

**Destroying the joint: a case study of feminist digital activism in Australia and its  
account of fatal violence against women**

*A thesis submitted to fulfil requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy*

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## **Statement of originality**

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work.

This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purposes.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources has been acknowledged.

*Jenna Price*

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## **Abstract**

### **Destroying the joint: a case study of feminist digital activism in Australia and its account of fatal violence against women**

Destroy the Joint is a feminist movement born in the digital era and a productive example of information activism. It shows that digital activism can be sustained in the longer term, particularly through the performance of emotional labour and the accumulation of emotional capital. I interviewed thirty past and present moderators and administrators of Destroy The Joint (DTJ), and this thesis explores the ways in which these contemporary digital feminist activists use connective action to build progressive change. I introduce the transnational digital solidarity frame as a particular form of information activism, seen in the unique Counting Dead Women campaign on fatal violence against women. The activist backgrounds and experiences of individuals themselves also contributed to successful campaigning and helped to make them and their community resilient. Throughout the thesis I have applied Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and various forms of capital to consider the specific attributes and labours of activists as a foundation for sustainable activism. Building on Arlie Hochschild's research on emotional labour I unpack the experiences of, and labour involved in, feminist digital activism, and argue for more recognition of the centrality of emotional capital to feminism. The emotional labour in feminist digital activism includes being supportive, being kind, being resilient and being perennially available. These aspects of emotional labour are heightened within the digital context. This thesis has implications for the practice of feminist digital activism, including the benefit of including members with previous structured activist experience, tools and practices for using online groups as forums to provide support for other activists, and the importance of including activists with a diversity of skills and interests for long-term sustainability.

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My supervisor Professor Ariadne Vromen is a truly remarkable person.

One of Ariadne's former PhD students, in her own acknowledgements, described Ariadne's 'relentless' supervision. That's a very good way of putting it. She is both very demanding and highly supportive. I would add that she is ambitious on behalf of all her students (and her colleagues. I'm always running into people who say, Ariadne helped me do this or that). She has the balance between support and useful critique absolutely right. Also, just so you know, mythological Ariadne helped people navigate labyrinths so the real Ariadne has a serious case of nominative determinism.

Ariadne turned me into a researcher through her intense emotional labour. Despite sending me away after our first conversation to speak to someone in another department, she was kind enough to respond to 14 separate emails before I made my initial PhD proposal; and has been Gibraltar ever since. There is not one iota of bullshit about her and I love that so much. If anyone wants a high recommendation for a supervisor, she's mine. Or, as Pierre Bourdieu puts it:

“One can really supervise a research, since this is what is involved here, only on condition of actually *doing it* along *with* the researcher who is in charge of it: this implies that you work on questionnaire construction, on reading statistical tables or inter-pretng documents, that you suggest hypotheses if necessary, and so on. It is clear that, under such conditions, one can supervise only a very small number of research projects and that those who pretend to supervise a large number of them do not really do what they claim they are doing.” (Bourdieu, 1992, p. 221)

To the activists of Destroy the Joint, you are staunch women, ones you can trust at both the digital barricades and the ones where we might stand shoulder-to-shoulder. Thank you, all of you. This thesis wouldn't exist without you but far more importantly, the activism wouldn't exist without you.



Only my choice of supervisor makes me unbearably smug. Everything else about writing a PhD makes me unbearably anxious and so I'm grateful to those who helped me battle that anxiety. On the home front: John, Gabe, Mary, Dominic. Piles of stuff everywhere and not just in my brain.

It makes a big difference having a cohort of PhD students who are with you on the trip. I was furious when the then HDR coordinator at the University of Sydney Adam Kamradt-Scott insisted PhD candidates come to seminars and hear their colleagues present but he was right. The experience of watching others present their work, asking ourselves where we could improve and, with a few exceptions, discovering how constructive we all were was a great idea. I particularly want to thank Michael Vaughan, whose support and humour got me through some bad bits. I'd also like to thank Christine Winter, Lucy Sunman, Abi Taylor, Colombina Shaffer (she was the former PhD student who described Ariadne as providing 'relentless supportive'), Stephen Beverley and Francesco Bailo, Luke Craven, a little community of research students. Lovely. I'll miss it. Max Halupka was not a University of Sydney student but it felt like he was in my cohort. Same with Blair Williams. In addition, the research culture at the University of Sydney was brilliant and I'd argue that was because of a series of academics who wrangled the government and international relations PhD students. Thank you to Ariadne, who was one of those; Adam Kamradt-Scott who I've already mentioned; Megan Mackenzie, who was also my supportive associate supervisor, Susan Park and Rodney Smith.

