involved those who signed, supported, discussed or provoked debate publicly, privately or collectively. This is the key strength of such campaigns, even though trolling, for example, may fall on the public facilitators of the campaign. The King campaign was successful in revealing entrenched sexism and anti-feminist views. The #sackgavin campaign is an example of how issues can be raised rapidly—especially in a digital environment. The King case study is both outdated and not outdated. The #vilekyle, #sackalan and #destroythejoint campaigns emerged after #sackgavin, and each had more success than the last; however, each campaign also had problems. As a continuum, activism is a messy process, and one of continual revision, exchange and education. Activists do not have to solve all problems or meet all goals. Hence, smaller, specific targets can be beneficial, but there is advantage in greater numbers and collaboration with others. My experience is not universal.

For a small time at least, the #sackgavin campaign also helped to place equality on the agenda in state politics. This is a minor step towards denting the dominant paradigm around victim-blaming. Highlighting the King issue demonstrated a lack of understanding of the epidemic of sexual violence and victim-blaming against women. The #sackgavin campaign revealed that a lack of money does not have to be an obstacle to raising awareness through social media—especially when using platforms such as Change.org. The campaign showed that the process needs to be multi-faceted, and that it often cannot be done without the support of larger groups to help create media interest and apply pressure. Perhaps if Destroy the Joint had been around then, we would have had more support, and if we had media profiles, we would have been able to obtain the attention of more media feminists to help apply greater pressure. Sawer (2013) outlines the counter campaigns that saw social media mobilisation, not insignificantly because of
Destroy the Joint, and because of attention given to the issues of gender, misogyny and sexism highlighted by the then Prime Minister of Australia, Julia Gillard. For example:

By 2012 there was a big shift, with the PM making the sexist treatment of women in politics into an issue that resonated around the world. This was important: maintaining silence over discriminatory treatment in order not to be accused of playing a gender card can condemn others to experience the same treatment. Silence over sexism is unlikely to encourage other women to take up political careers. Moreover, once the extent of the demeaning treatment of women in politics became known, there was a remarkable social media mobilization around the issue, meshing with the feminist mobilization occurring globally over gendered violence (2013, p. 117).

While the King comments were not directed at a female politician, but were about victim-blaming, the collective mobilisations and attention given to gendered violence, discrimination, sexism and the harmfulness of such comments since the King event have arguably increased in the mainstream, social and online mediasphere. Therefore, there would have been a greater ability to recruit more feminist activists to assist in the campaign, and more attention may have been given to the severity of King’s inappropriate and potentially dangerous comments as a potential MP (and then Assistant Minister) in the Newman LNP government.

However, I suspect it is more to do with a marginalisation of Queensland, its history and the campaign’s association with state party politics. Regardless, this was

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37 Julia Gillard became Australia’s first female Prime Minister in 2010. Before this time, she had been called ‘deliberately barren’ by another politician, Bill Heffernan (News.com.au 2007, n.p.), and allegations about her unmarried, Atheist, childless status were made by various media and political identities throughout the course of her leadership. In 2012, Gillard made a powerful speech on sexism and misogyny, directed at the then Leader of the Opposition, Tony Abbott, in the Australian Parliament, which attracted global attention. According to Sawer (2013), this helped to ‘bring into the open the gendered nature of politics’ (p. 105). In the speech, which lasted for approximately 15 minutes and was viewed by more than two million people, Gillard said that ‘I will not be lectured about sexism and misogyny by this man, I will not. And the government will not be lectured about sexism and misogyny by this man. Not now, not ever’ (Julia Gillard’s misogyny speech). For the remaining 15 minutes, Gillard outlined examples of misogyny. ‘The mainstream media, in comparison to the blogosphere (which immediately recognized the significance of this speech’ (Sawer 2013, p. 114), while recognising the speech itself, did not focus on the gendered nature of political relations, but many ‘focused on the detail of partisan politicking’ (Sawer 2013, p. 114).

38 For example, there is an historical association in some parts of Australia that Queensland is a retrograde state that produces extreme right-wing politicians such as Pauline Hanson and Joh Bjelke-Petersen.
unfathomable to me, as the damage that an MP could do was more threatening than ‘regular’ sexists like radio broadcasters, Kyle Sandilands and Alan Jones, regardless of state or territory borders. I questioned why feminists who had been heavily involved in activism such as the Slutwalk movement (which is about victim-blaming and originated in Canada but has global reach) were relatively disengaged from the King issue when it was happening within a major political party in their own country. I concluded that obtaining attention is often a game of trend, savvy networking, tenacity and building an active online presence. While highlighting my own distaste for necessary unholy media alliances, the #sackgavin campaign revealed to me that we need more diverse feminist voices in the media. The campaign demonstrated the need for more collective feminist intervention to help not only disrupt normalising discourses, but also to prevent rape apologists from participating in drafting laws. Ultimately, it emphasised the need for more collective and visible feminist activist campaigning in Australia.

In this section of the thesis, it has been argued that social media should be viewed as a gateway to other actions—an awareness-raising tool with the potential to convert moral conscience into action. The challenge for feminist mass awareness structured campaigns is to implement long-term strategies based on moral agency and promote awareness of structural issues with sustainable actions and solutions. Currently, the majority of activists do not limit themselves to one medium at a time, but use a combination of media across multiple platforms, and ‘an inseparable mix of virtual and face-to-face communication’ (Bennett in van de Donk et al. 2004, p. 114). There must still be multiple actions both online and offline; one will not replace the other. Voices that old media might have silenced can now be heard through alternate pathways. The problem is the consistency of the noise; campaigners must work out how it can best be disseminated. Social media can afford a collective presence and opportunities to change or intervene in the agenda; however, netizens should not exaggerate the use of social media for revolution. The use of online technologies has much activist potential, but rather than making such a distinction between digital and traditional activism, it would be more helpful to understand the strengths and weaknesses of online activism, and to

39 A netizen is a term used to describe Internet citizens.
view both types of activism as both complementary and useful to each other. However, the effects of hate speech, cyber violence and trolling should not be ignored. As Summers (2013) outlined in *The Misogyny Factor*, social networking sites such as Facebook, which have significant reach potential in terms of numbers, have ‘given us new ways to intimidate, bully, harass and defame on a remarkable and previously unimaginable scale’ (p. 119).
Section 3:

Popular Media Feminisms and Feminists in Campaigning

Chapter 6: Celebrity Feminists and Media Soundbytes: A Literature Review

…How shall we ever make the world intelligent of our movement? I do not think that the answer lies in trying to render feminism easy, popular, and instantly gratifying. To conjure with the passive culture and adapt to its rules is to degrade and deny the fullness of our meaning and intention (Rich 1995, p. 6).

…I am not interested in trying to render feminism easy, popular, and instantly gratifying. To conjure with the passive culture and adapt to its rules is to degrade and deny the fullness of our meaning and intention (Rich 1995, p. 6).

…Celebrity is central to feminist visibility in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries; that is, it is the lens through which feminism is most commonly refracted (Taylor 2008, p. 105).

This section examines the contribution of some Australian celebrity feminists to public discourse via the mediasphere. It explores the potential use of such figures in feminist-led mass awareness campaigns aimed at mobilisation on critical issues such as preventing gender-based violence. The assumption is not that all, or even some, celebrity feminists would want to (or be the best advocates to) endorse a mass awareness campaign. I argue that there is an ongoing escalation in feminists participating in, and driving, media discourse, alongside other types of celebrity figures promoting different issues through mass awareness campaigns such as those to end extreme poverty and encourage environmental activism. This makes it timely to identify the contributions by celebrity feminists that would be most useful for organised and collective feminist campaigning in Australia. Additionally, a critical approach to the issues would enable the identification of challenges and problems in the area. Wicke (in Landes (ed.) 1998) argues that:

The celebrity zone is the public sphere where feminism is negotiated, where it is now in most active cultural play. This zone lies on the border of academic feminism, adjacent to it, sometimes invading it, at other times being invaded by
In this section of the thesis, I examine whether the contemporary rapidity in popular feminist commentary enables celebrity feminists to deliver more than palatable, recycled soundbites, or soundbytes. Are newer celebrity feminists in Australia offering more than neoconservative reactionary activism that aligns with dominant cultural postfeminist and neoliberal discourses? Is a self-celebratory brand power tainting this ‘active cultural play’ (Wicke in Landes (ed.) 1998, pp. 390–391)? Does this popularisation of feminist discourse ‘deny and degrade the fullness’ of the movement, as Rich (1995, p. 6) suggests?

6.1 Structure of the Section

This chapter presents a literature review of celebrity so that celebrity feminism itself is better defined in relation to other forms of celebrity. I also introduce my conceptual framework, which consists of three notions: the palatable; the unpalatable; and the tensions between, around and within celebrity feminists, which results in what I call the unpalatable–palatable. I argue that the tension that supports the unpalatable–palatable is often embodied within celebrity feminists and their commentary, and this tension allows them to succeed in the mediasphere. That is, they can occupy mainstream space because they often invoke palatable neoliberal sympathies to engage with that which neoliberalism itself finds unpalatable; alternatively, they are palatable within an (otherwise often) unpalatable neoliberal and postfeminist cultural climate. This is a complex configuration because I also define unpalatable–palatable as the need to appeal to mainstream audiences via celebrity feminists while agitating for change. Such an appeal is a nexus for visibility; however, it can be difficult to consume if a substantive feminist politics is evacuated through the format and medium. This is not the ‘fault’ of the feminists or the medium, but merely an acknowledgement of the zeitgeist. While celebrity feminists are potentially viable cultural and political figures in organised, large-scale feminist campaigning, they are largely critically unexplored in a campaigning context. This gap is addressed in this thesis, and it is part of the original contribution offered by this work. Celebrity feminists’ effects and contributions are now more relevant, as the ‘media are the prime vehicles for the construction and circulation of cultural values in the current era of mediatization’ (Djerf-Pierre 2011, p. 43).
This chapter focuses on the role of the media in the effect of and on feminists compared to other forms of celebrity, and the escalation of celebrity feminism and its strengths and weaknesses. Chapter 7 then explores these concepts in action, within activism, by identifying and examining the celebrity feminism of Dannielle Miller, Mia Freedman, Melinda Tankard Reist, Catherine Deveny and Helen Razer. This section concludes by positioning the potential use of celebrity feminism overall to mass awareness campaigning because it is necessary for feminist activists to ‘develop more advanced models of conflict and change that do not unravel collectivity and community’ (Brabazon 2002, p. 7).

6.2 Celebrity Feminism

Wicke (in Landes (ed.) 1998) coined the term ‘celebrity feminist’ and was the first to critically theorise the concept. She argues that ‘celebrity feminism...is a new locus for feminist discourse, feminist politics, and feminist conflicts, both conflicts internal to feminism and feminism’s many struggles with antifeminist forces’ (in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 387). Feminism is not outside celebrity culture, but is embedded within everyday practices at multiple levels, including the cultural level. As Skeggs (1997) notes, a ‘great deal of feminism is mediated through celebrities...and celebrity feminists’ (p. 40). Moreover, many people form their ideas about feminism through celebrity and the media ‘from the frameworks that are available to them’ (Skeggs 1997, p. 40). This thesis identifies some of these frameworks within the zeitgeist as key sites for mainstream mass awareness campaigning. Wicke (in Landes (ed.) 1998) argues that to dismiss the complex value and relationship of celebrity feminists to broader (and arguably more complex) feminist politics is to ‘fail to take into account the most materially evident new circumstance grounding feminism: the appearance of the domain that I call “celebrity feminism”’ (p. 386). Since the time of Wicke’s (in Landes (ed.) 1998) assertion that ‘we must recognize that the energies of the celebrity imaginary are fuelling feminist discourse and political activity as never before’ (p. 391), the proliferation of the celebrity feminist commentator has become much more apparent in Australia. Although there is no fixed definition of ‘celebrity feminist’, there is a broadening of the possibilities for those who may be marked as celebrity feminists. The questions of what constitutes celebrity feminism, and who a celebrity feminist is, are complex and problematic; they defy easy definitional labelling—especially because of
their consistent inconsistency and state of flux. Who confers celebrity feminists their title and position as public feminist advocates? According to Murphy (2002):

the addition of the adjectives ‘celebrity’, ‘blockbuster’ or ‘media’ to the word ‘feminism’ signifies the transit of feminism into the media sphere. The large selection of descriptives can make discussion unwieldy…However this slippage provides an important reminder of the way politics and media entwine (p. 25).

The collection of feminists under examination in the subsequent chapter is mostly popular media commentators who regularly participate in both online (including social) and mainstream media, who speak at feminist-billed events, who are publically known for being feminist, and who have been visible in speaking about feminism and feminist issues for several years in Australia—even if other feminists disagree with their right to assume the title of feminist (e.g., some of the contentions around Tankard Reist’s feminist politics and authority are discussed in the next chapter).

Taylor (2014b, p. 760) asks ‘what is celebrity feminism—or indeed what can it be—when there is, quite rightly, not a singular, unified homogenous feminism…Is the celebrity feminist now an anachronism?’ In her work on the feminist celebrity of Germaine Greer, Taylor (2014b) argues that Greer and newer celebrity feminists such as the UK’s Caitlin Moran indicate that celebrity feminism is indeed not an ‘anachronism’ (p. 760). Lilburn, Magarey and Sheridan (2000) position Greer as the first feminist to have ‘navigated this space at least in the Australian context…a feminist pioneer in the celebrity zone’ (p. 335). Taylor (2014b) describes Greer as an ‘adaptable celebrity’ whose humour ensures her mainstream status. She argues that Greer is often denounced for ‘courting celebrity—a criticism that is not frequently levelled at other forms of celebrity’, and she argues that such censure fails to recognise ‘Greer’s active—and often highly successful—attempts to keep feminism on the public radar’ (Taylor 2014b, p. 761).

While acknowledging that this particular type of celebrity is usually less prominent than other forms, this research argues that celebrity feminism is escalating in Australia; it reveals that the figure of the celebrity feminist is indeed not outmoded. As with ‘discussions among feminists about the difficulties and dangers of talking about women as a single group’ (Young 1994, p. 713), I note that it is difficult to discuss celebrity feminists (indeed all feminists) as a single group. Similarly, as stated, I resist using the
wave metaphors to describe the commentators; instead, I say a ‘serial’ rather than a ‘group’.

In this section, I examine a non-homogenous serial of media feminists who are less celebrated than, for example, Greer and Moran, on the continuum of celebrity feminism. Nonetheless, they maintain media identities and are recognised as feminists by audiences and by parts of mainstream, online and/or social media. It is important to note that none of the identities possess the authority or hyper-visibility of Greer, or the relative long-term visibility of Anne Summers or Eva Cox. This is not solely because of the longevity of their careers, but because of the proliferation of celebrity across many spaces and fields—not just feminism. Greer’s feminist celebrity eclipses almost all others, even Anne Summers and Eva Cox, who are also notable Australian celebrity feminists originating from the ‘second wave’. As Taylor (2014b) argues:

> in the mediasphere, her status as an authorised speaker on feminism remains largely uncontested—even if her arguments may at times be. The capital she has accrued over many decades facilitates access to the mediasphere that is enjoyed by few other feminists (p. 765).

In embodying that ‘distinct mode of public subjectivity that offers some resistances to dominant ways of theorising fame and renown’, celebrity feminists are ‘clearly celebritised in a fundamentally different way to their counterparts in film, music, or even sport and politics’ (Taylor 2014a, p. 77). For example, they do not come under the paparazzi glare or public scrutiny in ways that are more common to many other types of celebrity. However, as demonstrated in Chapter 7, regardless of the individual differences among celebrity feminists, an intense, gendered and specific form of ad hominem attack is often directed at celebrity feminists simply because they identify as feminists. This is often delivered online and in social media through e-bile (Jane 2012a).

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40 Young (1994) argues:

> for reconceptualizing social collectivity or the meaning of social groups as what Sartre describes as a phenomenon of serial collectivity in his Critique of Dialectical Reason (1976). Such a way of thinking about women…allows us to see women as a collective without identifying common attributes that all women have or implying that all women have a common identity (1994, p. 714).

Young’s use of Sartre’s concept is an alternative helpful application of the concept of seriality in this thesis when discussing celebrity feminists as a collective.
Taylor (2014a) refers to celebrity feminists as ‘women whose fame is the direct product of their feminist intervention into public discourse’, noting that in the past 50 years, ‘the most highly visible feminist celebrities have been authors of popular feminist works of non-fiction’ (p. 75), and she cites authors Betty Friedan, Naomi Wolf, Anne Summers, Germaine Greer, Gloria Steinem and Susan Faludi as authors of what Henderson and Rowlands (1996) call ‘feminist blockbusters’. Wicke (in Landes (ed.) 1998) sees a celebrity feminist as any woman with a position in the public realm, stating that such women will be ‘assimilated’ into the position of celebrity feminist (p. 389). Regarding the contemporary celebrity feminists under examination in this section, I view celebrity feminists as either a ‘direct product of their feminist intervention into public discourse’ (Taylor 2014a, p. 75) (e.g., Razer, Tankard Reist and Miller), or as a woman with a pre-existing public profile who has been ‘assimilated’ (Wicke in Landes 1998, p. 389) into the celebrity feminist role (e.g., Freedman and Deveny). As Taylor (2014a) and Henderson and Rowlands (1996) remind us, many celebrity feminists produce feminist blockbusters; however, none of the six I have identified are, to date, producers of feminist blockbusters.

For Wicke (in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 390), ‘celebrity feminism does not refer to a celebrity image, or not to that image alone’. Further, she argues that to dismiss the potential of the celebrity feminist would be to ‘miss the point and the politics. Celebrity discourse is a powerful political site, a current state of being…prematurely moralizing over it ignores its reality and its political potential’ (Wicke in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 390). Indeed, as Taylor (2012, p. 11) states, ‘it is now axiomatic that mainstream media culture functions as one of the key public sites in the constitution of feminism’. If, as Hollows and Moseley (2006, p. 2) contend, ‘most people become conscious of feminism through the way it is represented in popular culture’, then celebrity feminism, broadly situated in popular and online media cultures, is now more relevant than ever, and it can add important levels of texture to feminist agendas.

Australian feminist author and well-known blogger Hills (2013) wrote about young celebrities claiming feminist status (e.g., US pop-star Miley Cyrus), labelling these women as celebrity feminists. I agree that there is more than one type of celebrity feminist; however, I do not recruit the terminology in the same manner as Hills. I am talking about a specific type of person: popular feminist media commentators who have found a level of celebrity not through being pop-stars or actors, but who regularly
comment, blog on, speak about or undertake feminist activism, and who are generally known in the mediasphere as being feminist social commentators or experts (this does not mean that their commentary is limited only to feminism, but it does comprise a large part of what they do or what they are asked to comment upon). These celebrity/popular media feminists are not highly staged managed celebrities such as Cyrus; however, like many popular celebrities, they are ‘achieved celebrities’ (Rojek 2012, p. vii). They mostly do not have the same level of celebrification or public profiles because they are not mainstream celebrities, but they are still often ‘achieved’ celebrities for reasons other than those that apply to celebrities such as Cyrus. They help drive public discourse around feminisms, and they are predominantly known for what they say. Charles (2012b) labels Tankard Reist and Miller as ‘popular feminist commentators’ in her exploration of their work in the media in Australia (p. 318). She refers to Tankard Reist, Miller and Maguire as ‘ubiquitous media commentators on issues facing girls, including sexualisation’ (Charles 2012b, p. 318). I agree with Charles’ description of these women as popular feminist commentators, but I also use this term (or a variation thereof) interchangeably with ‘celebrity feminist’.

6.2.1 Authority

Not all celebrity or popular feminists have equal amounts of authority afforded to them by the media, audiences or other feminists. This perceived authority may come from academic training, business leadership, awards or what Senft (in Hartley, Burgess & Bruns (eds.) 2014, p. 346) called ‘microcelebrity’, which is ‘the commitment to deploying and maintaining one’s online identity as if it were a branded good’. Senft (in Hartley, Burgess & Bruns (eds.) 2014, p. 346) asserts that this practice of branding has moved from the Internet’s margins to its mainstream. Some of the current serial of Australian celebrity feminists are ‘trained’ in Gender Studies (e.g., Ford, Razer and Moss, who is currently undertaking a doctorate in the School of Gender and Cultural Studies at the University of Sydney), while others have education experience (e.g., Miller is a former high school teacher). However, some have ‘found’ feminism after pursuing other careers (e.g., Freedman was a women’s magazine editor) and use
feminism as a part of their business. Some have mainstream media status as feminists, although it may be disputed within certain feminist communities whether they are actually feminists (e.g., Tankard Reist came scrutiny during the #mtrsues affair and was accused of being anti-feminist, and this happens regularly). 41

6.2.2 Existing scholarship on individual feminists

The celebrity feminist as both an object of, and a driver for, public discourse about feminism embodies a unique form of celebrity and gendered politics and has the potential to be a conduit in organised feminist campaigning. Celebrity feminists can perform an ‘adhesive’ function (Inglis 2010, p. 4), together with other forms of specialised celebrity (e.g., celanthropists or other types of celebrity advocates). As Taylor (2014b, p. 759) argues, ‘feminist celebrity is a distinct, and developing, mode of public subjectivity which celebrity studies and feminist media studies have thus far failed to significantly address’. Within this lack of scholarship on feminist celebrity is the use of celebrity feminists in organised and issue-targeted mass awareness campaigning in Australia. There has been no scholarly work to date on the potential use of these figures in a mass awareness organised campaigning context; this is a gap raised in this thesis. Although some scholarly interventions on celebrity and/or popular media feminism have been conducted in Australia (e.g., Taylor 2008, 2014a, 2014b; Lilburn, Magarey & Sheridan 2000; Rowlands & Henderson 1996), there has been little critical work on contemporary Australian celebrity feminists such as Freedman, Miller, Tankard Reist, Deveny and Razer. However, Simic (2009), Gleeson (2013) and Baird (2013) have all written scholarly work on Tankard Reist, largely centring around her pro-life feminism and debates around ‘pornification’, the sexualisation of children and anti-raunch feminism.