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A few things: it is infuriating that at a time when we are all going to live to 90, or many of us anyway, that a constant response to my decision to do a PhD was, why would you do this now? No one would ever stop tending a garden after a few years so I'm not sure why I should stop tending to my thinking. Also, to the men, most men, to whom I spoke about my project, I have some advice. Be supportive of women and their endeavours. Try to encourage rather than discourage. Be generous. It is not helpful to ask: "Why do you want to do that?" No-one

would embark on this process without reason. I gave my first paper at a POP workshop (Political Organisations and Participation group, a standing research group of the Australian Political Studies Association) in Melbourne. The male professor who had been at once discouraging and patronising when I first applied to do a PhD came up to apologise for doubting my ability. Five years later, I'm still furious.

That's the same advice I give to the young men, some men, in the various PhD seminars I attended. There is no need to flaunt your intelligence. You are in a PhD program so we know you are pretty smart already. Try to encourage your peers rather than discourage.

Also, when looking for a home to do your PhD, find a place where there is a tradition of supportive research, where people speak to you like an adult and where people's individual circumstances are considered. Find an institution which resists a neoliberal approach to postgraduate qualifications. If it's all forms, punishments, fines and people who will never respond unless there is an emergency, run the other way. It's hard enough already. I could not speak more highly of the research culture at the University of Sydney in the Department of Government and International Relations. Even staff members who were not my supervisor/s would ask how I was going. Thanks Anika Gauja and Chris Pepin-Neff and Madeleine Pill. I'd also like to thank the University of Sydney for its generosity when it comes to funding postgraduate students to attend conferences and workshops. In my case, it meant presenting my PhD research at two international conferences and that felt pretty exciting.

To my various editors, at various levels, over the years, thank you for supporting me and my determination to write about what matters. In particular, Eric Beecher, Max Prisk, Michelle Grattan, David McLennan, Julie Lewis, Grant Newton, Mark Baker, Sarah Oakes, Candice Chung, Natalie Reilly, Wendy Tuohy.

To anyone wanting to do a PhD, keep going.

I had a lot of self-doubt. These people didn't doubt me for one second (and if they did, they kept it to themselves). Thank you all.

Just a couple of things you should know about the thesis. Parts of chapter four appeared in *Destroying the Joint*, edited by Jane Caro; and in a story I wrote for the *Walkley* magazine. Frances Shaw edited my thesis mainly to improve structure and remove repetition. Her research is on digital political networks and digital ethics. Heather Goodall proofread my thesis. And two brilliant women, Indra McKie and Krystal Campbell, helped me repair my EndNote after it corrupted.

## **Preface**

I was one of the first people to join the online Australian feminist action group Destroy The Joint. It is now seven years later and I am still involved as an activist. This thesis on Destroy the Joint (DTJ) tells some of the stories of why this movement mattered to me and to others, and why it still does. It also reveals how the activists in DTJ sustained this activism and each other, and documents our successes thus far. It has been very different to any of my previous activist experience. Activists will always talk about the hard grind of activism; or the boring slog of activism or the tears, stress and shouting. As Robin Leidner wrote in 1993, many difficulties arise in feminist organisations: emotional intensity, factionalism, structurelessness, refusal to acknowledge discord. She does not mention boredom or burnout which could be added to that list. In DTJ, sometimes there was and is boredom but there was far less burnout than I expected. I have not burnt out and a number of the other women involved in the project have not burnt out either. DTJ made some of the activists feel positive about activism and that feeling of positivity made them feel as if they could keep going, that we could all keep going. Feelings, emotions, affect turn out to be very important in this story of activist resilience. I wanted to investigate the online Australian feminist activist experience and discover what, if anything, was unique to DTJ and if the results from my analysis would help sustain future activists. As a long-time activist, feminist activism is central to my life so any evidence to guide future activists and reveal frameworks for building activist resilience more generally, and build understanding about what makes some activists more resilient than other activists, may be useful. I wanted to understand what made them stay or in some cases, what made them leave. What was there about DTJ as an activist group which encouraged people to commit?

My name is Jenna Price. I am not now and never have been a member of the Australian Labor Party, a union official, a slut or a whore. I mention this because I spend a lot of time on the internet, either as a DTJ activist, as a journalist or as a member of the general public. I'm also a woman. These are key factors in the level of trolling I experience (Citron 2014; Henry & Powell, 2017; Jane, 2016; Tandon, 2015) so when it comes to those particular accusations - member of the Australian Labor Party, union official, slut or whore - the first two are plainly incorrect. The second two are more a matter of opinion but of all the names feminists are called, of all the accusations I've fielded, the one which irritates me the most is the suggestion that I'm a member of a political party, as if no-one can ever be politically

organised unless they are a functionary of a political party. I would have had to argue, from my own experience and well before I did the research for this thesis, that if one wanted organisation, look no further than the survivors of government school parent fundraising groups. Now, my research says that if one wants organisation, then recruiting women trained in the union movement or in family life or in both, is useful.