Simic (2011, p. 1) contends that pro-life Tankard Reist is one of the ‘most publicly visible feminists in Australia’ and ‘is often one of the first to speak out or be invited to comment on the latest sex scandal or high profile instance of sexism’ (p. 6). Since the

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41 #mtrsues is a Twitter hashtag created around Tankard Reist. It is discussed further in the next chapter.
publication of Simic’s work, this has changed somewhat—especially after the event that became known as #mtrssues; currently, Freedman and Miller occupy that space in the mainstream media. Simic (2011, p. 1) identifies “anti-raunch feminism” as one of the key visible Western feminisms’, and she discusses ‘how understandings of “raunch culture” have expanded since the time Ariel Levy coined the term (2005) to include the “hyper” sexualisation of children and teenage girls and the “pornification” of western culture’. She argues that this has ‘provided a hitherto unprecedented public platform for a blend of pro-life and radical feminisms’ (Simic 2011, p. 2). She contends that the style of politics ‘has not necessarily translated to political efficacy in lobbying the state: rather, the effects of anti-raunch feminism, as expressed by Melinda Tankard Reist, are mostly rhetorical’ (Simic 2011, p. 3). According to Simic (2011), a key rhetorical strategy used by anti-raunch feminists, along with ‘mobilising mothers to protect and educate their children’, has been the identification of ‘feminisms that have “gone wrong” and to offer a corrective or antidote to misguided sexual politics they figure as disempowering or exploitative’ (p. 3).

Gleeson (2013) argues that in anti-‘pornification’ campaigns in Australia over the past 40 years, there has been a ‘consistent centrality of fears mobilised about children, to the detriment of nuanced debate about the meanings of men, women, sex and censorship and the relationship of these meanings to feminism’ (p. 83). Chapter 7 gestures towards these debates, Tankard Reist’s key role in them, and the #mtrssues affair, as it is important to locate what celebrity feminists in Australia are saying, as well as their agenda and perceptions around these figures, in order to ascertain efficacy for other types of campaigning, such as feminist-driven mass awareness campaigning around critical issues such as gender-based violence.

Charles (2012a, 2012b, 2014) has contributed scholarly writings on Tankard Reist and Miller as key popular feminist commentators in the Australian mediasphere. She argues that ‘the level of public interest in what has variously been called “raunch culture”, “pornification” or more broadly “sexualisation” of culture, has created new opportunities for enterprising women’ (Charles 2012b, p. 317) such as Tankard Reist and Miller. Although few researchers have thus far written critically about the celebrity feminists under examination, some have written in the Destroying the Joint anthology (in Caro (ed.) 2013), which features written contributions by Miller and Deveny (and Ford, an unpalatable who is not under consideration in this thesis), and the online grassroots campaign that provided the space for the anthology (Sawer 2013; McLean & Maalsen 2013). For example, Sawer (2013) outlines the counter campaigns that saw
social media mobilisation, not insignificantly because of Destroy the Joint, and because of attention given to the issues of gender, misogyny and sexism highlighted by (then) Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. Although the movement and book have featured heavily in popular media and opinion pieces, there has been little scholarly work conducted on this to date—most likely because of its relative ‘newness’. Similarly, no academic work to date has focused specifically on Freedman or Deveny in the scholarly context of popular or celebrity feminism.\textsuperscript{42} This is possibly because they mostly are (with the exception of Razer who has been present as a media commentator in Australia since the 1990s) relatively newly known as feminist commentators; however, for the reasons listed above, it is important to acknowledge them because they have, and have had, currency and cultural effect in Australia, and they may be of value in endorsing and participating in larger-scale campaigning. As Brabazon (2002) articulates, the concern is:

with populist feminists, rather than feminist-inflected popular culture…No one is ignoring the politics of popular culture. We simply cannot agree with the nature and effectiveness of that politics…the aim of feminism is not to trash or celebrate popular culture or academic writing. The real skill lies in linking the two (p. 13).

This thesis takes celebrity feminism seriously as both a scholarly pursuit and as a Tool of the Zeitgeist for mass awareness campaigning.

Garner’s (1995) controversial book, \textit{The First Stone}, was a ‘site of intense discursive contestation’ (Taylor 2008, p. 17). Examining how three celebrity feminists (Garner, Summers and Jenna Mead) featured in the event, Taylor (2008, p. 104) demonstrates how ‘multiple forms of celebrity feminism can co-exist and serve different (and sometimes conflicting, other times complementary) purposes’. Taylor (2008) develops Wicke’s celebrity feminist arguments in her examination of \textit{The First Stone} media event, arguing that ‘celebrity feminism is an internally variegated phenomenon which works to manage the narratives of feminism’s past, present and future circulating in

\textsuperscript{42} However, there has been much popular commentary and journalism about each figure outside of the academic context.
print media culture’ (p. 103). This diversity is reflected broadly beyond the print media, and since 1995, the online and social mediaspheres have increased the frequency and presence of this dissemination. Dux and Simic (2008, p. 64) discuss the ‘commentary overload’ that occurred after the publication of *The First Stone* in 1996, and how:

> a few years later, feminism’s media representative was more likely to be one of the Spice Girls than a Garner or a Cox. This shift seems to have been a function of feminism’s ubiquity, of the fact that it had supposedly permeated our culture…So experts were irrelevant (2008, p. 64).

Rather than being a media event like the *First Stone* affair, it is the rapidity of feminist discourse in the Australian mediasphere has consistently increased exponentially. Australia is now at another critical nexus for feminist visibility, and the unpalatable–palatable tensions embodied by media feminists and media feminisms highlight these ‘multiple forms of celebrity feminism’ (Taylor 2008, p. 4). Further, parts of this can be recruited—carefully and appropriately—in feminist mass awareness campaigning. Taylor (2008) contends that ‘some cultural actors are granted the authority to speak about feminism, and to have these utterances validated, in ways not permitted others’ (p. 31), and this is the case with the six Australian feminist figures chosen for exploration in this section of the thesis. All have experienced this type of cultural recognition to varying degrees because of their celebrity and privilege. Further, in Australia’s contemporary mediasphere, there is an escalation of voices speaking about feminism and feminist issues in ways that have not previously been as regular; the velocity has increased because of gendered news spaces such as the *Daily Life* and opportunities through social and online media opening up the way for feminist identities to be more readily known.

### 6.2.3 Reasons for increased velocity

This increased velocity of feminist discourse in the Australian mediasphere has resulted from several factors. As Lilburn, Magarey and Sheridan (2000, p. 335) assert, ‘feminism has always been, at least in part, a media matter’; however, a key reason for the proliferation of feminist commentary in the mediasphere is what Turner (2010) has conceptualised as ‘the demotic turn’, where he contends that:

> It has become commonplace to notice the increasing number of opportunities for ordinary people to appear in the media…The causes are many: the pervasiveness
of celebrity, shifts in television from drama to ‘live’ formats, and the interactivity of Web 2.0 among them. The ordinary citizen’s access to a media profile that was unavailable before the digital revolution has encouraged some to argue that we have entered an unprecedented era of networked information, which in turn provides opportunities for participation (p. xi).

This is not to say that everyone who speaks about feminist issues in the media is, or has the potential to become, a celebrity feminist. However, there has been an increase in the number of commentators in the mediasphere who have been appointed and anointed as feminists by the media and audiences. Although The First Stone and its media event (Taylor 2008) created commentary in other forms of media (not only print media, but also talkback radio and television), the Internet and other forms of communicative technologies have provided opportunities for more (and more rapid), often reactionary feminist commentary, and have created feminist celebrities. Further, although ‘feminism is pronounced “dead” on a regular basis, especially by anti-feminist commentators…but also by established feminists’ (Redfern & Aune 2010, p. 1), there is an increased velocity of feminist discourse in the mediasphere in Australia because of the possibilities generated by online and social media, gendered news spaces, and opinion pieces and feminist events. Since Wicke’s (in Landes (ed.) 1998) important critical theorisation of the celebrity feminist and celebrity feminism, new technologies have led to a diversification of voices, even though, as Section 2 demonstrated, digital divides and other issues remain problematic. Wicke (in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 386) argued that there are no ‘discernible political movements that are exclusively feminist’ in the US. However, with online communicative technologies, many new opportunities have emerged for feminists to develop and perform their celebrity. This is a key reason why I argue for greater definitional malleability around the interchangeability of ‘popular feminist commentator’ and ‘celebrity feminist’, while acknowledging that celebrity more broadly is, as Holmes and Redmond (2010, p. 4) remind us ‘slippery and varied in its connotations’. As Sawer (in Maddison & Sawer (ed.) 2013, p. 17) argues, the ‘women’s movement is not dead…[it has] changed and evolved, it has hidden in some unexpected places and taken on new forms…Sometimes we need to turn to other social movements, such as environment and social justice movements’. This thesis argues that organising and appropriating some of the mass awareness and mobilisation strategies of other such social movements will significantly benefit feminist activism in Australia.
The ubiquity of celebrity culture reveals acceleration in the production of celebrity, which in itself means more opportunities for the celebritisation of feminists. The rise in the opinion and citizen journalism culture via online media, blogs and other publications provides more opportunities for feminist voices, as do independent media outlets such as the highly successful mamamia.com.au, which is owned by Freedman. Additionally, sites such as thehoopla.com.au (co-created by Wendy Harmer, a well-known media personality, Australian comedian and social commentator) is a heavily trafficked site that focuses on women’s issues, with content discussed daily by one of its editors on Studio Ten, a morning television program. This indicates the potential for online media to transit explicitly to mainstream media. Fairfax’s Daily Life is a women’s news website that was launched by Fairfax in 2012 and calls itself ‘female biased’ (Daily Life Commenting Policy 2012). It is the first of its kind in Australia; however, this type of separate women’s news site exists overseas in the Huffington Post, The New York Times and other news publications. These sites differ from standalone sites that are ‘aimed at women’ (e.g., mamamia.com.au and thehoopla.com.au) because they are connected to larger news outlets. All of these sites, as well as self-managed independent and highly trafficked blogs, are platforms for well-known Australian feminists such as Clementine Ford, Rachel Hills and Clementine Bastow. The velocity of feminist discourse in the mediasphere increased with the advent of social media such as Twitter and the popularity of online collective feminist consciousness-raising/activism groups. For example, Destroy the Joint received global attention, and the book that followed, Destroying the Joint (Caro (ed.) 2013) featured a collection of essays from popular media and celebrity feminists. Additionally, feminist-billed, larger-scale events are commonly held at ideas and writers festivals. For example, ‘The Festival of Dangerous Ideas’ at the Sydney Opera House in 2012 featured seasoned, authorised feminists Cox and Greer alongside newer celebrity feminists Tara Moss and Dannielle Miller.

43 On several popular Australian morning television programs (e.g., Sunrise on Channel Seven and Today on the Nine Network), there are panels with female-only panels, such as ‘The Grill’ (Today) and ‘Kochie’s Angels’ (Sunrise), whereby a male host asks questions about women’s issues. These panels often feature popular feminist figures such as Freedman, Spicer, Miller and other higher-profile women in the mediasphere. There is a gap in scholarly research around morning television and feminists—and what passes as feminist content. As it is outside the scope of this research, it is a suggestion I make later for further research.

44 Little critical work has been done on female-content websites on news sites. This is also a suggestion for further research.
Women’s events with feminist content, such as TedXsouthbankwomen, Brisbane, featured Clementine Ford and prominent Australian journalist Tracey Spicer, whose address on body image and the pressures faced by women to present ‘ideal’ and limiting views of femininity received mainstream media attention and viral attention through sharing on social media. Similarly, the strong focus on sexism and misogyny surrounding Australia’s first female Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, and her notorious parliamentary ‘attack’ on Tony Abbott in 2012 went global in the mediasphere. The speech attracted two million Internet downloads in just 10 days, and ‘the word “misogynist” was suddenly part of everyday conversation, creating new media interest and debate’ (Maddison & Sawer 2013, p. xii). Additionally, feminist celanthropy and celebrity activism have globally contributed other layers of visibility to women’s rights violations, as demonstrated by actors such as Angelina Jolie and Nicole Kidman, whose high-profile ambassador roles with the UN have drawn attention to feminist issues. More recently, actor Emma Watson’s speech (‘He for She’) on gender equality at the UN received international recognition. Although not globally as recognisable, well known Australian media feminist figure and author, Tara Moss, has a role within the UN as an ambassador for children’s rights.

6.2.4 The palatable

A key marker of palatable feminists is their overarching non-threatening media presence and conservative agendas; they are often regarded as ‘acceptable’, and they appear in normative versions of Western ‘beauty’. Additionally, as Segal (1998, n.p.) asserts, ‘the media will always be able to find and promote particular voices which are less threatening to their agenda’. This amplification of some voices over others is supported by Dux and Simic’s (2008) referral to a debate between Miranda Devine (a conservative media commentator in Australia) and University of Sydney academic Professor Elspeth Probyn in 2004. The topic of the debate was ‘Is feminism a dirty word?’ Dux and Simic (2008) state that:

Probyn felt she had won the fight, but perhaps not the war. ‘What was the point of reading through dense texts, conducting research and trying to formulate decent arguments about gender issues if it’s the loudest, most publicly voiced opinion that gets to count?’ Good question. Yet, as Probyn also points out, Devine (and others) are not writing in a vacuum. Feminists ignore the media at their peril (pp. 63–64).
Currently in Australia, Freedman and Miller are among the most recognisable feminist figures in the mainstream mediasphere, and they, like Devine, are the most palatable. However, with the escalation of feminist discourse by popular feminist commentators in various media formats and spaces, it is important that there is unpalatable contestation by other feminists and feminisms to these ‘managers’ of feminist discourse in the mainstream. The palatable and unpalatable co-exist in relation to one another, and they may overlap, resist and agitate with and against themselves. However, some celebrity feminists are considerably more palatable than unpalatable, such as Miller and Freedman, as will be discussed in the next chapter. This does not mean that they do not have unpalatable moments; as Ahmed (2010a) reminds us through her own experience, the feminist is seen as the disruptor as in ‘my experience of being a feminist has taught me much about rolling eyes…However she speaks, the feminist is usually the one who is viewed as “causing the argument,” who is disturbing the fragility of the peace’ (p. 65). In this sense, speaking within the mediasphere about feminism, naming oneself as a feminist will always be seen as a disturbance by someone. Thus, all feminists are seen as unpalatable at times. The unpalatable–palatable tension is never a simple binary; it operates at multiple intersections, as well as being a continuum. Some feminists are more regularly palatable—or unpalatable—than others. Another feature of the palatable feminist is the neoliberal focus, in which there is a tendency to ‘focus on the individual [which] can obstruct us from giving feminism (which, after all, is about collective gains) our whole-hearted support’ (Redfern & Aune 2010, p. 9).

Dubriwny (2013) theorises the figure of the ‘vulnerable empowered woman’ in relation to women’s health. She argues that because postfeminist and neoliberal discourses are ‘the most visible narratives about women’s health’, this has created ‘a new identity for women entering the health marketplace: the vulnerable empowered woman’ (Dubriwny 2013, p. 8). The vulnerable empowered woman is one who has some agency and is a ‘thoroughly postfeminist woman, who through her various practices of risk management and consumption, functions to support a variety of neoliberal power structures’ (Dubriwny 2013, p. 9). In terms of health, Dubriwny (2013) argues that the dominant narratives mean that women are seen to be empowered via choice over lifestyle for health, and consumption for control of their bodies and medical treatments to ‘manage’ risk (vulnerability) ‘associated with living the life of a contemporary woman’ (p. 9). Parts of the concept of the vulnerable empowered woman are useful when examining
Miller and Enlighten Education’s work with teen girls. In the next chapter, I argue that the teen girl figure is positioned as a type of vulnerable empowered subject who is seen to be empowered through her connections with Enlighten. Miller at the Enlighten core, works to guide the selection of teen girl choice, as well as to protect her, as she is presumably vulnerable and thus in need of outside intervention, with the result being the recreation of ideal neoliberal postfeminist subjects.

Charles (2012b), one of the few Australian feminist scholars writing about newer celebrity feminists Miller and Tankard Reist, argues that the ‘popular feminist “expert” commentator/educator, saviour of girls and young women’ is a figure that is becoming more present and visible (p. 317). She argues that these ““expert” commentators are problematic figures whose work in critiquing and educating girls about aspects of a “sexualised popular culture” is paradoxical. They may be citing and performing other normative dimensions of contemporary young femininity that go unremarked upon and are thus reinscribed as normal and expected’ (Charles 2012b, p. 317). Charles (2012b, p. 317) feels an ‘ambivalence’ about such figures and cites Hopkins’ (2002, p. 1) work on the ‘cute but powerful girl-woman’ as emblematic of what she feels about ‘expert’ commentators. She quotes Hopkins (2002, p. 7) who states that ‘they inspire me and exasperate me at the same time’. I share Charles’ ambivalence and Hopkins’ inspiration and exasperation. This is because there is potential to effectively utilise the visibility of such figures in mass awareness campaigning, but their work is also highly palatable, privileged and connected with the feminism-as-a-business model. This tension creates a troubling and troubled form of activism: collective celebrity feminist involvement in the mainstream mass awareness campaigning agenda is clearly useful as an ‘entrée’, but it may also prevent those that it entices from reaching the more substantive ‘sticking points’ (Wicke in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 404) around campaigning against gender-based violence on the assumption that it has been addressed in a postfeminist era of empowered womanhood. It also unavoidably valorises some feminist voices, sexualities and bodies—voices that are already profiting in a neoliberal climate financially, often significantly enhanced by their media engagement: white, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual bodies.

6.2.5 The unpalatable
Although there has been an increasing velocity, the quality of feminist discourse varies, with an often-visible neoconservative content considered palatable and safe for or by mainstream audiences. Nonetheless, there are relatively well-known unpalatable outliers of celebrity feminist discourse, such as Deveny and Razer. Despite this, they still afford a level of the unthreatening safe and palatable (which should be, and often is, challenged by the commentators themselves) in an ostensibly white, middle-class media landscape. While the ‘politics of gender, sexuality, race, class, and location in contemporary culture…is, in many places, distinctively neoliberal and postfeminist’ (Gill & Scharff 2011, p. 1), the unpalatable is necessary to agitate with this palatable feminism using more diverse voices. Deveny and Razer offer alternatives in the popular feminist commentariat. These figures are in varying capacities, unpalatable; they can be seen as more threatening and are often viewed by their readers and mainstream audiences as unacceptable. They often speak abrasively and resist ‘nice’ stereotypes, and their bodies sometimes transgress narrow ideals of ‘beauty’.

The unpalatable feminist is a feminist killjoy (Ahmed 2010). Ahmed (2010, p. 65) states that ‘feminists don’t even have to say anything to be read as killing joy’. The unpalatable are the outliers; they are the (more) difficult and dogmatic feminist commentators, and they are often transgressive in their feminist politics in comparison with others. Further, they will often offer a contestation to the more palatable feminist politics. For example, Razer (2012, 2013, 2014) has been highly critical of Destroy the Joint, Everyday Sexism and the idea of rape culture. Deveny, an activist and social commentator on multiple issues such as asylum seeking, childcare, bodies, religion and trolling, regularly causes offence and debates key religious and right-wing political figures such as Catholic Cardinal George Pell and former Deputy Leader of the Australian Liberal Party Peter Reith. She unapologetically says ‘I don’t do small talk’ (Deveny 2012a, n.p.). Despite being feminist killjoys, these unpalatable feminists are known for their acerbic sense of humour, and Deveny in particular has achieved much of her celebrity from being a professional comedian. They do not play ‘nice’ and, unlike
Freedman, Miller and Tankard-Reist, they are not traditional entrepreneurs operating a commercial enterprise from within their feminism.45

6.2.6 The Unpalatable–Palatable

The unpalatable–palatable relates to multiple tensions about both palatable and unpalatable celebrity feminists, while recognising that there is not a simple binary; rather, it is a disrupted and disruptive state of flux. It is an acknowledgement that many feminists are concerned with ‘the pessimism surrounding criticism on the intersections of feminism and media culture, the authority conferred on “celebrity feminists”’ (Taylor 2008, p. 109). Secondly, it means the need to appeal to mainstream audiences while agitating for feminist change. This centres on the nexus for mainstream audience visibility, but it can be difficult—almost unpalatable—to consume. Thirdly, it refers to the consumption of feminism in the mediasphere (both by media-appointed feminist commentators and the media itself). Lastly, it relates to the figure of a feminist spokesperson who is often a white, middle-class, heterosexual neoliberal subject—she who must ‘pass’ and be safe and palatable for broader audiences. What they discuss is often palatably packaged, as ‘popular feminist commentators sell easily accessible narratives that are appealing for consumers’ (Charles 2012a, p. 11). However, for the purpose of awareness-raising campaigning about women’s rights issues such as gender-based violence, it is pondered whether the unpalatable–palatable, which is often awarded more currency among mainstream audiences in the mediasphere, might have a value that exceeds its flawed politics that cohabit with the domain, and finally, at the risk of qualification and caveat overload, whether it is worth it because of the risk of a level of depoliticisation.

6.2.7 Feminist media culture

45 Another unpalatable who is not under examination in this thesis is Clementine Ford (2008), who wrote in a major Australian weekend newspaper about not feeling guilt or shame over her own abortions and then called herself a ‘boner killer’ and ‘feminist killjoy to the stars’ in the ‘about’ section on her website (<http://clementineford.tumblr.com/about>).
According to Lilburn, Magarey and Sheridan (2000, p. 335), feminism and feminists have always been a part of the media, and the relationships ‘have ranged from the indignant through the manipulative to the participatory’. They contend that celebrity feminists are ‘both feminist and media savvy’ (Lilburn, Magarey & Sheridan 2000, p. 335). Insofar as feminism being ‘allowed’ within the visible public domains of mass media, while not always being mutually exclusive, palatable and unpalatable figures have helped define popular understandings of Australian feminisms. Although they may contribute legitimately and valuably, there is an ‘exclusion zone’ that highlights the inequality of women positioned outside the dominant paradigms. This includes women of colour, non-able-bodied women, queer women and working-class women. This is problematic because there is a tokenism afforded to such women who are given voice but who fall outside of the dominant paradigms. The exclusion zone is not a new concept, and ‘critics have also persistently argued that the mainstream media simply promotes those least likely to threaten the dominant order, a gesture believed to elide the movement’s diversity’ (Taylor 2014b, p. 762). White, heterosexist, able-bodied privilege is at the forefront of most of the visible feminism, and this must be highlighted and challenged in mass awareness campaigning. Although Australian feminism is in no way restricted to these public feminist figures, and there is a significant amount of other feminism that is invisible to the gaze of the media, ongoing feminist work in Australia regardless of problematic ‘waves’, discipline boundaries, goals and careers of the individual feminists.

Gill (2007), in discussing the ‘shift to feminism becoming part of media discourse’ and the ways in which this opens up debate and myriad readings of gender in media culture, asks:

have the media feminism been transformed by feminism, become—in significant ways—feminist? Or have they incorporated or recuperated feminist ideas, emptying them of their radical force and selling them back to us as sanitized products or lifestyles to consume? (p. 41).

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46 This can now be understood as extending to, and blurring with, social and online media savvy. This has been evident in researching the profiles of the serial of feminists under examination in Chapter 7.
The same can be asked of and about celebrity feminists and popular feminist commentators. Are the more palatable, populist feminisms offered by Freedman and Miller, for example, devoid of a substantial feminist politics? Gill (2007) believes that Wicke’s arguments about celebrity feminism are ‘extremely pertinent, for she suggests that it behoves us (those who think of themselves as feminists) to recognise the changed context of debate on feminist-related issues’ (p. 103). This changing mediasphere, as well as the dominant social and political contexts around such an environment, and the celebrity feminists appearing within these contexts, make it critical to recognise that ‘feminism—especially in a context routinely celebrated as postfeminist, with its work thought to have been done—continues to need its celebrities; those women who receive the type of cultural legitimation that enables feminism to continue its vital work’ (Taylor 2014b, p. 771). In this research, I resist framing feminism in the mediasphere in a celebratory manner, but cautiously regard it as having potential.

6.2.8 Postfeminism and neoliberalism

In Australia and other Western nations, there was a period in the early 1990s when feminism, having made significant inroads into supporting women’s rights, reached a high point when it was actually ‘highly fashionable’ to be a feminist (Dux & Simic 2008, p. 8). Following advances in the ‘detraditionalisation of gender’, women’s lives were changing, meaning that more women were finishing high school and entering university, mothers were working, reproductive controls separated sex and parenthood, and women were more active participants in public life (Bulbeck 2012, p. 5). During this period, capitalism underwent a renaissance.

Neoliberalism explains why many women may reject the term ‘feminism’. At the moment that feminism seemed to have achieved significant structural reforms for women’s rights, a ‘vigorous commercial culture stepped in to re-secure the terms of traditional gender relations’ (Meagher 2011, p. 63). During this period, feminist rhetoric and political discourse were appropriated, and women’s issues were reinterpreted according to a neoliberal vocabulary of ‘individualisation, meritocracy, aspiration and achievement’ (McRobbie 2009, p. 2). Inevitably this centred on women’s employment and consumerism. Conservative Western governments began dismantling the ‘gender equality machinery’ that promoted gender equality legislation, policies and services that
supported women in favour of policies driven by market forces and economic rationalisation (Bulbeck 2010, p. 22).

Neoliberal discourses have undoubtedly significantly influenced certain dominant views on feminism, as ‘neoliberal governance is a mode of power that fundamentally operates in and through discourse’ (Kauppinen 2013, p. 83). Understanding the core principles of neoliberalism is fundamental to understanding its effect on feminism and how it has affected perceptions of feminism. Neoliberalism emerged in response to the economic crisis of the 1970s. It provided a strategy to boost economic stagnation, restore capital accumulation and displace established Keynesian modes of welfare provision and state regulation through policies of privatisation and deregulation. Neoliberalism is a political–economic theory that proposes that ‘human wellbeing can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterised by strong private property rights, free markets and trade’ (Harvey in Barnett 2009, p. 2). If there is such thing as a neoliberal project, then it is assumed that it must work by seeking to bring into existence many neoliberal subjects. This is particularly relevant when reviewing the profiles and feminism of popular media feminist commentators such as Miller and Freedman.

However, by the end of the 1990s, feminism had come to be seen as passé by many, together with claims that it had entered into a postfeminist period. For example, in 2003, the then Australian Liberal Prime Minister, John Howard, declared that ‘we are in the post-feminist stage of the debate’ (Summers 2003, p. 21). The pervasive—and dangerous—myth that feminism’s work was largely done or in the process of being taken care of in the West makes it crucial to better engage activists and mainstream audiences. Such misconceptions and stereotypes have validated what McRobbie (2011b) has called a ‘disidentification’ with feminism on the part of young women. This disidentification does not always mean that there is a lack of feminist movement, as it is the case that ‘while the women’s movement might no longer be so visible on the streets (although protest activity has been more persistent than the popular narrative might suggest)...[it] is still working its way through institutions, and is alive within submerged networks, cultural production and everyday living’ (Maddison & Sawer 2014, p. xvii). However, greater collectivism and visibility in the mainstream can be achieved by taking advantage of the celebrity realm (and celebrity feminism within that site) as it is a powerful culture in which to recruit for organised feminist cultural
attitudinal campaigns because it is ‘the lens through which feminism is most commonly refracted’ (Taylor 2008, p. 105). However, care must be taken that an increase in feminist discourse in the mediaskphere does not reinforce what Walters (1999, p. 10) calls the ‘reality gap’, or the myth that feminism’s work is done.

Although they are ‘ostensibly different concepts’ (Charles 2014, p. 26), neoliberalism and postfeminism share concomitant individualised discourses where the responsibility often falls at the individual rather than collective, structural level. Taylor (2011, p. 3) describes this as the ‘symbiotic relationship between postfeminist and neoliberal rhetorics’. As they ‘both position women as self-regulating “empowered” individuals/consumers dis-embedded from traditional gender roles and relations, and therefore from the feminist politics that may have been required to fight against… unequal gender roles’ (Charles 2014, p. 26), unpacking postfeminism and neoliberalism and how they work together reveals how problematic they are for collective feminist activism. The expectation that individuals respond to issues makes the need for larger-scale group responses to gendered disadvantage appear unnecessary.

As noted by Gill (2007, p. 147), postfeminism has, like ‘postmodernism before it…become overloaded with different meanings’. It is employed in both academic and popular cultural discourses, and ‘it has become a key term in the lexicon of feminist cultural critique in recent years. Its taken-for-granted status belies very real disputes and contestations over its meanings’ (Gill & Scharff 2011, p. 3). Postfeminism is important to an analysis of the popular, as ‘its language and conceptualization are now so pronounced a feature of popular discourse’ (Tasker & Negra 2005, p. 107). Despite there being many definitions, and postfeminism being subject to much ‘interpretive struggle’ (Genz 2009, p. 19), broadly, there are two dominant understandings: the ‘death’ or ‘end’ of feminism, or a continuation of feminism signalled by the ‘post’, which theoretically intersects with other ‘posts’ such as postmodernism and poststructuralism. Murray (1997) defines postfeminism as the combination of poststructural, post-modern and Cultural Studies feminism. She argues that ‘postfeminism is a theoretical diversion which may gain us useful insights on the human condition but is a sidetrack to the feminist struggle for equality’ (Murray 1997, p. 37). In positioning postfeminism in opposition to (and weaker than) earlier modes of feminism, Murray (1997) reasons that postfeminist discourses fail to recognise the need for political action, and only value individual choice, action and circumstance. Thus, in such
conceptualising of postfeminism, there is no need for collective action within such theories. Although it is a highly contested term, in this thesis, my interpretation of postfeminism is best aligned with that of McRobbie (2004), who states:

that post-feminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force (p. 255).

In the postfeminist rhetoric of Miller and Freedman in particular, freedom and individual choice are consistently present. The parts of the discourses that operate in tandem with postfeminism and neoliberalism make collective activism about issues such as gender-based violence difficult. Thus, if the responsibility falls at the individual level, a lack of structural awareness and need for collective action is diminished.

Thus, postfeminist logic means that there is gender equality that is ‘both achieved and yet still unsatisfactory’, and that there is a ‘characteristic assumption that the themes, pleasures, values, and lifestyles with which it is associated are somehow universally shared and, perhaps more significant, universally accessible’ (Negra & Tasker 2007, p. 2). It is in this concept of a universal accessibility that Miller and Freedman’s postfeminist rhetoric becomes most clear. In Razer and Deveny and others (such as Ford), there is a resistance to this and an insistence that focus be given to marginalised women, and not simplistically those who often already have relatively more freedom and choice.

Neoliberalism made women, mostly in Western democracies, the focus of intensive attention during the 1990s, with the ‘revalorisation’ of the ‘girlie’ culture through popular feminism and consumer culture. This was both a liberating force and a capitulation to consumerism, as described in McRobbie’s (2011a, p. 179) nuance of the concept of postfeminism, which she suggests may also be viewed as a ‘sophisticated anti-feminism’. Young women, therefore, are the prospective subjects of abundant capacity in what McRobbie (2011a, p. 179) called ‘the new sexual contract’. So in such neoliberal narratives, girl power is regarded as an enabler of this potential. For example, Miller and Enlighten Education actively invoke a ‘Spice Girls’ type of girl power postfeminist position while working with mostly middle-class girls and their parents, often at elite private schools, discussing issues such as body image and self-esteem.
McRobbie (2011b, p. 3) has explored some of the ways in which neoliberalism has created ‘new terrain for young women’. She references governmentality to describe the ‘complex intersections and flows of media and political discourses’ in order to create a neoliberal culture that is appealing and attentive to younger women, and where renewed substantive feminist politics appear to be unnecessary because women are effectively infantilised (McRobbie 2011c, p. 4). Rather than stressing the collective concerns of women, feminism is replaced with individualisation in popular and in political discourses through competition, ambition, meritocracy, self-help and the rise of the ‘alpha girl’ (McRobbie 2011a, p. 181). Consumer culture has also become a precarious power, where ‘commercial values now occupy a critical place in the formation of the categories of youthful femininity’ (McRobbie 2008, p. 532). Through popular and consumer culture, neoliberalism has promoted divisive social stories and histories that have made individualism appear natural, and self-empowerment and self-interest over collectivity seen admirable, and desirable.

6.2.9 Academic feminism

There will always be complex relationships between theory and practice, and between theorists and activists, and sometimes between feminist academics who speak in the media and feminist academics who do not, although they are not always mutually exclusive, as shown by some trained academic feminists who have become celebrity feminists (e.g., Greer and Summers). A key point is that many academics are specialists and often cannot, or do not want to, speak to more generalised audiences (media or other), and that feminism in the popular realms—in this instance, as commentary—will mostly not require substantive intellectual engagement by the commentators. However, it is more complex than this, and some academics who regularly comment on issues in the media have been criticised for doing so. For example, Professor Catherine Lumby, who occasionally speaks in the media, has seemingly negotiated the boundary between academic and mainstream audiences, although not without criticism from both academic and non-academic audiences. Lumby is not only a public intellectual, but also a celebrity feminist. As Dux and Simic (2008) point out, this is not without problems:

Professor of Journalism Catharine Lumby is kept busy disseminating feminist ideas, explaining pop culture and rejecting critiques that blame the media for a plethora of social and cultural ills. As pop culture continues to push boundaries,
Lumby’s job gets harder, or at least more visible. She is often the one-stop shop for a grab on Paris Hilton, pornography or reality television…fellow media critic Guy Rundle accused her of being ‘the orthodontist’s nurse of academia (she’ll take a retainer from anyone) (p. 56).

It is significant to note that while academic feminism is not ‘itself a coherent, consistent or reified realm’ (Wicke in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 386), more public entry points to more dense feminist work may be (relatively) difficult to find at times. However, to dismiss some academic feminist work as too complex for broader mainstream potential, as Nussbaum (1999) does when discussing Judith Butler, forecloses any possibility of questioning or deconstructing dominant discourses. Nussbaum accuses Butler’s work of obscurantism, inaccessibility and irrelevancy for political activism. She argues that:

Butlerian feminism is in many ways easier than the old feminism. It tells scores of talented young women that they need not work on changing the law, or feeding the hungry, or assailing power through theory harnessed to material politics. They can do politics in safety of their campuses, remaining on the symbolic level, making subversive gestures at power through speech and gesture (Nussbaum 1999, n.p.).

In one of her earlier interviews, Butler explains that she did not aim to become popular, and how the popularity opened her work up for misinterpretation. It is important to remember that when Butler (1990) wrote Gender Trouble, she was not writing for a popular audience, and she did not anticipate becoming an academic celebrity as a result. She refuses to be remorseful for her academic intelligence, rigour or style of writing, as ‘I never expected my work to be read by very many people. I am dense, I am abstract, I am esoteric. Why should I become popular?’ (Butler in Michalik 2001, n.p.).

The mediasphere generally does not provide a forum for substantive engagement with difficult texts and research; however, feminism needs public figures and advocates, and it is not suggested that they function in the same way, or even together necessarily, but that there should not be an impetus to do so, as they serve complementary functions to circulate, enhance or create feminist discourse. Additionally, hierarchies valorising the academic over the popular modes of feminist discourse are unhelpful. Academic and popular discourses and their supporters have differing functions and modes of
operation, and celebrity feminists—whether academic or non-academically trained—should not be silenced in public discourse.

Celebrity feminists can play a crucial role in participating in the discourse about feminism to mainstream audiences, as ‘theory and practice alike get roughed up in the celebrity market, but those rough edges have valuable sticking points’ (Wicke in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 404). This thesis argues that these sticking points are the ‘net worth’ principle: collective feminist activism for mass awareness with a caveat that critical feminist practice and politics must not be evacuated at the expense of populism. However, some sticking points (such as access to ideas as entry-ways to feminists’ ways of doing and being that may not otherwise be available or sought after; popular follows to broader audiences) are worth examining and recruiting for large-scale feminist campaigning. These sticking points are much like the ‘adhesives’ to which Inglis (2010, p. 4) labels the role of celebrity in public discourse, as they ‘pull those separate entities together…toward maintaining social cohesion and common values’. These sticking points are discussed in the next chapter.
Chapter 7: Celebrity/Media/Popular Feminists and Unpalatable Palatable: Tensions

…in a culture increasingly obsessed with celebrity, where the mainstream media latches on to personae upon whom can be projected all sorts of hopes and dreams, to ignore the prominence and impact of feminism’s most public voices on popular conceptions of feminism would be disingenuous. Whether self-appointed or media appointed, like it or not, and regardless of its a priori inability to represent women in all their diversity, feminism—in its popular incarnations—has had its leaders (Siegel 2007, p. 16).

… to deploy the term ‘celebrity feminist’ as a prima facie insult, as a pejorative reference to a presumably all-too-public persona…would be to miss the point and the politics. Celebrity discourse is a powerful political site, a current state of being, a predominantly social process: stigmatising it or premature moralising over it ignores its reality and its political potential (Wicke in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 390).

7.1 Introduction

Segal (in DeKoven (ed.) 2001) argues that there is:

a contentious minority of women attempting to map out and assess which different pieces in the jigsaw of feminism get picked up, leaving us to ask just who is selecting the fragments, and whose particular interests their delivery serves…it is only by finding creative ways to combine forces, and by learning from one another’s journeys, that feminists can still hope to open spaces (p. 57).

In this chapter, I extract a part of the current Australian celebrity feminist ‘jigsaw of feminism’ to understand the ‘rough edges’ that may have ‘valuable sticking points’ (Wicke in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 404) for use in mass awareness campaigning. I do this by focusing on celebrity feminisms and some feminists of celebrity in Australia to explore whether the use of celebrity feminist figures might be advantageous for mass awareness strategies for organised feminist-driven campaigns. This is because celebrity itself is increasingly pervasive, and many types of other celebrities are widely utilised in
mass awareness campaigns, such as those created by and for environmental and poverty social movements. As noted in the introductory chapter to this section, my conceptual framework consists of three notions: the palatable; the unpalatable; and the tensions between, around and within celebrity feminists, which results in what I call the unpalatable–palatable.

Firstly, this chapter considers the more palatable feminists: Miller and Freedman. I also explore two outliers, or the (more) unpalatable feminist commentators—Razer and Deveny—who are often transgressive in their feminist politics in comparison with others. This is because they are seen—by audiences and sometimes other feminist commentators and parts of the mediasphere—as recalcitrant; they offer a contestation to the palatable and they take longer to digest. They do not play ‘nice’, and they are not entrepreneurs operating a commercial enterprise (although they derive income from their commentary and work, but predominantly as solo operators). They often defy predictability. While no feminist is completely unpalatable or palatable on the spectrum, Tankard Reist, who is also explored in this section, fits most uncomfortably on the continuum. In this chapter, I draw upon some of the key issues that each of these figures raise and offer their commentary upon. I examine how they construct and perform their celebrity through the use of social and online media and mainstream media, and the ways in which they might reinscribe and/or challenge normative ideas about certain issues (e.g., sexualisation and feminism). I do this with the purpose of asking the key question in this section: Is the celebrity feminist media commentator in Australia a figure who could be of benefit to a mass awareness campaign about critical and underreported issues such as gender-based violence in Australia when, according to Natasha Stott Despoja, the chair of the Foundation to Prevent Violence against Women and Their Children, ‘the evidence is very clear: there is an extraordinary link between gender inequality and violence against women. The link between attitudinal change and minimising violence is absolutely unquestionable…[this is] a national emergency’ (in Martin 2014, n.p.).

47 There are other unpalatables in the feminist commentariat in Australia, including Clementine Ford and Clementine Bastow. Jane Caro, another commentator and evolving celebrity feminist, straddles the palatable and unpalatable.
This relatively new serial of celebrity feminists does not equate to homogeneity; however, there are commonalities—and predictabilities—(ostensibly overrepresentation of white, middle-class, heterosexual, relatively ‘safe’ women) that are discussed in this chapter. I examine their very particular performative celebrity roles through their self-representational practices, and in turn, the way they are represented in various forms of media. That is, how do they perform and maintain their celebrity, and how have they established their authority as feminists in the mediasphere? As celebrity feminism exists on a continuum whereby some are afforded more visibility and authority than others by the mainstream media, in online or social media, by audiences, and by other feminists, and noting that this fluctuates, I examine how individual brands are often being created around feminism in the media.