I have been a journalist for 40 years and an activist for longer - but it's only once I became an academic in my fifties that I was able to recognise that journalism, activism, social media interconnected, that they could interact. I decided I wanted to write a PhD rather than to write journalism about this phenomenon because I needed to understand the theoretical context and also wanted to spend time reflecting on what happened and how a group of mostly women (and, briefly, men) managed to keep going without tearing each other to shreds, without flaring out. And - mostly - without hating each other. I also knew that I needed to read more about how social movements work to better grasp what happened. To appropriate Flavia Dzodan (2011), my feminism will be theoretical or it will be bullshit. My aim was to claim that feminism sits in the broader context of social movements and that its collective expression exemplifies Tilly's concepts of political movement theory in particular the theory of worthiness, unity, number and commitment (1999). If DTJ operated in the overlap of contention, politics and collective action, then I needed to read much more to be able to demonstrate that. To do that, I would survey both social movement theories, theories of political participation and current feminist scholarship around online participation.

## **Glossary of Terms**

**Administrators** (also admins or admin): the activists in Destroy the Joint who take most of the responsibility for the long-term direction of DTJ, including its campaigns. The admins may also mod (or moderate) the page.

**Capital:** (also capitals when referring to a number of specific capitals) (Bourdieu, 1986)

-cultural capital: what we know

-social capital: who we know

-emotional capital (Nowotny, 1981): relationships and emotional skills

**Connective action:** actions taken by informal social networks to work towards progressive social change, an emerging form of democratic mobilisation (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, 2013)

**Destroy the Joint** (DTJ): feminist action group, social movement, Facebook page.

**Emotional labour:** first described as the management of emotions for the benefit of paid employment (Hochschild, 1983)

**Habitus:** Dispositions and traits, deeply embedded (Bourdieu, 1977)

**Moderators** (also mod or mods, modding is the verb): the activists in Destroy the Joint who moderate interactions on the page and also contribute to the formations of the campaigns

**Posts** (verbs, posting, posted): The term post is used in this thesis to describe the public messages which appear on the Destroy the Joint Facebook page. Also, the words post and posted appear as verbs to describe the act of putting those public messages on the page. Public comments appear beneath a post.

## **Chapter One: An Introduction**

### **From Twitter strangers to Facebook sisters**

This thesis begins in the context of the intransigent rate of violence against women, continuing gender inequality, and increasing feminisation of poverty. These factors have combined to propel us along feminism's fourth wave, or regeneration, as a social movement, and the platform for that regeneration is digital. In response to that regeneration and following on from decades of research on feminism, my thesis analyses contemporary digital feminist activism in Australia, using the case study of DTJ, a series of connected campaigns, led by Australian feminists.

There are many different iterations of feminist activism online, and research focussing on digital activism reveals that it acts as a gateway to other activism, actions and engagement (Brunsting & Postmes, 2002; Xenos, Vromen & Loader, 2014). My thesis is an investigation of the Australian feminist action group DTJ, a feminist movement born in the digital era, to analyse both how it functioned internally and how its campaigns functioned. I argue this feminist digital activist community was successful in organising and community-building because of specific attributes and labours of its member activists, and was thus able to operate as a productive example of information activism. This analysis and subsequent findings may be beneficial to activists in Australia and elsewhere by showing how the campaigns of this social movement operated; and how the organisers engaged with the movement.

This thesis will first seek to provide the background to the creation of the online feminist action group which operates through the DTJ Facebook page. It will summarise and analyse key campaigns and outcomes of those campaigns to provide a framework for the subsequent analysis of feminist activism in Australia through the continued online organising of DTJ, which is still considered influential seven years after its inception (Casey, 2016; McLean, Maalsen & Grech, 2016). Most importantly, it will examine the social, cultural and emotional capitals of those who came to DTJ as administrators and moderators and what impact that had on the nature of DTJ.

The introduction of this thesis has several functions. Firstly, it outlines why research on activism is important and sets out a general overview of both activism and feminism.

Secondly, it provides an overarching theoretical framework which provides context for the specific literature reviews in each analysis chapter. In addition, my research as an insider exploring the work of Australian feminist online activist group DTJ will use the theories of French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu to explore how the habitus and capitals of those activists built resilience within their activism and, in addition, provided novel campaigning methods.