As mentioned in the introductory chapter of this section, in the past decade or so, there has been a proliferation of Australian feminist blogs, online news, websites and popular commentators speaking on feminist issues (e.g., online sites such as The Hoopla, Fairfax’s Daily Life and Freedman’s Mamamia.com.au), as well as an increase in social media feminist identities. There have been a number of reasonably visible feminist activism groups; for example, Tankard Reist’s ‘Collective Shout’ (which engages in boycotts and culture jamming), the online petition culture, which helps to illuminate feminist and other issues within the broader mediasphere, and perhaps the most mainstream and publicly recognisable of all, the Destroy the Joint movement. The growth has not only been in Australia, but is reflected throughout many parts of the world, and a number of high-profile international feminist campaigns have received viral and mainstream media attention, including ‘Everyday Sexism’, ‘Hollaback’, ‘Stop Street Harassment’, ‘Slutwalk’ and ‘Who Needs Feminism’.

This chapter examines whether there has been a dilution of feminist politics in/due to the mediasphere multiplication of feminist commentators for less substantive issues and engagement, and whether celebrity/popular feminists are contributing to the apparent evacuation of feminist politics that Cannold (2011) alludes to when she states:

I kind of worry that I’m going to lose activists to fight Brazilians and other sorts of things that they find offensive instead of getting on board with fighting the thing that is—instead of the proxy, the actual thing that’s the problem: the violence, the inequality, work/family issues. These are really the things, I think, that are affecting women’s lives.
Do movements like Destroy the Joint lack focus and create a community of ‘outragegasm’ (Gilmore 2013, n.p.) that becomes morally entrepreneurial (Becker 1962) and an echo chamber of vigilantes and/or seemingly non-discriminatory with regard to the issues they present? If so, is there anything wrong with being vigilantes? Destroy the Joint is discussed in this section for two reasons. First, it is a common target of Razer’s wrath. Second, the movement, which began online, was highly publicised by a selection of contributors to the Destroying the Joint anthology, which was published after the online movement had gathered momentum without many of the contributors to the anthology being actual activists involved in the formation of the online movement (Caro (ed.) 2013). Are popular feminist commentators on the celebrity feminist continuum, for example, too often substituting actual feminist credentials for opinion pieces served up as research or expertise? Is the current feminist commentariat presenting a liberal feminist conveyor belt of issues? Razer, who is a media commentator, provocateur and currently the primary unpalatable, has raised concerns with comments such as ‘oh my fuck. Between campaigning for marriage and against old radio announcers, activism these days is as edgy as an Anne Geddes calendar’ (Razer 2012). As such, this chapter explores the idea of a co-option of feminism by the media and media-appointed celebrity feminists in Australia, as well as the effects this might have on broader feminist engagement and activism. It looks towards the neoliberal and postfeminist cultural climate and rhetoric, and the use of ‘brand’ that some individual feminist celebrities use to market and commodify their feminism and businesses. Further, it asks whether caution is needed regarding the overuse of popular feminists in any mass awareness campaign. Do they provide access that is not otherwise ordinarily obtainable by non-media feminists and feminist academics? Does such feminism reduce it to palatable ‘morning tv-esque’ types of soundbytes (or bite-sized scraps)? Was it always?

7.2 The Palatable

7.2.1 Dannielle Miller

Miller is the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Enlighten Education. Miller and her business partner, Francesca Kaoutel, co-founded Enlighten Education as an Australian-based for-profit business in 2003. It is described on Miller’s website as the:
Leading provider of workshops for teen girls on body image, self-esteem and empowerment. Enlighten touches the lives of 20,000 girls every year across Australia and New Zealand, and we have launched our workshops in the United States and Singapore (Miller 2014, n.p.).

The Enlighten Education website refers to ‘The Butterfly Effect: creating shiny girls’ (Enlighten Education 2014). The ‘shiny’ focus may signify happiness and kindness, and it may be related to gendered stereotypes around palatable versions of femininity. Miller (2014, n.p.) describes herself ‘as an educator, business woman and a mother’, stating that her ‘life’s passion is to empower girls to grow into the bright, shiny adults they have the potential to be’. Miller has been a regular feminist media commentator in Australia since the mid to late 2000s on issues such as the sexualisation of teenage girls, body image, self-esteem and parenting, and she has worked to cultivate and create her profile as a self-made feminist author, educator and entrepreneurial businesswoman. As such, Miller is at the centre of both her personal brand and the interrelated Enlighten Education brand. To date, Miller has published several books aimed at both teenage girls and their parents.  

She has now expanded her business interests to include a series of workshops aimed at teenage boys (www.goodfellation.com), although this is not the focus of this overview. She embodies the ideal successful neoliberal subject, seeking to share her ‘empowerment’ and business knowledge with teenage girls, boys and their parents.

Miller has been nominated for, and/or won, many publically recognisable awards, and these are used on the business and personal websites to convey both her—and Enlighten’s—authority. For example, 12 awards are listed on Enlighten Education’s home page, most of which are for Miller personally (www.enlighteneducation.com). There is also an ‘awards’ tab on the personal webpage, which signifies the perception of authority. For example, in 2014 Miller was named finalist in the InStyle Magazine

48 Miller’s books include a parenting book for teenage girls, The Butterfly Effect: a positive new approach to raising happy, confident teen girls (2009), and books directed at teenage girls, including The girl with the butterfly tattoo: a girl’s guide to claiming her own power (2010) and Loveability: an empowered girl’s guide to dating and relationships (co-authored with Nina Funnell, 2013), and an e-book directed as parents entitled Gratitude: a positive new approach to raising thankful kids (2014).
‘Woman of Style’ awards, in 2009, she was named by The Australian as Australia’s ‘Number One Emerging Leader in Education’, and the Sydney Morning Herald Sydney Magazine listed her as among Sydney’s top 100 influential people. In 2007, Miller was NSW’s ‘Entrepreneur of the Year’, and in 2012, she received an Australian Leadership Award. In 2013, Prevention Magazine listed Miller as one of Australia’s Most Inspiring Women over 40 in the ‘Game Changers’ category. In addition, Enlighten Education was a finalist for the Australian Human Rights Commission Business Award in 2011, nominated for the Australian Small Business Champion Award in Educational Services in 2010, and named the Australian Small Business Champion for Children’s Services in 2007 (Miller 2014).

Enlighten Education relies upon the promotion of Miller at the centre of the brand. To work within a neoliberal climate as a successful business entrepreneur and postfeminist subject, Miller’s individual profile needs to be foregrounded; thus, she performs a palatable form of relatable ‘girl power’ feminism, which has created a level of feminist celebrity for her. Miller updates her Facebook status to reaffirm her form of celebrity within the ‘girl world’, with status updates such as:

Yes I’m a sweaty mess as I’ve worked back-to-back with over 350 girls today…And been mobbed. But golly I’m happy and proud! (Miller 2013a).

Most amazing response from girls today. I revisited the Year 8 girls at UWC Singapore. They went completely nuts at seeing me again and the teachers had to act as security. LOL. As I left, the girls spontaneously formed a guard of honor and clapped and cheered me out. The Deputy and I were in tears. I’ll never forget today! — feeling blessed (Miller 2013b).

In terms of the establishment of authority as a celebrity feminist, a key sign that she had arrived was when Miller and another media feminist commentator, author Tara Moss, appeared on stage with two of the three leading, longstanding Australian celebrity feminists, Germaine Greer and Eva Cox at the Festival of Dangerous Ideas at the
Sydney Opera House in 2012 in a panel entitled ‘All Women Hate Each Other’. The placement of Miller and Moss alongside Greer and Cox can be understood as a popular ‘changing of the feminist guard’ or as ‘heirs of this feminist lineage’ (Tyler 2005, p. 25). It also signalled the disruption and reinforcement of binaries: the popular and the academic, the established and the emergent, and the younger and the older. The event was not an ordinary festival event—it was a one-hour long, sold-out ticketed event at the Opera House, arguably one of the most prestigious and important Australian stages. Moss and Miller’s authority to speak on the subject of feminism signalled sufficient mainstream cultural kudos to share the stage with the formidable Cox and Greer.

Enlighten Education is a for-profit business that has franchises in various states of Australia, although Miller retains ownership in several locations. Enlighten Education also has operations in New Zealand and Singapore. It operates by conducting workshops for teenage girls at their schools to help them ‘decode the mixed messages they receive and help them develop self-esteem and confidence’ (Enlighten Education n.d.). There are several package options, including the ‘Career Gal’ course, which helps teenage girls ‘identify and develop the skills employers want’. There is also a full-day course that covers:

- critically evaluating media and social messages about having a ‘perfect’ body;
- reconnecting with core values and self-belief lost in adolescence;
- feminism;
- fashion labels and social labelling;
- managing money;
- study and workplace skills;
- personal safety;
- journal writing;
- stress management;
- and having healthy friendships (Enlighten Education n.d.).

Enlighten Education targets its products to girls aged 12–18, and the site states that it features ‘testimonials from many of Australia’s and New Zealand’s top schools and leading experts in education and psychology’ (Enlighten Education n.d.). Miller also

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49 Anne Summers is the third of the arguably most well-known celebrity feminists, besides Cox and Greer, in Australia. She did not appear on this panel.

50 Tyler (2005) refers to ‘the heir of the feminist lineage’ when discussing a 1998 Time magazine cover featuring Susan B. Anthony, Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan, with fictional character Ally McBeal (Calista Flockhart) positioned as their alleged ‘heir’.
holds ‘parent seminars’ at the schools; thus, Enlighten Education captures both the
parent and teen girl markets. Both Miller’s personal and Enlighten Education websites
feature much promotional material, including links to videos, television appearances,
YouTube, social media sites and testimonials. Miller is, or has been, a regular
commentator on morning television shows such as the *Kerri-Anne Show*, *Mornings* and
*The Morning Show*. Miller’s website is visually palatable and designed to be
welcoming. As noted by Charles (2012b, p. 321), the website ‘appeal seems to be
modelled on a similar aesthetic to that which other consumer products for girls (such as
magazines) might use’. The home page is set with a large iPad as the backdrop, and the
theme is set like a diary, with a cup of tea or coffee, Enlighten Education business cards,
Post-It notes with links to approach Miller for talks or business coaching, her books,
videos of her speaking in the media, and Enlighten Education’s social media pages. At
‘Blog’ and ‘Enlighten’ itself, and ‘each of these different tabs leads to a further
opportunity to consume Enlighten Education’s products’ (Charles 2012b, p. 321).
Enlighten Education’s success works for various reasons, including the market it
targets, Miller’s presence and perception of authority, the use of multiple platforms,
excessive emotion, visual and other forms of gendered palatability, and consumption
aspects (selling products and educational advice via the packages). As noted by Charles
(2012b, p. 320), ‘her workshops, and other Enlighten Education products, are sold using
tactics of pleasure and emotional engagement’.

The website states that in Enlighten Education workshops:

> We cover everything from helping girls discover their own inner beauty, to
> managing friendships and even developing business plans. Enlighten encourages
girls to reach their own conclusions and to know their own minds. Rather than
telling girls what to do, we focus on informing, inspiring and empowering them.
We encourage girls to be discerning consumers and critical thinkers and to find
their own voice and power in a complex world (Enlighten Education n.d.).

The ‘discovery’ of inner beauty assumes that it is hidden and that the girls somehow
require empowerment and guidance to find this beauty. In such contradictory
discourses, young women are framed as ‘the vulnerable empowered’ (Dubriwby 2013);
they are positioned as needing assistance to enable them to grow into self-managed
adults who can critically engage with the world. I position Miller and Enlighten
Education as ‘drawing from postfeminism rather than feminism. Postfeminism has usurped the position of feminism, bringing with it a representation of women as highly gendered individuals who are empowered to choose’ (Dubriwny 2013, p. 13). Structural inequity prevents choice and agency for many young women, and simply being positive or empowered will not create opportunities for many. Dubriwny (2013) theorises the concept of the ‘vulnerable empowered woman’ when examining women’s health issues in mainstream public discourse, whereby ‘the emergence of postfeminist and neoliberal narratives as the most visible narratives about women’s health has resulted in a new identity for women entering the health marketplace: the vulnerable empowered woman…Women become empowered through the act of choice’ (p. 8). The concept of the vulnerable empowered has utility when positioning Miller and Enlighten Education’s work with teen girls. Charles (2012a) argues that Miller:

urges parents to help their daughters move beyond ‘Bratz, Britney and Bacardi Breezers’ (Miller, 2009, p. 1). At the same time, she cites many times in her publications an image of young women as ‘brave, captivating, creative, intelligent’ (Miller, 2012) people, battling against a toxic media culture. The implication of this is that girls are both vulnerable and requiring adult intervention, and also extremely capable, simply needing to be prompted by a caring adult to harness their inner strength, and become empowered to develop a critical distance from sexualised culture. All that is needed, it seems, is for girls to become ‘savvy navigators’, who can challenge and work against oppressive regulatory discourses of femininity and sexuality (p. 11).

Miller (2009, p. 4) says that, as a:

woman who believes in women’s rights…we have not managed to make much more than a crack in our own bathroom mirrors, our self-imposed glass ceilings. And I am left wondering how we can expect the next generation of women—our girls—to step up and change the world when they, too, are preoccupied with wanting to change themselves, obsessed with achieving airbrushed perfection.

The ‘self-imposed’ emphasis and focus on appearance and body image as key feminist issues indicates that the individual is either at fault, or complicit in, the cultural expectations and normative behaviours surrounding the beauty industry, and that the fixation on these behaviours prevents women from achieving their full potential. The neoliberal focus on individual failures and limitations, rather than structural, systemic
issues is demonstrated here with the ‘self-imposed glass ceilings’ (Miller 2009, p. 4). As such, Miller is the ‘thoroughly postfeminist woman…[she] functions to support a variety of neoliberal power structures…about individual choices and not about social and cultural factors’ (Dubriwny 2013, p. 9). Miller believes that the key to changing girls’ futures is to educate and provide the tools to challenge these dominant norms from an early age; essentially, they are to be empowered to self-manage as postfeminist neoliberal subjects. However, as certain types of postfeminist neoliberal subjects, these girls, just like the vulnerable empowered woman theorised by Dubriwny (2013), ‘appears to have some agency and power to shape her own life…through her various practices of risk management’ (p.9). However, this ostensibly excludes those who already do not have access to certain institutional support and other forms of social and cultural capital. As Charles (2012) argues, approaches such as Miller’s are ‘too simplistic and individualistic’, and they fail to account in a substantive way for the intersections with issues such as class and race, and how challenging ‘normative femininities and redressing social injustice may not be as uncomplicated as presented’ (p. 10).

Miller consistently references ‘girl power’ and talks about ‘girl world’ (Miller 2008, 2011), and one of Enlighten Education’s workshops is called ‘Real Girl Power’. Miller and Enlighten Education actively invoke a ‘Spice Girls’ type of ‘girl power’ postfeminist position while working with mostly middle-class girls and their parents (often at private schools) and discussing issues such as body image and self-esteem. For example, in one blog post, Miller talks about engaging girls in the women’s movement and how they get the teachers involved in this process:

I then love to get the teachers involved by inviting them up too to do an impromptu dance to the ultimate girl-power group—The Spice Girls; ‘Yo I tell you what I want, what I really, really want’…I am always thrilled how well teachers embrace this—and yes, the girls absolutely go crazy! And from this platform of humour and critical analysis, we begin exploring (in the words of Ginger, Posh, Baby, Sporty and Scary) what it is that women ‘really, really want’ (Miller 2013c, n.p.).

Miller argues that feminism needs to become more appealing because girls are disconnected from feminism; therefore, ‘we need to bring it to this generation in a way that’s more palatable. They can still like fashion and boys; they can still shave their legs
and be a feminist’ (Miller 2010, p. 8). Here, Miller draws upon old, recognisable feminist clichés: the hairy-legged, separatist, lesbian feminist with the abject hair lurking as the outdated ‘other’ feminist. This is a subtle postfeminist agenda that invokes gender equality as having been ‘taken into account…[as] post-feminism…suggest[s] that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force’ (McRobbie 2004, p. 255). Thus, ‘girl power’ discourses present the girl as ‘assertive, dynamic, and unbound from the constraints of passive femininity’ (Gonick 2006, p. 2), but conversely, she is positioned as needing assistance to meet the goal of empowerment. Further, the statement that Enlighten Education workshops can ‘cover everything…even developing business plans’ (Enlighten Education n.d.), as well as the advertisement on Miller’s page offering ‘expert business coaching and advice’ (Miller n.d.), reveals that Miller and Enlighten Education conform to the neoliberal vocabulary of ‘individualisation, meritocracy, aspiration and achievement’ (McRobbie 2009, p. 2) to develop ‘the range of activities that are commodified, commercialised and marketed necessarily implies that people’s subjectivities need to be re-tooled and re-worked—as active consumers, entrepreneurial subjects, or empowered participants’ (Barnett 2009, p. 13).

Shields Dobson (in Harris (ed.) 2008, p. 126) argues that such ‘narratives of “girl power”…have been extremely successful in popular culture and marketing in the past ten years and have had a huge effect on popular girl culture…and what it means to be “empowered”’. According to Shields Dobson (in Harris (ed.) 2008, p. 126), the ‘interconnected values signified in girl power narratives [are]…namely consumerism, visibility/image circulation, and “celebrity”’. Enlighten Education offers workshops with the aim of empowering girls to manage their images. Additionally, there is an online ‘Enlighten’ shop that ‘offers amazing alternatives to the often limiting messages presented to our girls’ (Enlighten Education n.d.). In the Enlighten shop, posters, Miller’s books and stickers are sold with self-esteem and positive-thinking affirmations. In other words, (self) empowerment discourse functions as a marketing strategy. The idea that the girls are ‘our girls’ means that Enlighten Education presents a caring consumerism: that we are all in this together. This connection is reinforced in a strong social media presence and association with the Enlighten Education presenters—led by Miller—through Facebook, the blog, Instagram and other types of forums that girls are already connected with. These are coupled with books, promotional Enlighten
Education material, books and talks for parents, ongoing media attention and interviews, and comments from Miller, ensuring that Enlighten Education has a market of keen consumers actively engaging with the advice surrounding notions of girl power. As the self-made girl power figure, Miller is neoliberalism’s ‘discursively embedded ideal subject… neoliberal citizens should be self-sufficient and responsible… an effective neoliberal subject attends to fashions, is focused on self-improvement, and purchases goods and services to achieve ‘self-realisation’… the idea neoliberal citizen is an entrepreneur’ (Marwick 2013, p. 13). According to Harris (2003, p. 16), ‘the concept of girl power has been highly significant in the image of young women as independent, successful, and self-inventing’. At the centre of the Enlighten Education brand, Miller is the self-made entrepreneurial neoliberal subject—the type of woman she seeks to empower the girls to become. She embodies the ‘ideal late-modern subject… one who is flexible, individualised, resilient, self-driven, and self-made’ (Harris 2003, p. 16). Her confident, self-assured persona in social and mainstream media ensures that she positions herself as the expert commentator, and she takes advantage of ‘the significant public interest in sexualisation, in a way that reinscribes other normative dimensions of contemporary young femininity such as entrepreneurialism, business acumen (Harris 2004), visibility and notoriety (Hopkins 2002)’ (Charles 2012b, p. 318). Miller and Enlighten Education do some work with girls from less privileged backgrounds; however, it is clear from this for-profit business’ public profile and social media promotion that this is less of a focus. This individualised approach often fails to take into account broader structural issues—for example, various inequities such as gender pay gaps, superannuation gender gaps and gender-based violence and intersectional issues (e.g., female homelessness). Thus, it attempts to reproduce a certain type of subject, which often fails to recognise the urgency of collective activism because ‘feminism is no longer needed as a political force’ (McRobbie 2011b, p. 1). The structural inequalities are often ignored through the assumption that girls have enough cultural capital to navigate the culture themselves and overcome challenges via positive thinking, self-esteem and drive. This is the case with the work conducted by Enlighten Education, with Miller as the CEO neoliberal subject at the helm. It predominantly works for the relatively privileged in terms of class and race via highly commoditised educational models sold as feminism.

Miller has a very active social and online media presence, as well as being a regular commentator on television and radio in Australia. Enlighten Education engages with
young women (its target ages are 12–18) via Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, their blog and websites, and Miller has personal profiles linked to these technologies, as well as a YouTube channel. She speaks on topics such as body image, self-harm, self-esteem, and finding and managing teen romance. Miller’s feminist celebrity and popularity with her teen-girl fans (and their parents) is emotively performative. She regularly uses both her Enlighten Education (with over 11,000 followers) and personal Facebook pages to engage with her—and her company’s—audience. She posts regular email feedback of praise she and the company have received, as well as testimonials and other compliments. This is a form of entrepreneurial promotion that further establishes authority via popularity and emotional connections; the issue is with the conflation of business and feminism, as well as what counts as feminism. Miller shares personal life anecdotes and talks in emotive ways, often offering advice to girls of how to engage in, and manage, online environments. She regularly posts comments to indicate that she personally has a large following, and she interacts with people on her Facebook wall and posts photographs with students and celebrities. Miller travels to Singapore to work with exclusive, private schools and deliver Enlighten Education’s empowerment message. She appears to embody a ‘guru’ subject position and promotes this through her use of social media. For example, posts about how her presence (as the figurehead of Enlighten Education) is received indicate that she actively fosters this: ‘the young women at Dover gave me a rock-star reception and spontaneously cheered me all the way through the school grounds to the car park. If only I had had a video to capture this moment—although I probably wouldn’t have been able to film as I was crying with joy’ (2013c, n.p.). Miller’s choice of the use of the words ‘rock-star’ indicates a level of self-belief in the power of her feminist celebrity presence; she is the opposite of Ahmed’s (2010b) feminist killjoy; she is a palatable role model in a post-capitalist society, sharing its values and helping to constitute its female consumers.