### **The context of Destroy the Joint**

Destroy The Joint flowered alongside Australia's first woman prime minister, Julia Gillard, from 2010 to 2013. An unusually broad cross section of Australian women took an interest in Gillard's prime ministership explained by Marian Sawer (2012) and David Denmark and his co-authors (2012) as the gender affinity effect, that is, women reacting more favourably to women, and, as referred affinity through increased political engagement (Denemark et al., 2012), in Destroy The Joint. In fact, the 'gender card' and 'gender wars' were also both sites for increased interest by media (Johnson, 2015; Trimble, 2016). In 2011, between 31 August and 4 November, a search on the news database Factiva, found 125 mentions of sexism in the Australian media it searched. In the same period of time for the following year, the situation was very different. First Australian radio presenter Alan Jones said women were destroying the joint, naming Gillard and a number of other prominent Australian women, then gave a speech at a dinner to raise money for the youth arm of the conservative Liberal Party in Australia where he said that Prime Minister Gillard's father had died of shame until 4 November 2012 there were well over 1000 mentions (Price, 2012). The time was right for increased feminist political participation, a direct effect of the symbolic power of women in elected office on women's engagement (Karp & Banducci, 2008).

Seven years on, the context for feminist activism is both more complex and more layered, yet never more necessary. The #metoo movement, focussing on sexual harassment and sexual assault, has slowed in Australia, victim both to this country's poor workplace protections and its constraining defamation laws (Lim, 2019). In 2019, as this introduction is being written, gender reveals itself again as key in the political landscape, in political participation as politicians and as voters, as the central problem at work and play, as a driver of the economy. Feminism has made it clear that if men are the default setting, then that setting will be questioned. Gender representation in parliament is in the news every day as the federal Coalition government in Australia struggles to either preselect women as candidates



for elections or fails to hold on to them once they are preselected. Feminist generation after feminist generation works to manoeuvre gender to the front: getting the vote; entering the workforce; getting equal pay; being free from sexual harassment; from sexual assault; from family violence.

In this particular moment in time, from 2010 to 2019, the current Australian feminist generation has embraced digital activism (Casey, 2016; Gleeson, 2016; 2017; 2018; McLean & Maalsen, 2013; 2015; 2017; Lupton, 2014; Trott, 2018; 2019). The role of feminism and the role of women in politics in Australia has been canvassed by many, however the digital aspect of feminist political activism also requires investigation. Contemporary feminists conduct campaigns and use different strategies to conduct those campaign, in a state of constant negotiation. It is through this constant negotiation that feminists claim a collective identity which struggles towards equality and this will be analysed in the next chapter about the generations of feminism (chapter two). Today much feminist organisation occurs online but the challenges remain. Scholarly research into new forms of politics facilitated by the internet has focussed on whether it would be an effective tool or just a replication of existing power structures. Feminists are digital citizens, part of a networked society (Castells, 1996) and both the value of the digital communication and the ease with which it occurs contribute to impact. In some respects, this may make it easier to see the contradictory structure of interests and values that constitute (feminist) society. The concept of digital activism (Hands, 2011) builds on what was described as cyberactivism, the notion that activists organised online through the use of platforms such as email, blogs and social networking sites to act and to advocate. Martha McCaughey and Michael Ayers (2003) argued online activism had transformed our understandings of the way in which traditional activism operated but claimed it could only achieve progressive social change if it was used alongside traditional organising.

The best fit for a theory of how digital activism works was Bennett and Segerberg's theory of connective action (2012; 2013). Novel ways of conceiving of political participation emerge rarely but Bennett and Segerberg not only identified a new form of political participation in their 2012 article but also developed a new conception of how that new form – connective action – could be applied. While Castells (2012, p. 244) argued that networked social movements would “fade away in their current states of being” or be transformed into an

actor, he did not see a possibility that those two entities – networked social movement and political actor – can exist at once.

In contrast, Bennett and Segerberg's work (2012; 2013) also showed crowds organised broadly, rather than the top-down political organising more familiar in collective action, and these crowds were both resilient and persistent both in what they chose to campaign about and how they campaigned. Because of the ease of access to the organising platform - and its responsiveness - a crowd-enabled response would often be more flexible and spontaneous. Other scholars were quick to use these concepts (Bastos & Mercea, 2015; Dahlgren, 2014; Hadden, 2015; Loader, Vromen & Xenos, 2014; Sloam, 2014; Theocharis, 2015; Vromen, 2016) or build on them as a basis for developing new concepts (Mattoni & Treré, 2014; Mortensen, 2015).

Connective action was a transformational conceptualisation of activism in the digital age, emerging after an investigation by (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012, 2013) of major mobilisations in the early 21st century, including the Occupy protests which took place in the United States and elsewhere in 2011. This form of contentious political action deserved special attention because it established that activists could work together in a loose network, and not necessarily come to a collective agreement on each aspect of a particular campaign. Even more significantly, it was the first research which comprehensively revealed how these social media platforms worked as organising mechanisms. These digital networks did not share the same messages at the same times. Indeed, the communication was multilayered, and in many cases personally adapted to and from the individual communicator. The most shareable parts of many of these campaigns included personal action frames (Bennett and Segerberg, 2013, p. 6), that is, shareable frames which were easy to personalise, as both a political message and a medium in itself. The key elements in the personalisation of these frames, which operate as calls to action, are the use of “symbolic inclusiveness” (2013, p. 37) and “technological openness” (2013, p. 37), which together provide leverage to the formation of connective action.

At the outset of this research, I hypothesised that all shared imagery of a political nature, to achieve a political end, could be categorised as a personal action frame. My own

investigation extends this by contending that some of what is shared on the internet for political purposes is about building solidarity, adapting to a personal circumstance.

The other apposite theoretical aspect of Bennett and Segerberg's work was their typology of the three models of action most likely to be found in contentious politics: organisationally-brokered, organisationally-enabled and crowd-enabled (2013, p. 47).

Briefly, the organisationally-brokered network model (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013) is familiar in the sphere of activism and is the foundation of collective action. Whether the organisation is influential or inconsequential, the method of organising and communication is the same; issues and actions are collectively framed, the message is spread top-down and there is a strong leadership which builds coalitions around the issues, provides strong organisational coordination of action, and controls the communication and therefore the message. This is particularly evident in the use of social media where all posts are manufactured in-house and the conversation is one-way, heavily moderated or even pre-moderated with filters applied to the group or page. It is individual personal outreach to other compatible people. Australian examples would be the Facebook pages of both major political parties: the Liberal Party of Australia and the Australian Labor Party.

The model of organisationally-enabled places more emphasis on loose coalitions of organisations which are like-minded. However, they encourage participants at both an individual level and at an organisational level to somehow adapt the message, to make it more personalised. They also leverage their digital media networks to enable this process. This model uses organisational networks but within and among those networks, the mode of operation is connective. An Australian example is GetUp, an Australian digital campaigning organisation (Vromen & Coleman, 2011).

The third model devised by Bennett and Segerberg is crowd-organised and enabled by technology. There is no centralised coordination of action; and any actions or expressions are both personal and supported by industrial scale access to what the authors describe as "multi-layered social technologies". In addition, these groupings which form, big or small, may reject more formal organisations and may not have lead agents. More importantly, any previous experience of activism within those groupings informs the group as an entity. This

makes it possible both for individual actors to reflect-in-action, which is the phrase Donald Schön (1986) uses to describe when actors in fields have enough knowledge and experience to react in a way which is automatic or instinctive. In addition, because of the rapidity of activism in internet time, I contend that this kind of response, where activists can reflect-in-action, is likely to be developed over a much shorter time. In any event, these movements respond quickly, their activists reflect-in-action (Schön, 1986) and, through social media, continually participate in actions, maintaining a constant pressure on the opposition (Alinsky, 1971). A number of scholars have ascribed this action to particular iterations of activism, for example Trapenberg Frick (2016) on the Tea Party movement and related property rights groups, Shepard (2014) on community projects as social activism, and shared economy based communities (Olariu, 2014).

This last model, crowd-organised and enabled by technology, best describes the formation of DTJ which, from the outset, was enabled and organised by digital platforms (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; 2013). While that research focused on Twitter, I argue that connective action in this instance began on Twitter but migrated to Facebook and that DTJ moved from purely crowd-enabled to the more hybridised form of crowd-organised and organisationally-enabled.

The work on connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; 2013), along with the work of Darren Lilleker and Thierry Vedel (2013), will be examined in the context of the digital environment, in particular, the work of Henrike Knappe and Sabine Lang (2014). These scholars investigated the outreach and mobilisation capacity of women's movements in Germany and the UK and ascribed the term 'communicative turn' to contemporary feminism's shift from offline to online.

Therefore the communicative turn, as applied to feminism, provides a direct link between feminist activism and connective action (Knappe & Lang, 2014). Bennett and Segerberg (2012; 2013) illustrate the way in which communication is utilised in connective action and the importance that plays in activism while Knappe and Lang (2014) define this as the communicative turn. The communicative turn, now clear in activism (Norman, 2017; Lopez, 2018; Polino, 2018) and in the face-to-face political arena (Mansbridge, 2018) is a crucial lens through which to examine feminist digital activism and

the organising which structures that activism. Through each communicative act, this will provide insight into the development of policies, resulting strategies, and devised actions. These instances allow a contemporary feminist framework for activism to be understood.