After appearing at the Sydney Opera House with Cox, Greer and Moss, Miller wrote a blogpost saying that she would like to ‘make a plea for kindness. For I fear we are killing it’ (Miller 2012b, n.p.). This was because both Cox and Greer ‘challenged the assumption that women should be expected to be “nice” and seemed to be implying that women could be as unpleasant as they wanted to be (insert cheering from the crowd)’ (Miller 2012b, n.p.). Miller’s palatable feminism is ‘nice’ and ‘safe’, and while it is having an effect on some young women (e.g., predominantly those who have access via their elite schools), it does not often challenge normative values. Further, the idea of
unkindness as a criticism can be viewed as conforming to the idea that women are not logically working against her beliefs or arguments, but are somehow unkind and not nice; that is, the emotional woman incapable of a rational criticism based upon logic, but ideally should be driven by stereotypes of femininity. In her research on gender and politeness, Mills (2003, p. 203) found that ‘politeness is often considered to be a woman’s concern…stereotypes of how women in general should behave are in fact rather a prototypical description of white, middle-class women’s behaviour in relation to politeness’. Ahmed (2010, p. 69) draws upon the work of Firestone, who argues for a ‘smile boycott’ and contends that ‘feminism involves challenging the very “pressure” of happiness’. Resistance to Miller’s palatability by the ‘old guard’ of Greer and Cox effectually created a tension in the broader feminist discourse. Such cultural conversations are essential for the state of debate because they are highly visible and recorded events, such as the event staged at the Opera House. These are necessary in order to ask questions about who gets chosen, who is authorised and by whom, and who passes as an expert in the mainstream.

What Miller and Enlighten Education do is aligned with postfeminist and neoliberal logics because it is about autonomy/self-control, self-discipline, self-governing, self-improvement and empowerment; it is predominantly an individualised feminism that focuses on self-promotion and encourages entrepreneurialism. As the individual is on the ascendant in the rest of society, it is not surprising that Miller—at the centre of her feminist brand—is also on the ascendant. Although the workshops and products can be seen to be capitalising on the ‘culture of sexualisation’ that has allowed commentators such as Miller ‘opportunities for visibility and notoriety’ (Charles 2012b, p. 320), and this should not go unnoticed, criticised or unremarked, there is a net worth, and I acknowledge the resonance of Miller and Enlighten Education with over 20,000 girls each year in several countries. Miller is able to comment in the media, and she has some timely, important contributions outside of the Enlighten Education business model, such as the problems feminists face in the media regarding online vitriol (Miller 2012a). Additionally, Enlighten Education’s mission involves no corporate sponsorship, as the organisation believes ‘that this may send girls mixed messages and raise potential conflicts of interest’ (Enlighten Education ‘In the Community’ n.d.). However, it sells products (not only in terms of merchandise, but also their courses and seminars), and this again ‘can thus be understood to be working within the same logic of the consumer-driven culture it purports to critique’ (Charles 2012b, p. 321). However, to only view
Enlighten Education and Miller in these terms is to disregard some of their positive contributions, such as Miller speaking out consistently about the trolling and abuse of feminist commentators, her community work in terms of being an ambassador for various non-government organisations such as the Mirabel Foundation and Pregnant Pause, the many testimonials that attest to the ongoing and increasing popularity of Enlighten Education, and evaluations from the girls themselves. These demonstrate that Enlighten Education and Miller are resonating within certain demographics and getting and keeping feminism on the agenda to some extent. The issue is with ‘the performance of normative, and highly classed, ways of being a young woman that are reinscribed as normal and expected’ by Miller and Enlighten Education (Charles 2012b, p. 321). Like Charles (2012b, p. 321), I am:

careful not to suggest that such approaches have nothing to offer…I have moments of feeling inspired by what Enlighten Education seems to be doing. I find myself feeling guilty for wearing my ‘academic hat’, and wondering if it really is just straightforwardly positive that Miller and her team are out there doing this work; that they are engaging directly with so many girls, and using the techniques of corporate culture to speak back to its potentially damaging effects on young women. I admire the scope and reach of their influence…[yet]…The images of gleaming trophies, and the constant information about Miller’s professional success, work to remind me that this is what I should be aiming for as a young woman, and that this is what all girls and young women are supposed to be doing—developing their skills as creative entrepreneurs.

7.2.2 Mia Freedman and Mamamia.com.au

Freedman is a blogger, businesswoman and ubiquitous media commentator. She established (and is the editor of) the highly successful and popular women’s website Mamamia.com.au (hereafter ‘Mamamia’), which is Australia’s largest women’s website, claiming that ‘between 2 and 4 million Australian women (and the occasional bloke too!) log onto Mamamia and our sister site iVillage.com.au every month’ (Mamamia.com.au ‘About’ n.d.). Mamamia has more than 300 contributors, including celebrities, experts and ‘ordinary’ people, who write opinion pieces. The site claims a focus on social justice, women’s media representation, bodies and humanitarianism (Mamamia.com.au ‘About’ n.d.). Mamamia describes itself as:
Here at Mamamia, absolutely everything is up for discussion: from pop culture to politics, body image to motherhood, feminism to fashion. We unashamedly cover what everyone is talking about today: whether that’s stories which will make you laugh out loud, cover your mouth in shock, help you get informed or start you thinking about an issue in a different way and sometimes, we help you to just switch off the brain power from a few sweet minutes and kick back. We’re not a mummy website, we’re not a news website and we’re not an opinion website either. We defy categorisation (just like our readers) (Mamamia.com.au n.d.)

Rather than defying categorisation, Mamamia is primarily a business built around Freedman’s pre-existing media profile. It promotes other businesses and receives advertising dollars through ‘clickbait’. Its ideal readers are both entrepreneurial and consuming:

Mamamia readers are an entrepreneurial lot. You’re also evangelical—once you see something, buy something or hear about something fabulous, you want to share it. Sharing is caring, after all. And we care a lot around here. Yes we do. So here’s your chance to care. And share. Today we are celebrating the launch of the Mamamia Business Directory (Mamamia.com.au 2011).

To state that ‘Mamamia readers are an entrepreneurial lot’, for example, is contradictory to their claims in the website description that ‘we defy categorisation (just like our readers)’, as the site clearly categorises its readers as ‘entrepreneurial’. Additionally, readers are regarded as ‘evangelical’ about their consumer habits, and they are told that ‘sharing is caring’. This is an appeal to the idea of nurturing stereotypes around femininity in order to sell and promote.

Before launching Mamamia in 2007, Freedman was a magazine journalist at women’s magazines such as Cleo, and later as editor-in-chief of Dolly, Cleo and Cosmopolitan.

51 ‘Clickbait’ is a term used to describe a website featuring eye-catching headlines that encourage readers to continue by ‘clicking’ the hyperlink, which often takes them to another site featuring the advertising paid for on the site.
She has also hosted, and appeared as a regular commentator, on television programs. She is a regular opinion piece writer for (mostly) the (conservative) Murdoch-owned News Limited. In recent years, she has moved from general media commentator to being positioned (by herself and by various parts of the media) as a feminist expert in the mainstream media, with regular appearances on television panels, radio programs, and at events to provide expert commentary on feminism. Freedman’s simplistic position about feminism is highlighted by an exchange with Greer on television program *Q&A* (2013). Freedman explained her version of feminism as ‘all it is is wanting social, political and economic equality with men’. To this, Greer weighed in with authority, responding that:

> it’s important to point out that we haven’t even got there yet. When we talk about equality, we’re actually enunciating a profoundly conservative aim. We just want to have what somebody else has got. We don’t really want to change the whole system (*Q&A* 2013).

In postfeminist discourses, the valorisation of the individual is privileged, rather than concern about collective activism regarding systemic inequities. Thus, the ideal subject is, for example, a particular version of success where entrepreneurial career, care and repair of the self are prioritised. Freedman and Mamamia can be seen to work within this paradigm. Freedman (2014, n.p.) says that she has:

> always believed in the power of people to change their own lives. Whether it’s through therapy or changing jobs or changing a relationship… I’ve had really bad circumstances in my life but I’ve always been very, very driven to change them.

Like Miller, Freedman is the ideal subject within the neoliberal culture: self-directed and flexible to transformation (Harris 2003, p. 16). However, her failure to draw attention to structural injustice that prevents access to less advantaged people does not account for intersectional disadvantage. Rather than challenging the dominant norms that oppress, the individual is seen to be responsible for change. Similar to Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook’s Chief Operating Officer (COO) and creator of ‘Lean In’ in the US, but on a comparatively minor scale, Freedman can be described in the Australian context, as bell hooks argues about Sandberg, made ‘via mass media…a new high priestess of feminist movement…Suddenly, as if by magic, mass media brought into public consciousness conversations about feminism, reframing the scope and politics
through an amazing feat of advertising’ (hooks 2013, n.p.). Like Sandberg, Freedman’s understanding of feminism appears premised upon a simple understanding of gender equality, and as hooks argues about Sandberg, Freedman also ‘effectively uses her race and class power and privilege to promote a narrow definition of feminism that obscures and undermines visionary feminist concerns’ (hooks 2013, n.p.).

Claiming to have two to four million readers per month, Mamamia is a profitable commercial enterprise that came under scrutiny (especially on Twitter) for not financially compensating many of its citizen journalist contributors. At the time, Freedman justified this by saying that many of the writers would not otherwise have the exposure offered by Mamamia:

   It’s a free market and there are different exchange propositions on offer for people who have a story to tell. Ours is one of them. But we are not going to apologise for offering literally hundreds of previously unpublished writers the chance to share their work with our large and influential audience. As a direct result, many of those contributors have gone on to land new opportunities—paid gigs, book deals, columns, big jobs, different careers based on the exposure they’ve received on Mamamia. We’re incredibly proud of their success and excited that we got to play a part in making it happen (Mamamia ‘A Word about Mamamia and Our Contributors’ n.d.).

Thus, Mamamia has positioned itself as the saviour of the poor, other(wise) unknown. Feminist writer Hills (2012c, n.p.) argues that although this is not altogether unusual, ‘it’s disappointing: contributing to a culture of devalued writing and lower quality media…especially when working for profitable, non-struggling media companies like Mamamia and News Ltd’. Freedman and Mamamia are supporters of capitalist free-market economics, and apart from earning advertising dollars for clicks on her website, she presents—at times—a voice which requires challenge as it is being marketed as feminist. There are many examples of Freedman’s neoconservative version of feminism.

52 *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead* (2013) is a book by Sheryl Sandberg, the COO of Facebook, which then lead to the ‘Lean In’ movement that discussed women and workplace empowerment. Lean In was criticised by many feminists, such as Fauldi (2013), who said that Lean In was indicative of the ways in which ‘Capitalism, you could say, had midwifed feminism’ (n.p.).
For example, Freedman wrote a piece called ‘This isn’t victim blaming. This is common sense’ (Freedman 2013b, n.p.). Freedman (2013b, n.p.) argued that women can mitigate the risk of rape by reducing alcohol intake, asserting that this is ‘common sense’ and that:

sexual assault is never the fault of the victim. Neither is being hit by a drunk driver. The sole person to blame for such crimes is the perpetrator. But teaching girls how to reduce their risk of sexual assault is not the same thing as victim blaming. It’s not. And we must stop confusing the two.

Freedman’s assertions justifiably created uproar in the mediasphere and among feminists. She is not an expert on sexual assault and arguably used her platform in an irresponsible manner when she disproportionately focused on victims’ behaviour. By using the phrase ‘common sense’, Freedman reduced the complexities of sexual assault to an individual level. Many feminists spoke back to Freedman; for example, Freedman was taken to task by one of the more unpalatable feminist commentators, Clementine Ford, who Tweeted various messages such as ‘God, Mia Freedman pretends Mamamia is a feminist site but still publishes bullsh**t about women, drinking and sexual assault’ (Ford 2013). Experts on the epidemic of sexual assault against women took to the media to correct Freedman’s lack of knowledge on the issue (Seear & Fraser 2013, n.p.). As a polarising force, Freedman elicited several different types of reactions about what actually constitutes victim-blaming and what constitutes risk management, as well as the critics who are sceptical about what Freedman says regardless of what she says. Australian writer John Birmingham (2013b, n.p.) described this incident as the ‘Freedman Flaying’, arguing that the ‘cultural Left’, in making the argument that Freedman is a rape apologist, is ‘not the real reason Freedman is getting flayed’, but rather because of the ‘uncomfortable truth’ that there is a more generalised ‘distaste’ for Mamamia and its popularity, its click-bait and its use of ‘unpaid interns’. Although Freedman was predominantly misguided in her poorly researched opinion piece and used evidence about sexual assault inadequately (i.e., she failed to recognise that it is likely to happen at the hands of someone known to the victim rather than at the hands of a stranger while one is intoxicated), the responses in both the mainstream and online mediasphere demonstrated the types of important cultural conversations that Freedman can generate in both agreement with, and in opposition to, her.
Freedman has failed to draw attention to her racial privilege; for example, she wrote a blog post entitled ‘MIA: The Boy Who Cried Racist’, which discussed the controversy that was created by a Tweet sent by Australian singer and (then) judge on The Voice Australia, Delta Goodrem (Freedman 2013a). Goodrem’s Tweet stated that four white males who dressed up as the four judges on The Voice Australia (Seal, Ricky Martin, Joel Madden and Goodrem) were ‘hilarious’. The criticism was centred on the male who painted himself black (attempting to impersonate Seal), sparking justified charges of racism for ‘black face’. Goodrem’s comments and re-Tweeting of the image were quickly labelled racist. Freedman (2013a) argued that there is a difference between painting an individual face in the name of ‘dress up’ and ‘painting your face black to mock an entire race’. Telling her readers ‘Let’s not be The Boy Who Cried Racist’ and that ‘I also understand that different people have different thresholds; something I consider sexist may not push your buttons and vice versa’ (Freedman 2013a), Freedman again makes the issue an individual one, whereby different people must take control of their beliefs, rather than looking deeper at the historical, social and cultural specificities. By blogging on this, Freedman controls the platform and decides on the agenda and terms of the debate (in this case, of what humour is and what racism is). She fails to account for her own racial privilege and lack of lived experience to speak about this issue; this in turn retains the agenda she controls.

Freedman is overarching in her conservatism, encourages consumerism and is palatable and simplistic in her views on feminism; however, she resonates with a large audience, as revealed by her successes in terms of numbers, her pre-existing profile and otherwise strong media presence over various media platforms. Freedman can spark debate about feminism and its many meanings, which is productive for the broader discourse about feminism, and she has a voice and access that is not available to many when it comes to discussing feminism in Australia. Therefore, as an introduction to feminism, a palatable bite for many who may not otherwise engage with, Freedman at times represents a voice with opportunity. To dismiss her right to be feminist or a feminist leader outright is to disavow her appeal to the millions of women listening to her or disagreeing with and agitating against her on her site. However, Freedman’s former experience—indeed, how she made her name—as a women’s magazine editor deserves scrutiny, as do some of her feminist politics and their connection with for-profit businesses and advertising. Freedman does not speak for or to all women, but to ignore that she speaks to many is ignoring the power of her position. Freedman performs her celebrity with a girl-next-
door familiarity, bonding with her readers with an unthreatening consumerist ethos: the sort of grown-up ‘girl power’ best friend to go shopping with. She is privileged but is seen as a self-made entrepreneur with her ever-expanding media outlets online. By engaging in click-bait, Freedman ensures that she taps into a culture that is obsessed with scandals and soundbytes; however, her reach is far greater than that of other palatable feminists because of the number of people who recognise her in mainstream media.

7.2.3 Melinda Tankard-Reist

Another feminist who has experienced a level of mainstream recognition in the mediasphere is controversial pro-life, anti-porn and anti-sexualisation campaigner Tankard Reist. Within the past few years, she has occupied mainstream media space in Australia as one of the (relatively) few privileged voices given authority to speak under the broad label of ‘feminist’ within this space. Tankard Reist’s website lists her as a ‘Writer-Speaker-Advocate’ (Tankard Reist ‘About’ n.d.). A former media advisor to conservative Senator Brian Harradine, and now media commentator and activist in the anti-porn, anti-raunch movement, Tankard Reist is a conservative Christian who, like Miller, has a flair for self-marketing and entrepreneurialism. She has made an industry around her commentary, talks at schools, books and her co-founded feminist activism group, ‘Collective Shout: for a world free of sexploitation’. Collective Shout is an online grassroots movement that ‘names and shames corporations, advertisers, marketers who objectify women and sexualise girls to sell products and services. Collective Shout has succeeded in campaigns against a number of major corporations’ (Tankard Reist ‘About’ n.d.).53 She has written several books: *Giving Sorrow Words: Women’s Stories of Grief After Abortion* (2000); *Defiant Birth: Women Who Resist Medical Eugenics* (2006); *Getting Real: Challenging the Sexualisation of Girls* (2009; co-edited with Dr Abigail Bray), and *Big Porn Inc: Exposing the Harms of the Global

53 Collective Shout aims to:
name, shame and expose the corporations, advertisers, marketers and media engaging in practices which are offensive and harmful, especially to women and girls, but also to men and boys...Collective Shout makes it easier: we are a ‘one-stop shop’ for concerned people to make their voices heard. Together we are directing the widespread concern on this issue into a series of hard-hitting and targeted campaigns to bring about the change needed (Collective Shout n.d.).
**Pornography Industry** (2011). Like Miller, she has many testimonials and an online shop that sells her merchandise. In the past decade, she has appeared countless times in mainstream media, and she has an active online presence. She also speaks in schools in Australia and overseas. Tankard Reist is an advocate and ambassador working with organisations such as World Vision on anti-trafficking. According to Hills (2012a, n.p.), it was when she:

started writing about the sexualisation of children in the late 2000s that Tankard Reist became the household name she is today. Picking up where debates around young women and raunch culture had left off, the term gave voice to parents’ fears about the impact that sexual imagery and popular culture were having on their kids.

During her time working for Senator Harradine, he blocked the abortion drug RU486. In the past, Tankard Reist has said that abortion is ‘violence against women’ (Morton 2012, n.p.). She is known for being litigious, and Wilson’s (2012b) claims that she is ‘deceptive and duplicitous’ about her religious beliefs caused her lawyers to threaten defamation.

Simic (2010, p. 1) contends that Tankard Reist is ‘one of the most publicly visible feminists in Australia’, and that she has dethroned feminists such as Eva Cox as Australia’s most public feminist voice. Simic outlines Tankard Reist’s anti-raunch, pro-life feminism and outlines its unlikely alliance with radical feminism (the difference between the two is the pro-life component, while the similarity is the anti-porn, anti-sexualisation, anti-raunch component). Thus, Tankard Reist has managed to combine anti-raunch and pro-life agendas. Notwithstanding, Tankard Reist’s authority to speak as a feminist, let alone a celebrity one, has been contentious and subject to the type of ‘conflicts internal to feminism’ to which Wicke (in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 387) refers. However, Tankard Reist’s right to label herself as a feminist is not the focus of my research, as I resist notions of feminist-label ownership. Rather, I am interested in the space of contested meanings about what constitutes feminism and feminist identity that
occurred when a hive of heightened activity erupted—firstly in the Twitterverse—because of what became known as ‘#MTRsues’.54

In January 2012, Sunday Life magazine (part of The Sydney Morning Herald) featured an article by feminist journalist, author and blogger Hills (2012a), entitled ‘Who’s Afraid of Melinda Tankard Reist?’ Hills’ ‘failure’ to divulge Tankard Reist’s Christian background and its influence and effect on her feminist agenda sparked some criticism within feminist and atheist communities. Questions of feminist authenticity and competency were raised in various forums. During the discussions, the omnipresent questions that surface in feminist discourse about whether one can be pro-life and entitled to the ‘feminist’ label were prominent. In the midst of these discussions, Wilson (2012a n.p.) posted an entry on her blog: ‘The Questions Rachel Hills Didn’t Ask Melinda Tankard Reist’. In this post, Wilson questions Tankard Reist’s religious affiliations, labelling her a Baptist and ‘deceptive and duplicitous’ about her religious beliefs (2012a, n.p.). Soon after, Tankard Reist’s lawyers issued a letter asking Wilson to retract her statement due to the laws of defamation (Farouque 2012, n.p.). In the Twitterverse, Cannold created the #MTRsues hashtag, which housed thousands of Tweets about Tankard Reist, as well as broader feminist issues. It also transited into the broader mediasphere.