In many ways these questions about cyberactivism, or what is now called digital or online activism, are ones which have preoccupied feminists about all activism through the four waves. That is, feminist activists have consistently been confronted with the question of how to get the message across most effectively, how to build a community of feminist concern and action, and how to transform the public sphere. These questions provide a context to the particular study of feminism and its effectiveness in Australia. Sarah Maddison and Marian Sawyer (2013), in their unique longitudinal study of feminism's institutional outcomes, argue for a multiplicity of repertoires: "It is now recognised that most movements have engaged with conventional politics, through lobbying and institution-building, at the same time as pursuing more adversarial and performative tactics" (Maddison & Sawyer, 2013, p. xii). This multiplicity of repertoires broadens capacity, is more inclusive and; as Marshall Ganz says, it increases the possibility that one of these repertoires might actually work (Ganz, 2005).

This thesis is located at the intersection of these issues. In particular, I am interested to interrogate the ways in which feminists have used the internet, turning themselves into cyberactivists to achieve social change. Employing traditional political strategies from lobbying to institution-building, feminists have been able to secure significant social and economic change for women. However, as Sarah Maddison and Marian Sawyer (2013) also point out, these more orthodox strategies have always run in parallel with more adversarial and performative tactics. It is these adversarial and performative tactics which are characteristic of the cyberactivism that this thesis interrogates via a specific case-study of feminist digital activism: the Destroy the Joint movement.

### **At the intersection**

The online feminist activism of DTJ was built on social media, at once highly flexible but also an organising platform (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; 2013). In addition, DTJ benefitted from the work of journalists, including my own work, often using that work to provide contexts for calls-to-actions, campaigns and the broad discussion of sexism and misogyny. This intersection of journalism and activism has always existed (Dorf & Tarrow, 2017) and

that intersection received a signal boost because of the impact of social media (Dubois, Gruzd, & Jacobson, 2018) and the broad understanding that the power of media may shape political participation (Russell, 2017).

In the background to all this, I was also developing as an academic in the traditional sense of the word. When I was employed as a tenured academic, it was as a practicing journalist rather than as a scholar. However, it is hard to resist the enculturation of practitioners by the academy so I began to teach in areas which were theoretical, particularly in the areas of citizenship and participation. That provided a broader context for how DTJ worked. So, these were five threads with me all the time throughout the process of my research: feminism, journalism, social media, activism and academia. I learned about the tradition of activist scholars (Hale, 2008; Sudbury & Okazawa-Rey, 2015). In my own workplaces, my own activism has always been a site of some contention.

I also wrote more and more as there were three strands of my life which required that: teaching, being a columnist, and being an activist. Some journalists are also activists (Dorf & Tarrow, 2017), or at least try to take a position which might challenge what is going on in the real world, and that has been true for me. My whole life was waiting for all these separate parts of my life to come together to try to make change. It was only when I became an academic and not long after DTJ began that it became clear there was room for a useful – and hopeful - narrative about online feminist activists in Australia.

As I began my proposal for this PhD, scanning what had been covered, I tried to grasp the many and varied work of feminist academics in Australia before me. There were all the Australian women whose work which had been influential when I first went to university (Greer, 1970; Kingston, 1977; Summers, 1975); and a host more across all disciplines. Feminist researchers had looked at the history of the Women's Electoral Lobby (WEL) (Sawer & Radford, 2008), the history of Louisa Lawson (Ollif, 1978), the history of those who campaigned for the vote (Oldfield, 1992). There were the stories of successful campaigns, such as securing the vote, and campaigns which were still waiting to be successful in some states and territories, such as abortion law reform, parental leave and child care. There was room to further explore the nuts and bolts of feminist campaigns from the inside and this provided an area for more extensive research. Much has been written about

DTJ from the outside, particularly in mainstream media and in academic research. In summary, that coverage has been surprised, sceptical, enthusiastic. In less mainstream media and on social media, the coverage has sometimes been less than enthusiastic and, in a number of cases, highly critical. For the most part, from the outside, and with a handful of interviews with participants who left DTJ after a short time, which did not provide extensive insight into the group. This is the first comprehensive analysis of DTJ.

This intersection of insider research and more traditional systematic social science research may provide a useful insight into happens inside an Australian online feminist social movement and form new knowledge to assist in sustaining feminist activism in a society where women are still not equal, where women are murdered by men at the rate of at least one a week, and where the cost to the community of family violence alone is predicted by the Productivity Commission to be \$609 million by 2021 (Department of Social Services, 2014). As I submit this these, in June 2019, three women have been murdered in three days. In October 2018, 11 women were killed in 31 days, mostly by men they knew. In September 2015, three women were killed over 24 hours. We need a better understanding and urgently needed theoretical perspectives on how to change violence and while we wait for society to change, a better understanding of how to raise awareness of the impact of violence against women.

In this thesis, I broaden the examination of DTJ to extend the work of Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg in their ground-breaking research on connective action (2010; 2013) by developing a frame beyond the personal action frame; and by exploring the shift in one organisation from crowd-enabled to organisationally-enabled connective action. In addition, I use Bourdieu's concepts of habitus (1977) and various forms of capital (1986). While habitus and capital are more fully explored in chapter five, they are also utilised in earlier chapters so a brief explanation beyond that in the glossary may be useful. Habitus is the embedded dispositions and traits, culturally and socially produced, our socialised norms. Habitus guides how we respond (Bourdieu, 1990). Capital is "understood as the set of actually usable resources and powers" (Bourdieu, 1986). It is what we know, how we know it, who we know; and together it confers status. This thesis uses cultural capital (what we know) and social capital (who we know, our networks). I analyse the characteristics of the feminist digital activists of DTJ to reveal the cultural and social capitals necessary for such

activism and highlight specific aspects of the capital which contributed to that activism, including an elaboration of the existing work on information activism (Halupka, 2014; 2015). While much of the research so far has stated that DTJ is a platform which enables social change, I will compare and contrast three early campaigns of DTJ and then undertake a more detailed analysis of Counting Dead Women as an example of information activism. That there is emotional labour (Hochschild, 1983) in activism is well understood – however, I extend the understanding of emotional labour in activism, including that some aspects of emotional labour, largely seen as negative, accrue as emotional capital, a form of social capital (Nowotny, 1981) acquired in the private sphere including “knowledge, contacts and relations as well as access to emotionally valued skills and assets which hold within any social network characterised at least partly by affective ties” (Nowotny, 1981, p. 148). I build on Jessamy Gleeson’s work (2016; 2017; 2018) to expand on her concept that emotional labour of digital activism is tied to activist burnout, to challenge her hypothesis using the interviews from my research so the activists themselves can propose ways in which to develop resilience within the feminist digital labour space. In addition, I have undertaken the first insider research on DTJ which provides a more comprehensive insight into how this iteration of feminist digital activism operates.

Three key research questions and sets of subquestions have emerged for this thesis.

First, who builds digital feminist activist communities and how are they are built? What are attributes of a sustainable feminist collective and how are those characteristics developed and sustained over time?

Second, how is information about the key concerns of social movements communicated? How do digital feminist activists get their messages, ideas and concerns out there? In what ways do feminist online/digital activists contribute to and transform the public sphere?

Third, what is the experience of these feminist digital activists? Are there ways to minimise burnout?

I selected the case study method because it allows an intense study of social phenomena through intensive analysis of a single case, while drawing on all aspects of the case. In this



way, I could examine the case study over time (particularly in analysing the three campaigns of this group). As well, case studies are frequently used in both feminist research and activist research, which is where this thesis sits (Ackerly & True, 2010).

I interviewed 30 DTJ activists, past and present. I then transcribed those interviews and loaded the transcriptions into coding software NVivo. I printed out transcripts so I could read them over and over again. I then used NVivo to code each interview, and emerged with many common themes across the interviews. As I explain more fully in chapter three, methods and methodology, I chose thematic analysis as a way to interpret what was in the interviews. I looked for themes – for patterns – which emerged across the data set and which provided what Shoshanna Sofaer (1999) described as “rich descriptions of complex phenomena” while also “giving voice to those whose views are rarely heard”. Indeed, some of the activists I interviewed were older women who had never been asked for their views on activism. Stories of emotions emerged from every single interview undertaken. In the chapter on emotional labour and capital, my research interrogates feelings including the positive, and found activist experiences beyond burnout.

It had not occurred to me how often activists would experience joy, or even that activists do activism every single day. These are small, surprising findings. As Ayres (2008) says, an inductive approach matters. I tried to use feminist thematic analysis as a way to give power to my research participants, to look at themes which the participants themselves raised, either directly (“you should write about this”) or indirectly. Although there does not appear to be a direct definition of feminist thematic analysis, I tried to emulate those researchers in nursing, in particular, to “capture the values and meaning that these [participants] attributed to their understanding of feminism and feminist identity” (McDougall, 2013).