#MTRsues attracted celebrity supporters for Wilson such as comedians Wil Anderson and unpalatable feminist commentator Deveny. During the debates—both pre- (sparked by the Hills piece) and post-#MTRsues—many opinion pieces were published in newspaper columns and on the Internet, and celebrity feminist icons such as Anne Summers (2012, n.p.) and Eva Cox weighed into conversations to add their authority (2012, n.p.). Summers and Cox are examples of the types of ‘cultural actors [who] are granted the authority to speak about feminism, and to have these utterances validated, in ways not permitted others’ (Taylor 2008, p. 31). Summers (2012, n.p.) argued that Tankard Reist is not a feminist because her position of lobbying ‘against the abuse of women and girls’ bodies through pornography’ is contradictory because she is anti-

54 #mtrsues is a Twitter hashtag created around the events that occurred.
abortion, and this is ‘the ultimate assault on a woman’s body: requiring her to carry a child she has decided she cannot have…Just because she says she is a feminist does not mean she is’. The debate that occurred after the Sunday Life piece by Hills—and then from the #MTRsues affair—was distracting, divisive and productive for Australian feminism. This was a significant series of events for Australian feminism, as the cultural conversations about feminism have publicly expanded because of such disruptions due to the more (although still not democratic or egalitarian) accessible space afforded by social media (although the dominance of celebrity feminists was apparent in the mainstream media). The #mtrsues controversy provided an opportunity for many already-established feminist commentators in the Australian mediasphere to further solidify and mark their positions. Upon reflection, two weeks after her initial piece was published, Hills (2012b, n.p.) remarked that ‘it is a rare weekend in the life of this journalist that five opinion pieces are published in major newspapers in response to something I wrote…Actually, let’s be honest—it is completely unprecedented’. There were at least a dozen print opinion pieces about Tankard Reist and #mtrsues, and Mamamia wrote a piece about Tankard Reist entitled ‘Is this Australia’s Most Controversial Feminist’, which quickly generated more than 300 comments (Morton 2012, n.p.).

It was therefore as much about the responding commentators and the conversations that it sparked as it was about Tankard Reist’s threats of litigation towards Wilson. The #mtrsues affair was as much about positioning oppositional relations between feminists and questioning the idea of feminist competency and authenticity. The Twittersphere, where much of the debate began and continued (although it also moved to opinion pieces), was the key location for conversations and clashes about the meaning of feminism and feminist labelling. Tankard Reist lost control as the medium (Twitter) ensured that she could not maintain authority as #mtrsues took on a life of its own. At that point Tankard Reist attempted to regain control via legal avenues. While the Twitterverse was alive with #mtrsues trending, the: mainstream press was much taken with the idea of a spat within the sisterhood and framed the issue not one of the nuances of public image and the threatened use of law to quell public debate, but as a demarcation dispute concerning the proper titleholders to the identity of “feminist” (Gleeson 2013, p. 83).

Keane (2012, n.p.) argued that:
the #MTRsues debate has gone off on a tangent about whether Tankard-Reist can call herself a feminist. It’s a bizarre discussion. If Tankard-Reist insists on calling herself a feminist, that’s entirely her right. She can call herself whatever she likes. It may not be accurate, but that’s her lookout. It’s only a problem when others, and especially journalists, uncritically repeat her self-description.

Much of the feminist blogosphere was inundated with commentary about Tankard Reist’s attempt to control the discourse via legal methods, and her position regarding abortion and lack of personal choice by other women being driven by her personal religious ideology. Blogger newswithnipples argued that #mtrsues was productive for feminism because it:

very publicly told people that there are different feminisms. That we’re not all pro-life and we’re not all anti-porn…Clearly, Tankard Reist’s pro-life feminism is complicated, but that’s her business as long as her feminism is not presented as the only feminism. This isn’t a problem with feminism, it’s a problem with the number of voices the mainstream media lets in (<http://newswithnipples.com/2012/01/26/we-dont-have-to-agree-with-each-other/> 2012, n.p.).

Cox (2012, n.p.) argued that ‘the issue of Tankard Reist’s religious beliefs and whether they are acknowledged is not the real issue here. It is a surrogate argument about who can call themselves a feminist’. She further argued that Tankard Reist’s attempts to silence Wilson were potentially attempts for publicity, and that the work of campaigners such as Tankard Reist ‘against tasteless porn and crappy T-shirts may seek to protect women, but they fail to address the broader gender biases of market forces. This is the argument we should be having—not nit-picking about perceived religious ties’ (Cox 2012, n.p.). Thus Cox is effectively arguing in a similar vein to Cannold that some activists are ‘fighting the proxy’ (2011, n.p.), and this is similar to Razer’s stance on activism, and indeed what now passes as activism. Dr Cathy Sherry, however, wrote in defence of Tankard-Reist, whom she claimed was being silenced, and took aim at bloggers, stating that ‘now that unaccountable bloggers, sneering and abusing from the safety of their bedrooms, have entered the fray, the pool of contributors to civil public debate is even smaller’ (2012, n.p.). Sherry’s accusations about bloggers represent a position of privilege and elitism about who is permitted to speak in public debate. If Tankard Reist is permitted to call herself a feminist, others are entitled to argue against
her beliefs. The broader issue is, however, Sherry’s accusation that other feminists are silencing Tankard Reist, yet she does not acknowledge the silencing attempts against blogger, Dr Jennifer Wilson, by Tankard Reist’s legal threats. Wilson, until the #mtrsues event, was a relatively unknown blogger, and Tankard Reist had held mainstream media space as a commentator. The power imbalance was startling regarding litigation threats, and accusations about Tankard Reist being silenced and bullied were disproportionate as it was Tankard Reist who summoned defamation law arguably in an endeavour to regulate the situation and silence her opposition. Conservative Tankard Reist defender, journalist Miranda Devine, labelled vocal Tankard Reist opponent, Dr Leslie Cannold an ‘abortion enthusiast’ (2012, n.p.) and said that the anger which exploded in the Twitterverse, and then the mainstream media was driven by ‘by spite, sanctimony and anti-Christian malice. This attempt to purge Christians from the marketplace of ideas is nothing less than 21st century McCarthyism’ (Devine 2012, n.p.). Julia Baird argued that the #mtrsues affair should have been productive to enhance the state of feminist debate, rather than becoming about Tankard-Reist’s personal faith as she sees Tankard Reist as raising ‘important issues, including the pervasiveness of porn culture and the sexualisation of young girls’ (2012, n.p.).

While the focus of this research is not the sexualisation and pornography debates as such, it is important to note that some commentators such as Miller and Tankard Reist have recently dominated discussions in the mainstream media about these issues (though Miller less so as her feminism is more about individual girls’ self-esteem and body image). Miller’s feminism, while fraught in its focus on self-promotion, entrepreneurialism and individual choice (and lack of focus on structural inequities, and intersections of class, race and sexuality for example), is not as conservative as Tankard-Reist’s. Melinda Tankard Reist is best positioned as a moral entrepreneur. Her presence is often both palatable and unpalatable in her politics, and to many other feminists; but she is more palatable than unpalatable as she is highly conservative. However, similar to the unpalatable, she is often a polarising figure (e.g., the #mtrsues affair), yet she is palatable in her conservatism around certain values such as example, pro-life. Howard Becker (1963) argued that moral entrepreneurs fall into two categories: rule creators and rule enforcers. A moral entrepreneur may be a group or individual who wants to maintain norms. Tankard Reist often operates as a moral entrepreneur and her organisation, Collective Shout, falls within that framework as the activism model is one
based upon culture jamming and boycotts (e.g., the targeting of condom billboards to be censored, ‘sexualisation’ and retail chains that might be seen to engage in ‘pornification’ because of the tee-shirts they sell). Furthermore, there is often a denial of agency for women within Tankard Reist’s politics as Gleeson contends she ‘tends to portray women less as active participants and more as passive victims in their relentless personal and cultural sexualisation’ (Gleeson 2013, pp. 84–85).

Further, ‘sexualisation is ‘big business’ (Bragg 2012, p. 407). Bragg positions some similar campaigners in the UK as moral entrepreneurs (2012, p. 407), and this is also relevant to Tankard-Reist, and to a lesser extent, Dannielle Miller as they have ‘have become mini industries in their own right, selling books, courses, workshops, posters and apps, and making frequent media appearances’ (Bragg 2012, p. 407). According to Charles, ‘the level of public interest in what has variously been called ‘raunch culture’, ‘pornification’ or more broadly ‘sexualisation’ of culture, has created new opportunities for enterprising women’ (2012b, p. 317). She positions Miller and Tankard Reist in this way. As a moral entrepreneur, Tankard Reist can be seen as advocating censorship and contributing to moral panic on certain issues such as the ‘pornification’ of culture, and sexualisation of children. This can be perceived as anti-feminist crusading imposing restrictions on the agency and perspective of others; this has enabled the development of Tankard Reist’s feminist celebrity, and made it distinctive in the Australian context.

According to Bragg, ‘in recent years, the ‘sexualisation of childhood has moved into the centre ground of public policy and debate internationally, despite the conceptual confusions and inadequate evidence surrounding the processes denoted by the term’ (2012, p. 406). Bragg argues that in the United Kingdom recently that the many government commissioned reports and a review called the Bailey Review of 2011 and proposals made by such reports and reviews may actually ‘amplify the voices of organised campaign groups at the expense of young people’s’ (2012, p. 406). This is a consideration for mass awareness campaigners who may wish to use Tankard Reist et al.

The Tankard-Reist (#mtrsues) issue provoked discussion on several levels, however whether the mainstream media chooses more/other voices to allow in is questionable given the amount of publicity Tankard Reist attracts due to her divisive public persona. I contend that while it may not, that bloggers, online petitions and larger feminist mobilisations can help create greater diversity of voices being heard; though this does
not mean that even some of those will be amplified in the same ways. The feminist online spaces have demonstrated potential for productive discourse, but also bullying and silencing. While Tankard-Reist may raise some valid concerns, it remains critical to consider in a public awareness campaign who is speaking as much as what they are saying as the agenda needs careful negotiation by experts in the field related to the specific issue.

7.3 The Unpalatable

The unpalatable, like the palatable, are not the same as each other. I position Helen Razer and Catherine Deveny as unpalatable feminists. They do, at times, blend and blur into palatable politics (in varying degrees). They are different from each other in the way they present issues, For example, Razer’s politics is predominantly class driven and she rejects the idea of ‘rape culture’ which other feminists, such as Clementine Ford, regularly address in their media. Razer holds a disdain for online ‘activism’ (indeed what passes as ‘activism’), and is vocal on her position against ‘call out’ culture (about ‘rape culture’, the Everyday Sexism project, and trolling, for example), whereas Deveny uses her platform to speak out on issues such as trolling online. Razer’s approach is often polemic, but with a strong academic basis, and she will frequently cite academics such as a Judith Butler in her acerbic criticism. Both Deveny and Razer are humorous, and can be regarded as being unashamedly ‘angry’. Their key roles, I argue, are to provoke, to anger, to stir and to speak back in the media, at the media, and at audiences, and often, at and to other feminists. They challenge, and they help create and progress cultural conversations. Often uncomfortably.

7.3.1 Helen Razer:

Helen Razer is arguably the most unpalatable of the unpalatable feminist commentators currently speaking within the mediasphere in Australia. She is difficult in both the

55 As mentioned, there are other unpalatable feminists, such as Clementine Ford, whose presence in the mediasphere—especially in online and social media—is increasing, and while it is outside of the scope of this thesis, Ford would be a valid study for unpalatable feminism.
content of her words, and in the way she speaks: to digest her words takes more effort as she frequently uses abstruse language, and has been criticised by the ABC TV’s program, Media Watch, for example for this (1999, n.p.). She has held opinion columns in major newspapers such as The Age and the Sydney Morning Herald as well as being a regular contributor to online independent news media outlet, Crikey. She studied gender and queer studies at the University of Sydney, and is one of the few feminist voices speaking in the mediasphere whose sexuality and discussion around sexuality is complicated. She argues that ‘sexuality doesn’t exist; it’s a Western construct’ (2014b, n.p.). She calls herself a ‘sexually ambivalent middle-aged crank’ (Razer 2013a, n.p.). Razer was in a same-sex relationship for fifteen years (Razer 2013a, n.p.), but is anti-same-sex marriage (Razer 2012b, n.p.) as ‘gay marriage’ fills me with bile. I do not understand why many persons, including the minor politicians currently advocating for its legitimacy, use this dicky phrase. Like the pairings, ‘women’s writing’, ‘aboriginal art’ or ‘disabled person’, ‘gay marriage’ implies nothing so much as second-best; a far shoddier version of the norm’ (Razer 2010c, n.p.). Razer began her career in the early 1990s as a broadcaster on Australian ABC’s FM music station, Triple J, and was there for many years before leaving due to being stalked by a ‘fan’. She has authored several non-fiction books, and writes a blog and is active in social media participating in media discourse by writing provocative opinion pieces.

Razer has consistently written and spoken on gender and feminism, but says that ‘my relationship with feminism is long, ardent and difficult…Feminism. It keeps me awake at night’, (2013b, n.p.). As a feminist killjoy, Razer ‘in the thick sociality of everyday spaces’ (Ahmed 2010a, p. 65) often intervenes in media debates (online and in more mainstream discourse) to speak back to other feminists; she is a killjoy among killjoys, and kills happiness among and around certain palatable feminists. Ahmed says that ‘to be recognised as a feminist is to be assigned to category of difficulty. You are ‘already read’ as ‘not easy to get along with’ when you name yourself as a feminist. You have to show that you are not difficult through displaying signs of good will and happiness’ (2010a, p. 66). Dannielle Miller and Mia Freedman frequently present positivity, and plea for kindness, niceness; Catherine Deveny and Helen Razer do not. Razer argues that ‘women are not nicer. Women are not a civilising influence. Women are just as capable of avarice and stupidity as anyone’ (2013b, n.p.).
Ahmed argues that ‘within feminism, some bodies more than others can be attributed as the cause of unhappiness’ (2010a, p. 67). Ahmed argues that the ‘figure of the angry black woman’ (2010a, p. 67) is one such feminist because she may highlight the racism within feminism. Razer frequently questions the state and foci of feminist discourse, and activism, in the mediasphere. She is similar to Camille Paglia, whom, in attacking the academy, ‘feeds from the hand she bites’ (Wicke, in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 387). Razer’s ‘hand’ is the media; it is the vehicle through which she found her celebrity, and she has made a career from criticism. Razer frequently draws attention to issues of race and class, and she has criticised the state of Australian feminism which she regards as victim to the shallowness of ‘girl-power’ and Sex and the City type stereotypes:

In the time before extreme makeovers, feminism proudly bleated its message of hope. While some of feminism's gains have been naturalised by a generation of younger women, many others remain unrealised. Feminism and gender issues have now moved into a territory that is difficult to pilot and almost impossible to describe (2005, n.p.).

Razer has been consistently cynical of popular feminist movements like Destroy the Joint and Collective Shout, but also of individual feminists such as Mia Freedman. Razer has disregard for Collective Shout. She says it is ‘an organisation founded by Melinda Tankard Reist and whose stated aim is to end ‘sexploitation’ (its covert goal is to make up silly words)’ (Razer 2014b, n.p.) Razer argues that the battles to erase sexism through protesting events such as lingerie football games or distasteful tee-shirts ‘fixates on meaningless battles’ as this does not mean that feminism has ‘won’ (2013e, n.p.). She tells other feminists to ‘shut up with your stupid protests against lingerie football, poor old Snoop Dogg and the liberation of brown women from their oppressors. Your protests are worse than ineffective; they’re actually making things worse’ (2013e, n.p.). She is fearless in her polemical ripostes and has been accused of criticising feminists as ‘doing it wrong’ rather than being part of the solution (2012a). Razer invokes a ‘legitimate’ feminism. She wrote a provocative opinion piece entitled ‘O feminism: UR doing it wrong’ (Razer 2012a, n.p.) Razer however refuses to neatly package her work and words to fit into a postfeminist and neoliberal palatability:

I recall an era when feminism’s purview was not limited to banging on about the need for more fat chicks in glossy magazines. While others fight for the right to force-feed Kate Moss, I continue antique fretting over equal pay, domestic violence and federal representation. At 40, I am old and clearly out of step with
a movement that demands Size 14 representation. And, at 40, I am quite inured to life in a nation that tolerates only the merest debate on feminism (Razer 2010a, n.p.)

Thus, she advocates a critique of feminism and patriarchy that is socialist and challenges a feminist politics where ‘calling out’ sexism or boycotting products, for example is positioned as effective feminist ‘activism’:

Do you REALLY think The Patriarchy will cease to function if you boycott a bar or a performer or a clothing store? Are you jamming the gears of capitalism by defending Chrissie Swan?56 …You need to read some macroeconomics, bitches, and spread the fucking word. Hey. I’m right. I was, in fact, appointed feminism’s door bitch. And, no, you can’t come in if all you have to talk about is The Need For More Women CEOs and Less Sexism in Ads (2013a, n.p.).

Razer often writes in a polemical manner to provoke, and not necessarily to argue the point. While Razer raises valid concerns and criticism about a lack of substantive engagement, she disavows entrée level feminist politics, and a ‘net worth’ approach due to a rigid belief that there is a better/right way to engage with feminism and to be feminist. She has made her career by being divisive and difficult and aims to provoke as she tells her readers to ‘skip ahead to the comments… No one reads a fucking thing any more apart from the headline and the comments so why not just jump ahead to the rage?’ (Razer 2014a, n.p.) as she believes people do not look locate the structural inequities, or enquire more deeply. This is something she addresses in her latest book co-authored with Bernard Keane, political writer for Crikey. Its title aptly indicates her position on media debate:  A short history of stupid: the decline of reason and why public debate makes us want to scream (2014).

56 Chrissie Swann is an Australian media personality, who made her name as a former reality television ‘star’ on Big Brother, and later on popular television and radio. Swann came under media scrutiny for having overweight children and being overweight herself (J.Mo & Elle 2012, n.p.)
Razer highlights racial privilege and she refuses to accept the logic that white women in powerful positions equal progress. She refuses to be seen as ‘nice’ and as such, stands in contrast with the palatable figures of Miller and Mia Freedman, for example. She is caustic and often, seen as vitriolic. Razer is a contrarian who enjoys a stoush. She is highly critical of the media as a campaigning tool, including the online movement, Destroy the Joint. For example, she said that:

There are two chief DTJ problems and the first is that it feels like a cultural studies tutorial from 1991… The second problem is that DTJ and her associates actually believe they are healing the faithless. Look. Here’s the thing: telling people they are being disadvantaged is a tricky business, Caroline Chisholm. There’s something dangerously missionary in an approach that seeks to draft sisters to a Crusade chiefly at war with nonsense on the behalf of hollow gods (Razer 2013a, n.p.).

Razer is critical of Destroy the Joint and Everyday Sexism because they are not substantively theorised. She says of Everyday Sexism that it is ‘theory-lite’ (Razer 2014c, n.p.). The discussions about what collective struggle might be are questions Razer raises as she is concerned with the material, lived experience for women, not about for example, ‘The fast cycles of uncritical rage that greeted a number of purportedly ‘misogynist’ incidents…dressing of children in appropriate clothing, naming a racehorse as a woman’ (2013b, n.p.). Arguing that Destroy the Joint ‘destroys the point’ in that it is a ‘ragegasm’ (2013b, n.p.), she calls for a more nuanced, considered feminist politics, and often provocatively invokes a ‘feminism and feminist gone wrong’ corrective view. For example, she says:

And don’t give me that ‘there are many feminisms’ shit. Yes, of course there are and my experience of gender is markedly different to that of a lass (or lad) living, say, in Maputo. But, for the sake of fuck, at SOME point, we have to agree about our basic aims and get off this DTJ-endorsed fap-wreck before we all perish from the carnal stink (2013b, n.p.).

Razer draws attention to privilege, as well as essentialism (Razer 2013b), and contends that Destroy the Joint is missing the point by not discussing politics or macroeconomics, which she sees as far more crucial to feminism. Razer, conversant in politics and Gender Studies, consistently holds a mirror up to what often passes as feminist media commentary. She is concerned that the struggle is unfocussed and that boycotts and
online ‘activism’ are not, for example, fighting what she sees as the ‘real’ struggle: masculinised violence and feminised poverty (Razer 2013b, n.p.). She refuses to simplify language and has solid academic ammunition, frequently citing Judith Butler in her opinion pieces. For example, Razer has said ‘my ideas about gender come more from Judith Butler than they do from, say, Growing Pains’ (2013b, n.p.). By this, Razer means that her critique is less Cultural Studies and more connected with presumably ‘higher’ forms of theory. The argument is binaristic as Cultural Studies is a highly specialised interdisciplinary field which was originally meant as a post-graduate discipline (that is, students would presumably have come from disciplines such as philosophy). Her greatest strength is to provide an alternate from the dominant voices in the mediasphere as she draws attention to issues around socio-economic class; she is an outlier, and even more than Deveny, she is acidic and refuses to participate in ‘niceties’ as she challenges what constitutes effective feminist activism and discourse; she challenges activism that becomes nothing more than calling out. Mia Freedman, has been a target for Razer’s ire. According to Razer, Freedman ‘is among many bright Australian women who hold that the sight of a little cottage cheese on celebrity thighs has the potential to ‘empower’. My own view is that such ‘real’, ‘bold’ images are every bit as useful to the ongoing feminist struggle as, say, a discount voucher for a push-up bra’ (2010a, n.p.). Razer takes aim at what can be regarded as the ‘proxy fighting’ within feminism (Cannold 2011, n.p.), and the dominance of magazine editors (e.g., Mia Freedman) inclusiveness at feminism, and says that:

it's too crammed with fashion magazine editors to make room for another unhelpful tit. I mean. Shit. If we keep letting these people in, all we'll ever talk about is How Photoshop is Killing Women... And, yes, there's room for everyone in an inclusive movement blah blah blah. But, when the actual fart will we start talking about something other than accessories? (2012a).

Razer’s consistent insistence that feminism become more reflexive, political and less about self-promotion for individuals contrasts the postfeminist neoliberalism of Miller and Freedman, for example, who operate commercial enterprises, and whose feminist ‘politics’ is palatable and focused on the individual experience and agency. Razer has made other references to that she considers to be inarticulate or ineffectual arguments as belonging in academia. She also has said that an argument writer and pianist, Anna Goldsworthy made about misogyny in Quarterly Essay (June 2013, Essay 50) was ‘difficult to unpick… as its ambition does not exceed ‘Some things in the media make
me uncomfortable’ and ‘It’s okay to be middle-class and still whine about stuff.’ The proper spot for this sort of debate – such as it is – is a forum no less serious than first-year cultural studies’ (2013c, n.p.). Ultimately Razer believes that the media is not the most effective vehicle of and for power to make substantive social and economic change as ‘items for mass consumption exist inevitably to maintain the conditions that encourage mass consumption and substantial change within this cycle is rarely possible. What media has made possible, however, is a great belief in its own influence’ (Razer 2014d, n.p.).

7.3.2 Catherine Deveny

Catherine Deveny, similar to Helen Razer, can be understood as a ‘feminist killjoy’ (Ahmed 2010). She, like Freedman, has the most mainstream visibility of the feminists in this chapter. Deveny has not always been known for her feminism, but on the celebrity feminist continuum, she is fast emerging as a leading feminist commentator. She began her career as a comedian, and now has a profile as a writer, a columnist for major newspapers, and regularly appears on television. She is a vocal atheist and commonly addresses atheist conferences, and participates in extensive charitable endeavours such as advocating for the rights of refugees. Deveny was named as one of the Top 100 Melbournians by The Age newspaper. She often writes ‘unpalatable’ opinion pieces, causes controversy for her comments, she is loud, swears in her writing, and will challenge normative ideas across a range of issues (such as atheism, gendered division of labour, and motherhood). For example, in a piece of The Guardian (Australia), Deveny writes against the fetishisation of marriage as ‘social critique, financial control and religious oppression is not what it was in 1932; we don't even have to have children, be straight or be coupled. But still, the fetishisation of marriage continues, unbridled…There are many with vested interests in keeping people, particularly women, in unhealthy relationships to preserve social order’ (Deveny 2013b, n.p.). Deveny also writes against the elevation of motherhood. She argues that it is neither the ‘most important job in the world...nor is it the toughest… if this is meant to exalt motherhood, then why is the line always used to sell toilet cleaner?’ (Deveny 2013a, n.p.). In the same article, Deveny talks about the valorisation of the relationship of mothers to children over other important relationships (e.g., fathers, grandparents, carers). She also takes aim at the idea of biological parenting in the same piece. Deveny sees this exalting of mothers as a form of oppression as ‘enabling this dogma devalues
the unpaid labor of rearing children as much as it strategically devalues women’s worth at work’ (2013a, n.p.)

Deveny is often concerned with the devaluing and feminisation of certain careers (e.g., childcare), and has spoken out about issues around gender pay disparity. For example, in 2012, there was a push for an increase to childcare worker wages by United Voice union in Australia. Deveny penned a number of opinion pieces on this in Mamamia. The power of Deveny’s celebrity as an opinion maker was quickly demonstrated as the article gathered almost 500 comments within 24 hours, and resulted in the associated petition gathering more media attention, and (then) Prime Minister Gillard ‘live blogging’ at Mamamia on this issue several days later. She is committed to lending voice for working class women, and says that the focus must be moved from ‘the ‘more women on boards’ rhetoric to having women and particularly the hundreds of thousands of low paid women – paid fairly’ (Deveny 2012b, n.p.).

Deveny proudly displays her body in that is often abject in the media: no make-up, gapped teeth, ‘overweight’ and appearing in her swim wear. For example, she wrote a post for Mamamia.com entitled ‘I’m 80 kilos, size 16 and I love my body’ (2011b, n.p.) where she tells readers that ‘I am not apologetic. I LOVE and constantly flaunt my 80 kilo size 16 bod. Tight dresses, short skirts and tits out on a daily basis. I love my 80 kilo size 16 bod! I run, cycle, swim, strip off and shag whenever I have the opportunity’ (Deveny 2012b, n.p.). Her feminism is unapologetic and she refuses to censor her body, her words, or her use of social media. Like Razer, Deveny was fired from her column with a national newspaper, The Age. The reason was because she had Tweeted several comments about celebrities at an awards ceremony, and caused offence within the public. She stood by her words, claiming that she was trying to ‘expose celebrity raunch culture and the sexual objectification of women, which is rife on the red carpet’ (Sankey 2010, n.p.) Razer tweeted support to Deveny about whom she said ‘I'm not nearly as mischievous or well-known as Catherine. And, of course, I am not as prominently employed as she was until last week’ (2010b, n.p.). Of Deveny, Razer says that ‘It is broadly known that she has had the filter between id and keyboard surgically removed to allow for a unique free-flow of rage’ (2010b, n.p.).

She has come under fire in multiple platforms for being too vocal (‘Questions and Mockery’ 2012, n.p.). For example, there was a controversy after she appeared on the same QandA television show panel as Peter Jensen, Anglican Archbishop. Blogger,
Chrys Stevenson, penned a post defending Deveny and states that ‘Deveny’s opposition to Anglican Archbishop, Peter Jensen, resulted in an onslaught of vitriolic criticism and abuse – even from those who claim to support her positions on asylum seekers, same-sex marriage and women’s equality’ (Stevenson 2012, n.p.). Deveny was scrutinised about her appearance on this panel in multiple places such as in the blogosphere, social media and in newspapers. Stevenson said of the Twitter #qanda feed during Deveny’s appearance that ‘the criticism on Twitter went into overdrive. According to comments on the #qanda Twitter stream Deveny is: an ugly, extremist, stupid, unintelligent, idiotic, thoughtless, self-righteous, self-centred, self-absorbed, nasty, confused, frustrated, bitter, twisted, humourless, un-funny, unreasonable, unrespectable, disrespectful, sarcastic, mocking, catty, hateful, boorish, blustering, bullying bitch’ (Stevenson 2012, n.p.) For example, The Australian newspaper wrote that:

Discussing the use of the word ‘submit’ in Anglican marriage ceremonies… (Deveny) offered this insight to the Archbishop: ‘Now you can choose to go to the Anglican Church and be married in a museum by a dinosaur.’ This was the sneering tone she is renowned for and presumably what she was invited on to the show to deliver. Important social issues might deserve a little more intelligence and respect (‘Questions and Mockery’ 2012, n.p.).

Apparently Deveny lacked respect for taking on a ‘sacred’ institution, and one of its figureheads. Stevenson then outlines examples of vitriol via emails that Deveny subsequently received. These sorts of ad hominem attacks for being a ‘feminist killjoy’ are common for popular media feminist commentator and even for unknown ‘lonewolf activists’ who speak out via social media (as demonstrated in Chapter 5 on #sackgavin). Deveny most often functions as an unpalatable outlier to mainstream discourse, and she does not retreat from being a ‘feminist killjoy’.

Stevenson outlined in her blogpost how the feedback on Deveny indicated that there was a (false) perception that she dominated conversation. However, Stevenson examined the QandA transcript in detail, word-by-word, and charted the percentage of conversation dominated by each of the five panellists. She found that Deveny spoke 17% of the time, compared with Jensen’s 36%, and that while Deveny had been accused of being dominant, that she had not been, and that, ‘the outrageous criticism of Deveny only makes sense if we understand that her performance was viewed through the filters
of cultural, gender and religious bias. Deveny’s sin is to be an outspoken woman’ (Stevenson 2012, n.p.). Deveny’s dominance could thus be regarded as for what she said, rather than how much she spoke. Deveny is an unpalatable woman, refusing to conform or be silenced, yet it is what she says, not how much or how she says, that becomes the issue. Talking on gendered ‘e-bile’ (Jane 2012a), and the seriousness of trolling, Deveny says that ‘having the misfortune of being born with an opinion and a vagina, I am no stranger to these trolls who try to get my attention on an hourly basis. Women who colour outside the lines cop a hundred times more vitriol than men and it’s a thousand times more vicious’ (Deveny 2012c, n.p.). She also speaks back to trolls, often using humour, calling a 2014 stage show, Trollhunter, co-written with feminist, writer and playwright, Van Badham. The show, according to Deveny is a ‘cockslap event’ (http://www.catherinedeveny.com/trollhunter/). Taking aim using comments trolls have directed at them (e.g., ‘too ugly to rape’ (Van Badham) and ‘acid tongued, potty mouth’ (Deveny)), the show is described as:

A hilarious battle axe wielding comic assault through multimedia and actual material of internet trolls into misogyny and internet culture…Catherine Deveny…Leather armour, battle axe in tow with a support army of other pissed off feminists from the media. Deveny goes to battle against the 21st century’s most revolting new phenomenon, the Internet Troll (http://www.catherinedeveny.com/trollhunter/).

Deveny is not often ‘safe’, and does not shy away from being unpalatable. She wrote about an opinion piece by conservative commentator, Miranda Devine, when Devine had written about Labor politician, Senator Penny Wong, and her same sex partner having a child together. Deveny stated that ‘If you are a conservative and/or a right-wing bigot you need Devine and people like her to massage your prejudices…If you are a progressive you need her to voice the extreme beliefs of the other team to get your beliefs over the line... Embedded in these arguments is the indisputable moral supremacy of straight, white, married, monogamous middle-class church-going people with mortgages’ (2011a, n.p.). Deveny, much like Razer, performs and maintains the celebrity feminist subject position through her refusal to conform, through provocation and refusal to be silenced, polite and nice, and through an acidic humour. Like all of the celebrity feminists, she is prolific in her use of social and online media. She is represented as an unruly woman (Rowe 1995). She is often viewed as an out of control and unpalatable woman in the mediasphere. As an unruly woman, Deveny’s comedy
often ‘contests patriarchal power and is so available to women and all oppressed people as a weapon with which to express their aggression and rage’ (Rowe 1995, p. 102). Thus, Deveny keeps her celebrity alive through her divisive, provocative Tweets, commentary and representational practices in social and mainstream media.

This section has explored if the contemporary rapidity in popular feminist commentary enables celebrity feminists to deliver more than palatable, recycled sound-bites or sound-bytes. Are ‘newer’ celebrity feminists in Australia offering more than neoconservative reactionary activism that aligns with dominant cultural postfeminist and neoliberal discourses? Is there a level self-celebratory brand power tainting this ‘active cultural play’ (Wicke, in Landes (ed.) 1998, pp. 390-391)? Does this popularisation of feminist discourse ‘deny and degrade the fullness’ of the movement, as Adrienne Rich (1995, p. 6) suggests, or are there ‘valuable sticking points’ (Wicke in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 404) that can help perform an ‘adhesive’ function (Inglis 2010, p. 4) in campaigning? In this chapter, my conceptual framework was explored in context with the five celebrity feminists under examination. The framework consists of three notions: the palatable; the unpalatable; and the tensions between, around and within celebrity feminists that results the unpalatable-palatable. The friction that supports the unpalatable-palatable is often embodied within celebrity feminists as well as within their commentary and it is this tension that allows them to ‘succeed’ in the mediasphere, thus enabling positions within mainstream ‘space’ because they often invoke ‘palatable’ neoliberal sympathies to engage with that neoliberalism itself finds ‘unpalatable’; alternatively they are palatable within an (otherwise often) unpalatable neoliberal and postfeminist cultural climate. This complex configuration also relates to the need to appeal to mainstream audiences via celebrity feminists, while agitating for change. As noted, such a plea is a connection for visibility, yet can be difficult to consume if a substantive feminist politics is evacuated through the format and medium. To renounce celebrity feminisms in the mediasphere is to discount its potential for feminist mass awareness campaigning; however, there needs to be a level of necessary criticism about shallow politics that appropriates feminism via window dressing; it must raise questions and criticisms around exclusions of race, ability, class, and sexuality, for example. The awareness campaigning style always must come with a caveat and an expected (and hoped for) level of provocative criticism.
The neoliberal impetus in the academy often precludes women academics speaking in the public zone. However, hierarchies valorising the academic – or other forms of feminisms - over the popular modes of feminist discourse are often desultory. They (academic and popular) have differing functions and modes of discourse (though some celebrity feminists such as Greer can adapt within roles with ease), and popular media feminist commentators should not be ‘silenced’ in broader feminist discourse. It is more complex than this, however, and some academics that are/have been seen to regularly comment on issues in the media, have come under criticism for doing so. The key research question arising from this chapter has been how do these figures help to progress feminist debate, discourse and awareness in Australia? I argue that to appeal to broad mainstream audiences, that the celebrity feminist figure can often be advantageous at keeping feminism within the public sphere (while not uncomplicated) and as such, I argue for a ‘net worth’ approach while acknowledging that the popular feminist commentariat comes with a ‘cost’ in the postfeminist neoliberal climate. Furthermore, claiming feminist identity as a ‘public’ voice is a political act in and of itself, and the threats and personal vitriol directed at the individual feminists under examination cannot be ignored as insignificant, nor can the bravery in the popular media feminists speaking back.

Charlotte Brunsdon says that ‘Wicke is insistent...that celebrity feminism cannot be dismissed in the name of some real authentic feminism which is ‘elsewhere’’ (1997, p. 102). Brunsdon follows an argument that Wicke makes about Naomi Wolf when Wicke argues that ‘however problematic, some form of feminist discourse is occurring within Wolfian celebrity space’ (in Landes (ed.) 1994, p. 765). I also argue that even though in the Australian popular feminist landscape there are problematic issues (although I do not engage in contestations over feminist authenticity) there is ‘some form of feminist discourse’ happening with much unexplored potential for mass awareness cultural attitudinal change campaigning. For example, the anthology *Destroying the Joint*, (Caro (ed.) 2013) could be interpreted as, in part, an appropriation of the success (in terms of visibility through virality) of the grassroots online activist group (Destroy the Joint) by some (not all) celebrity feminists who were not involved in the initial activist group; however, the use of celebrity feminists within the edited collection was a powerful aid to ensure the ongoing visibility of Destroy the Joint (the online movement), and allow it to maintain a political presence within the mediasphere. However, there is meaningful, and meaning-making, feminist discourse in the mediasphere because of the presence
and advocacy of these figures. Thus celebrity feminists have potential to be drawn upon for broader – and sometimes better - feminist campaigning. As Wicke argues against a refutation of the popular as though it is an ‘ideological ruin’ (in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 391), I too maintain that the figure of the celebrity feminist in Australia is not to be lightly dismissed as the cultural impact and ‘success’ of Freedman, Miller et al. is apparent. What constitutes ‘success’ however is contested, and this is something that I suggest in the conclusion of this research, needs to be negotiated by mass awareness campaigners for the purposes of a specific strategy.

In Australia, the current Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, has appointed himself as the Minister for Women, and while there is much feminist activism occurring, neoliberalism poses challenges to real feminist advance. Dux and Simic contend that ‘what we do need is for feminist women of all generations to take charge of the agenda again, and to get back to the basics by identifying and publicising the multitude of real problems that women continue to face; not the faux versions that sell newspapers’ (2008, p. 211). This thesis shares that goal. In Australia, historically media has been concentrated in terms of ownership, most prominently, by the Murdoch family, and to a lesser extent, at times by the Packer family. There are, as noted, very few female gendered news sites, though the Daily Life, despite being Fairfax owned, does at times, through writers such as Clementine Ford, offer some intervention to the types of ‘faux versions’ to which Dux and Simic refer. Mia Freedman as a digital entrepreneurial feminist through her sites, Mamamia.com and ivillage.com, gathers a reach of millions of readers in Australia, each month (http://www.mamamia.com.au/about-mia). Not only in traditional media, but also by media feminist owners such as Freedman, ‘media appropriations of feminism have been complex and diverse. The political consequences of such distillation continue to occupy feminist critics, who fear in particular the watering down of complex ideas and ideological critique, culminating in the emptying out of feminism’s oppositional potential’ as Taylor notes (2012, p. 11). And as such, I maintain that most forms of popular media celebrity feminisms come with a caveat: that it is often entry level feminism, and as such can sometimes be problematic: some feminists and feminisms are erased from online and mainstream media, demonstrating that none of the medias are egalitarian spaces, though nor are they equally unequal; often there is only slight variation of the same sorts of feminist discourse. While I do not abjure the contribution of feminist commentators already visible or trusted in the Australian mediasphere or create a hierarchy that privileges the academic over the
popular, notwithstanding it is argued that there is a level of attention about critical feminist issues such as gender-based violence missing from broader, mainstream feminism discourse in Australia (and elsewhere) due to a long history of normalisation around these issues, but also because of the neoliberal and postfeminist cultural climates; however, the unpalatable-palatable tensions help to agitate and irritate to drive ‘cultural conversations – and, most importantly, contestations – around gender and women’s subjectivity…every day within a media field that is now irrevocably inflected by feminism’ (Taylor 2012, p. 11).

The current jigsaw of popular feminist media commentators/ celebrity feminists without the history and, arguably, credentials, of a Greer, Cox or Summers, remains overwhelmingly - though not always - white, middle-class and heterosexual; the mainstream media amplifies particular voices. As Wicke reminds us, ‘good things happen in the celebrity zone and bad things happen in that zone’ (in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 391) and there is a strong palatable-unpalatable divide as well as blurring, but the tensions and messiness are critical for cultural conversations, and talking back to the dominant voices (as are newer forms of technology such as online activism). Razer and Deveny, for example, are necessary to balance the conservative careerist feminisms of Miller and Freedman. And Tankard Reist’s feminism, as demonstrated, caused debate over feminism in the broader mediasphere than most in recent times and the unpalatable-palatable tensions sparked discourse that enabled broader, often more difficult questions to be asked of and about Australian feminists and feminisms. Miller and Freedman have large followings due to their palatability, and due to their resonance with the dominant cultural discourses of postfeminism and neoliberalism. This does not mean that neoliberal agendas should not be scrutinised, or the lack of substantive political attention to intersectionality should go unremarked. There is an increasing diversity of voices due to technology, but this should not be made to mean as a democratic utopic space. Feminism is, as Kylie Murphy reminds us, a ‘brawling paradigm’ (2002, p. 3), and feminism needs its killjoys (Ahmed 2010) to synthesize (in)completely with its ‘shiny’ conservatives. Similarly, mass awareness campaigns need to be strategically planned to funnel attention, rather than just involve an excessive ‘commentary overload’ (Dux & Simic 2008, p. 64). And ‘those rough edges [that] have valuable sticking points’ (Wicke in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 404) occur in collective feminist activism for mass awareness with a caveat that critical feminist practice and politics must not be evacuated at the expense of populism, but there are some sticking
points such as access to *ideas as entry-ways* to feminists ways of doing and being that may not otherwise be available or sought after; popular follows to broader audiences. That is, the net worth principle where ‘feminists can still hope to open spaces’ (Segal in DeKoven (ed.) 2001, p. 57).
Chapter 8: Devouring the Zeitgeist: Conclusion and Future
Directions for Research

… And there is an enormous curiosity, a need, a desire to know. People are always complaining that the mass media stuff one’s head…On the contrary, I believe that people react; the more one convinces them, the more they question things. The mind isn’t made of soft wax. It’s a reactive substance. And the desire to know more, and to know it more deeply and to know other things increases as one tries to stuff peoples’ heads (Foucault in Rabinow (ed.) 1998, p. 325).

…women constitute half of the world’s population and their subordination and experience of inequality, though changed, remains unequivocal and substantial (McRobbie 2009, p. 2).

I began this thesis with the goal to analyse what activist tools are available to Australian twenty-first-century feminists within the Zeitgeist and to ascertain what has utility, what needs to be approached with caution and which parts need to be discarded altogether. As such, this research has explored and argued that Australian feminists can, and sometimes should, make use of celebrity feminists, celebrity activism such as celanthropy, and online activism in organised, large-scale public awareness campaigns not dissimilar to those of the scale used in other social movements. These methods should be utilised to reach out to a broader range of Australians concerning feminist issues. It reflects on the current mainstream activist climate potentially being or becoming a ‘conveyor belt’ for issues, but it seeks to recuperate a ‘net worth’ approach. It challenges the notion of ‘preaching to the choir’ with regard to mainstream feminist mass awareness in Australia, but it acknowledges that there is the potential for—and often unavoidable—partial de-politicisation of the issues because of populist elements of such campaigning. This must always be remembered and negotiated.

As previously stated, this thesis is not about violence against women; however, the prevention of violence against women is at its core. It is the key issue that has driven this research and my own feminist position. I have made suggestions as to why gender-based violence is a serious and urgent feminist target for more cultural attitudinal change campaigning in Australia. This thesis has regarded feminist activism on a
continuum where there are different activists and activisms for differing, sometimes overlapping, purposes, as Maddison (in Maddison & Sawer (eds) 2013, p. 51) reminds us that ‘feminist activists do not make a choice to engage in either discursive politics or institutional politics. It is more likely that women involved in one type of activism will also be involved in the other’. The key questions of this thesis have therefore centred on: What does each type explored here contribute? What is missing? What do they fail to contribute? Does it compensate? What does digital activism provide that celebrity feminism and celebrity activism do not? My research is unique in addressing these questions because the discussion revolves around three areas for feminist activism (celebrity activism, celebrity feminism and online activism), which I argued would be most beneficial used together because they are often utilised in other social movements’ mass awareness campaigns (e.g., poverty and the environment) and not often in organised feminist mass awareness campaigning. The thesis therefore has argued that the methods that would most successfully promote a stronger feminist movement in Australia are already available, but that they should be used to create powerful campaigns not dissimilar to those of the scale of those used in the fight to end global poverty.

Section 1 of this thesis engaged with the growing area(s) of research of celanthropy and celebrity activism in order to explore some of their potential uses for feminist activism in Australia. While acknowledging the somewhat problematic nature of the proliferation of celanthropists and other types of celebrity activists as consuming ‘charity’ and ‘aid’ as self-interested pursuits, I discussed the appropriation potential of promoting such figures for feminist activism in Australian campaigns. I asked whether celebrity activism is a viable mechanism for feminist activism to convey urgent mass awareness that women’s rights issues continue to be grossly underrepresented and undervalued and to help recruit activists to broader feminist movement(s). The fetishisation of celebrity and the changing nature of political engagement both suggested that this might be so. The section examined the movement sparked by Kristof and WuDunn’s (2009) Half the Sky book and movement to test the feasibility of using the mass awareness campaigning platforms set in place by these authors. While acknowledging that these methods (and indeed some of the movement’s premises) are not without problems, this chapter found that some of these techniques could sometimes be employed more often by Australian feminist activists however the campaign target matters. This chapter focused on the methods and reception of the campaigning style, maintaining that in the current cultural
climate, celebrity activism and other methods utilised are among the most effective methods for communicating with and to mainstream audiences. However, whether this type of engagement can impair dominant paradigms by entering the cultural imaginary, regardless of the cause or issue, is more complex; rather, it assists in adding to a broader cultural conversation.

Section 2 examined how the rise and convergence of technologies such as the Internet and mobile devices in the digital or hyper-connected era have affected the way that much activism is currently conducted. It is the efficacy of this activism as a feminist awareness-raising method that concerned this thesis. In this section, I reviewed the relevant academic literature to enable the scrutinisation of online petitions and the use of Twitter and Facebook by such actors to consider the effect of digital technologies on feminist activism in Australia. I did this so that I could answer the following questions throughout the section: What is it about online activism that may be useful to Australian feminists, and what are the challenges and potential risks? Does such activism have substantive political or material effects, and does this actually matter when the goal is awareness-raising based activism? Is this type of activism echo chamber activism that does little to address structural inequalities, and if so, is it salvageable to help funnel attention to broader embedded issues? To assist in answering such questions, this section analysed a specific grassroots feminist online activist campaign in Australia. It was an online, explicitly feminist, campaign as a form of direct media and political intervention. The campaign highlighted ways to manage an activist project and demonstrated that the outcomes—while not always consistent with the original goals—may be of value in disrupting normalising discourses surrounding victim blaming. It also highlighted many tensions that are often associated with grassroots activism, such as the attempted silencing and dismissal of myself by others. Ultimately, this campaign, using the hashtag #sackgavin, emphasised the need for more collective and more visible feminist activism. The issues are when clicktivism, to show support around an issue via social media, can lack offline follow-through because there can be the idea that the work is done. Thus, multipronged campaigns are crucial. However, awareness alone will not prevent violence, and attitudinal change campaigning is but one part of a response to broaden the conversation and public literacy. This chapter offered a qualitative self-reflexive analysis of the #sackgavin campaign, and more broadly, provided an interrogation of online feminist political interventions and silencing. Online activist groups such as Destroy the Joint could evacuate their politics of meaning if they
take on too many issues/smaller concerns, in much the same way that a celanthropist or other types of celebrity activists could vamp issues. Hence, careful strategising and consultation in any mass awareness campaign would be most advantageous to ensure more substantive results.

Section 3 asked whether some of the newer Australian celebrity feminists are too problematic politically and ideologically, and if so, would they be the best types of advocates to be recruited into broader campaigns, especially if they are already having a cultural impact on large audiences that may not otherwise access any form of feminism? It asked whether the rejection of palatable postfeminist and neoliberal politics, for example, binarises specific feminist knowledges (e.g., the academic) and therefore disavows the ways in which many consume and therefore recognise feminism (no matter how it is packaged: palatably or otherwise as a bite-sized entrée). To use a variety of celebrity feminists in a campaign within the palatable-unpalatable framework, while critically adding in other voices that have been silenced in mainstream media discourse, for example, does not disavow the agency of women who may consume feminist knowledge in this way. Nor does it say that the women are dupes in or to the system and that they are passively imbibing knowledge without critical ability. In this section, I found that Dannielle Miller and Mia Freedman—two of the most palatable feminists in the mediasphere—are having the broadest cultural effect in Australia at the present time. However, each feminist—both the unpalatable and the palatable (which are never really mutually exclusive concepts)—resonates with particular audiences, and they often challenge each other or provide balances. Like activism itself, information—indeed also the celebrity feminists themselves—is not stagnant. The use of these feminists, and celebrity feminists in general, needs to be carefully negotiated by the campaigners to drive the campaigns’ actual agendas, and to not deny agency to the women who follow particular feminists. The unpalatable voices should be heard more broadly, and dissent and debate should be applied, not for personal gain and publicity of the individual feminists, but to demonstrate feminist diversity; however, the key objective(s) of campaigns must be navigated and applied by the experts driving the campaign. Celebrity feminists are part of the ‘adhesives’ in the campaign, and this is important when considering that the role of the celebrity feminists as disseminators of public feminist literacy as feminism itself does not exist ‘in a privileged autonomous space or on an exalted moral or political, or even theoretical plane’ (Wicke in Landes (ed.) 1998, p. 387). A key argument that this thesis posits is
that celebrity feminists are powerful complementary conduits in a campaigning context; they provide access points, and this is often entrée feminist politics.

The original contribution of this thesis resides in the testing and analysis of campaign methods and pathways for the information of Australian feminists who want to take women’s rights issues to more central mainstream spaces, by highlighting both visibility and velocity. Greater connections between the complex, blurred lines of theory and praxis are shown here to help create more nuanced discourse from other expert feminists to enter mainstream media spaces without renouncing those feminist voices already speaking in such spaces. It has been argued that while feminist awareness-raising is advantageously administered through multiple mechanisms (and already is), a ‘multi-pronged’ organised campaigning approach can increase the possibilities for grassroots activism to invoke a greater form of participatory activism. It would work in intertwined ways. Many campaigns work on individual levels—these would work on attitudinal changes towards normative understandings of the broader community.

Women’s rights and gender equity are in varying states globally. Gender-based violence is at pandemic levels globally, according to the UN (n.d.). In Australia, the Gender Equality Blueprint (2010) produced by the (current) Australian Human Rights Commissioner, Elizabeth Broderick, discusses the importance of addressing attitudes in the prevention of gender-based violence:

Gender-based violence occurs on a continuum, ranging from demeaning attitudes towards women, to sexual harassment and, at its most severe, crimes against women such as sexual assault and family and domestic violence…It has serious and long-term consequences for individuals and for families, as well as significant economic costs for the community…Gender equality will not occur simply because we have anti discrimination laws in place. It requires a commitment from all people in Australia—women and men—to counter the attitudes and assumptions that lead to discrimination and unequal outcomes (Gender Equality Blueprint 2010).

Flood and Pease (2009, p. 125) write that ‘attitudes have been of central concern in relation to violence against women. Attitudes play a role in the perpetration of this violence, in victims’ responses to victimization, and in community responses to violence against women’. The (current) UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon’s UNiTE
to End Violence Against Women campaign, directs ‘all governments, civil society, women’s organizations, men, young people, the private sector, the media and the entire UN system to join forces in addressing this global pandemic’ (http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/about.shtml). The UNiTE campaign advocates for actions to be undertaken at global, regional and national levels so that the mobilisation of people and communities might occur ‘in addition to supporting the longstanding efforts of women’s and civil society organizations, the campaign is actively engaging with men, young people, celebrities, artists, sports personalities, private sector and many more’ (http://www.un.org/en/women/endviolence/about.shtml).

In Australia, there is (currently) a plan that advocates the ‘zero tolerance’ model towards violence against women: the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (2010–2022) (Department of Social Services 2010). This plan sets out a 12-year framework for all Australian governments to work ‘together and challenging the attitudes and behaviours that allow violence to occur’, as research indicates that affecting attitudinal change is imperative to gender equality and violence prevention; however:

The National Plan acknowledges that no government or group can address this problem alone. A unified approach to engagement is critical if we are to make real progress. Therefore, the National Plan is underpinned by the belief that involving all governments and the wider community is pivotal to reducing violence in the short and longer terms (Department of Social Services 2010).

Similar to the UNiTE campaign, it is the part of the National Plan about the ‘wider community’ being pivotal to reducing violence that this thesis has extracted; it is also the part about challenging attitudes and behaviours that this thesis has focused upon. Many other plans are in place in various sectors, including government and non-government, to advance Australian women’s place in a civil society, workforce participation, economic security, and to help prevent all forms of violence against women, and these all work towards common goals of gender equity. There are various recommendations, campaigns and actions already in place in an attempt to effect changes in such areas. This thesis has been concerned with adding to the activist tools that could be recruited in campaigns targeting attitudes and awareness about violence against women, and feminisms (Flood & Pease 2006, 2009; Htun & Weldon 2012).
Natasha Stott Despoja, Chair of the Foundation to Prevent Violence Against Women and their Children, said on White Ribbon Day (25 November) that:

The prevalence of domestic and family violence in our community is staggering…Sometimes I wonder if the community, and in particular our decision makers and community leaders, are aware of the extent and the consequences of this problem. That's why I’m calling on people in positions of power and indeed the broader community to treat this as a national emergency…It should be declared a national emergency and we should be tackling it with resources but also awareness (Stott Despoja 2013, n.p.).

The ‘emergency’ and ‘awareness’ pleas of Stott Despoja echo the concerns of this thesis. As such, this thesis has explored what (may) happen if online and mainstream (or both) media get behind campaigns—or celebrities who use their voices—to increase visibility, and thus, hopefully leverage broader support and activism. However, activism is a complex process and concept enacted by feminists in varied ways. As activism is not often a solitary event, or easily defined as one thing, it is much like feminism itself, which is often resistant to boundaries. Practises change over time. Like Mohanty (2003), this thesis has understood feminist practice as multiple and existing ‘at the level of daily life through the everyday acts that constitute our identities and relational communities; at the level of collective action in groups, networks, and movements constituted around feminist visions of social transformation; and at the levels of theory, pedagogy, and textual creativity in the scholarly and writing practices of feminists engaged in the production of knowledge’ (p. 5). It does not binarise the academic and the popular, acknowledging that one side of such binaries is always privileged, creating an Otherness, and invoking the idea of ‘some real authentic feminism which is “elsewhere”’ (Brunsdon 1997, p 102).

While there are ‘obvious reasons why feminists (and others) continue to gripe about the media’ (Dux & Simic 2008, p. 49), feminism in the media holds a central space as ‘rather than identifiable women’s movements positioning themselves in opposition to the mainstream, feminism now circulates through mass media…Political idealism and activism remain crucial, but pop culture can also help the cause’ (Dux & Simic 2008, p. 55). Many ‘contemporary forms of feminist activism...are based in an engagement with popular culture…the women’s movement’s engagement with popular culture is nothing new…[it] is just one more example of movement continuity’ (Strong & Maddison in
Maddison & Sawer (eds.) 2014, p. 115). In this thesis, I have demonstrated that taking advantage of the popular cultural and technological Zeitgeist and its discursive tools to target larger scale awareness-raising specifically is advantageous.

Feminist issues are being addressed in much activism in Australia, and there have been heterogeneous levels of success. While this thesis concurs with Redfern and Aune (2010, p. 1) who argue that ‘if you listened to the myths circulating in the mainstream media, you’d have a fairly warped view of feminism. Feminism is pronounced “dead” on a regular basis, especially by anti-feminist commentators…but also by established feminists’, its focus has not been on addressing the many levels of myth or the ongoing discussions about what it might mean to be feminist, or to even put forward that younger women are engaged with the movement via technology or other ways. Rather, the focus of this thesis has been to demonstrate how a large-scale mass awareness campaign in Australia would add to the artillery. There is a critical gap in the scholarly literature about the potential of large-scale feminist-led awareness campaigning in Australia, just as there is scholarly neglect regarding celebrity feminism (and, as I assert, about using celebrity and/or popular feminists in such campaigns). There is much feminist action in Australia and elsewhere currently, such as online through blogging and online activism, in the media through commentary, and in many other institutions and locations. This thesis has made suggestions looking towards the ‘Activism Zeitgeist’, and argues that feminists can utilise the popular and new media cultural climates to further publicise the movement in ways that have not been as available or given as much currency in the past. I concur with Inglehard and Norris (2003, p. 9) that:

Cultural change is not sufficient by itself for gender equality…But we argue that cultural change is a necessary condition for gender equality …In turn cultural change lays the basis for the mass mobilization of women’s movements and broad support for public policies that reinforce, consolidate, and accelerate the process of gender equality.

While I demonstrate that there is opportunity to utilise academically trained feminists in mass awareness campaigns, it is repudiated that they are superior; however I caution about the domination of the discourse by celebrity feminists, and the appropriation of feminism to arguably predominantly self-promote businesses or ‘brand’ profiles. Popular feminism does not have to function as scholarly debate, but it does not always have to exclude it; notwithstanding they are not the same, nor is it suggested that they
should be – but there are academically ‘trained’ feminists who can speak in more than one register and popular feminists who can as well. This thesis has not been a call for academic feminism to become something else, something Other to what it is or may be. It does not call for drastic user-friendliness or for academic feminists to become celebrity academics or popular in the media, but it suggests that there could be greater use for nuanced academic feminists’ work to be utilised (in part) within popular feminist discourse or campaigning. Some academic feminists could enhance public feminist discourse by consultation; however they are often largely invisible from many public ‘feminist’ events in Australia. While the academic and popular modes of address are different and do not need to involve the same people, though they sometimes do and can as Judith Butler articulates with regard to her own work:

I actually teach in a voice that is …very different from the written voice in Gender Trouble. I have probably also written in ways that are not quite as difficult as that voice was…It is important…especially for a theorist, to know how to shift registers…it is important not to underestimate the intelligence of lay readers, readers from various backgrounds and educational privilege…it is important that critical teaching and critical writing not only seek to be communicable, and reach people where they live, but also pose a challenge, and offer for readers to become something different from what they already are (Butler in Sonser Breen & Blumenfeld 2005, p. 24).

There are ways that this is done, and indeed some feminist scholars do this. For example, leading feminist philosopher, Sara Ahmed, is writing a book called Living a Feminist Life which combines feminist theory with ‘everyday experiences of being a feminist’ (Ahmed 2014, n.p.). Similarly, bell hooks’ Feminism is for Everybody (2000) is a book which aimed to introduce feminist theory to a wider-reaching audience.

Thus this study has examined ‘access points’ through which to reach greater audiences for cohesion at an atomised time where the individual exists at the epicentre. It is imperative, while not completely disavowing postfeminism, to move beyond neoliberal tendencies that are currently apparent within some forms of postfeminism. As such it advocates renewed larger-scale awareness-raising for collective awareness and recruitment to the movement. This is feminist activism with an entry-level caveat.
Overall, this thesis has argued that a mass awareness cultural attitudinal change campaign (series) would be advantageous in Australia, especially as that we are at a critical nexus for feminist activism and visibility, and thus the potential for such a campaign is imminent. While this has not been a thesis that is about violence against women, per se, it stands that the models and methods for feminist activism explored in this thesis should be used in whichever ways deemed necessary by certain feminist activists, that there is an important opportunity for campaigning about gender-based violence prevention using the said methods symbiotically. Additionally, this thesis argued that using large scale collective campaigning is critical as the dominant discourses of neoliberalism and postfeminism mean a reduced focus on collective action for such issues, and there has been, arguably, an evacuation of substantive feminist politics in some areas of the mediasphere and this has occurred, ironically, while there has been an increase in the velocity of feminist discourse in the Australian mediasphere and political arenas. While not being overly celebratory about the potential of the media – and remaining highly critical of the racism and heterosexism within the mainstream media particularly, this signals both an opportunity, as well as a need for targeted campaigning about critical feminist issues such as gender-based violence. It is critical to recognise this type of campaigning is not appropriate for all contexts, and that negotiations must be made with those with real, lived experience of marginalisation and oppression. Similarly, while it is acknowledged that gender-based violence is a pandemic globally, there should not be a flattening of types of violence against women into one pile. This will need to be nuanced by campaigners who would seek to write a large-scale feminist led mass awareness campaign in Australia, for example. Future research would elaborate on this.

8.1 Future directions for research

As a result of my research, I have been able to identify a number of areas that require further attention and analysis:

1. Research into the experience and costs of individual online campaigns emotionally on individual feminist activists due to the highly gendered nature of trolling, as well as the proliferation of access to online communicative technologies opening up access to politicians and petitions, for example.
2. Research about Australian gendered news spaces such as *The Daily Life*. This is a new phenomenon in Australia and has received little to no scholarly attention to date.

3. Research into popular mainstream Australian morning television programs which feature women’s panels. On several popular Australian morning television programs (e.g., *Sunrise* (Channel Seven), and *Today* (Nine Network) there are panels with female only panels such as ‘The Grill’ (*Today*) or ‘Kochie’s Angels’ (*Sunrise*), whereby a male host asks questions about ‘women’s issues’. Often these will feature popular feminist figures such as Mia Freedman, Tracey Spicer, Dannielle Miller, or other higher profile women in the mediasphere. There is a gap in scholarly research around morning television and feminist -and what passes as feminist - content.

4. Feminist celanthropy is a growing phenomenon that has only been gestured toward in this thesis. Celanthropy has been given some attention within some disciplines such as Celebrity Studies, and Cultural Studies, but the specific use of celanthropy as a feminist tool is under -recognised in academia.

This thesis has brought together theories about the potential uses of three different activist tactics for a feminist mass awareness campaign in Australia. It argues that using these together are powerful Tools of the Zeitgeist for feminist-led cultural attitudinal change campaigning in Australia. This is because even though there is an increase in velocity of feminist discourse due to online activism and the growing number of feminist celebrities speaking in the mainstream media about feminist issues, and other forms of activism, that there is no large-scale feminist led campaign in Australia which takes advantage of this escalation these tools together with other forms of celebrity activism. It is suggested that celebrity advocates, celanthropists, or celebrity feminists do not drive campaigns, but that there needs to be actual trained women’s rights experts (not just academics, but other feminist educators, advocates, policy and industry experts for example) at the forefront to decide on, advise and drive agenda around key critical feminist issues such as violence against women. Such campaigns should not be used by feminism-as-a-business-model celebrities or such celebrity feminists, to enhance careerist ambition, but it is suggested that to ignore the celebrity zeitgeist is to miss an opportunity taken up by other social movements which have run large-scale awareness campaigns. This research does not suggest that such campaigning is an antidote, rather it comes with strong caveats that this variety of activism is an entrée which is a part of
devouring the zeitgeist, to help spark other forms of awareness and engagement within the already diverse feminist social movement on the ever-expanding activist continuum.


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