### **Chapter Outlines**

As explained earlier, chapter one functions as both an introduction and a brief literature review; setting out both the theoretical realm in which this thesis operates and providing an insight into why it is crucial to reflect on our activism.

In chapter two, I lay out a brief historical overview of feminism from a social movements perspective and of Australian feminism, eventually focussing on the trajectory of feminist organising in the digital space.

Chapter three is the methods and methodology chapter, which also includes a section on the challenges and benefits of researching as an insider, and a reflection on my own feminist research methods. As I argue in this chapter, a case study provides a rich data set; and in this particular case study, the data set provides both the outward facing data and the behind-the-scenes data. This case study uses several examples: individuals, groups, processes, societies, episodes.

Chapters four to eight each contain empirical analysis using relevant existing research and an analysis of my primary data, interviews with activists. Each chapter has an overview of relevant literature to the key themes discussed within and will then introduce the key argument or arguments to be explored more fully. In each chapter, I will attempt to make clear why I am making claims of new knowledge which are relevant in the realm of online feminist Australian activism which in some instances could also be pertinent to online feminist activism elsewhere.

Chapter four is a brief history of Destroy The Joint's emergence and key events throughout its history, as well as summary of key critiques of the page. It uses analytics applied to Facebook data to describe the growth of the page; and also considers the structures and leadership within the organisation of DTJ.

In chapter five I explore the impact of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) and capital (Bourdieu, 1986) on the becoming of feminist activists in Destroy The Joint. As well as using Bourdieu's theories to undertake that exploration, and also the concept of prefiguration (Boggs, 1977), where activists bring their embedded values to bear on their next activist experience, in this case Destroy The Joint. In the sharing of the skills, knowledge and attributes which shape capital, capital both structures agents on the field and also structures the field itself. In the strictly Bourdieusian sense, capital has three forms: economic (money, property rights); cultural (education, skills, class, taste, preferences) and social (connections and networks).

Chapter six expands on Max Halupka's work on information activism (2014; 2015). In particular, I examine the concept of information activism as a function of cultural capital and apply that concept to activism. This chapter illustrates what these activists brought with them to the Australian online feminist activist group, how their activism evolved during their involvement with Destroy The Joint, and how what these activists brought to their activism shaped that activism.

Chapter seven "On campaigning and Counting Dead Women in Australia" examines both the campaigns within DTJ and the multiplicity of strategic repertoires used by the DTJ organisers in their hybrid campaigning. It explores how the admins and moderators of DTJ each personally felt about the campaigns of the page and what the admins and moderators considered to be effective and ineffective. In particular, it analyses the Counting Dead Women campaign, which keeps track of - and disseminates - a toll of fatal violence against women in Australia. I explore how the campaign was devised and then implemented. It will also examine what, if any, impact that campaign has had on the mainstream media coverage of fatal violence against women. I also examine the artefacts of the Counting Dead Women campaign, including the imagery of the campaign, how those artefacts were shared and the way this campaign performed on Facebook. Using that imagery and the way it is shared, I illustrate the shift from the concept of the personal action frame (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; 2013) as a form of political participation to a transnational digital solidarity frame, where those who participate online through the sharing of images do so to state their position in solidarity with others. I argue that this too is a form of connective action, enabled by the internet, which, unlike the personal action frame, emphasises more than shared values, more than individual interpretation and adaptation.

Chapter eight looks at the findings around the emotional labour of feminist activists in Australia, and its accrual and transformation to emotional capital; In this chapter, I look closely at another form of capital, one which was only lightly touched upon by Bourdieu but then more thoroughly explored by Helga Nowotny (1981). Emotions are a huge part of activism. Activists are driven by urgency, purpose and passion and, as Gould (2002) puts it well, "[m]ovement participants, animated by a tangled mixture of feelings and calculations, are much more than rational actors". Those feelings and calculations propel us. They also lead to burnout in feminist organisations. However, burnout was not a big factor in attrition in

DTJ, and indeed some of the activists have been there for nearly seven years. Through my data, I explore whether the connectedness of those in the group has an impact on resilience. This chapter explores emotional labour and emotional capital and how those concepts sit in the broader study of the politics of emotion. I analyse what the interview subjects themselves said about three distinct but intertwined themes: the emotional labour of activism in the feminist sphere, the emotional labour of dealing with attacks on the page, and the emotional labour of dealing with other activists. Emotional labour is unpaid because it is not recognised as labour, however I argue it is identified and recognised as a form of exchange within the volunteer digital feminist activist workplace.

I outline what these activists convey about emotional capital, and argue they accumulate emotional capital through this activism. They accumulate capital because they labour, they accumulate emotional capital because of their emotional labour as they carry out their activism. Emotional capital was once identified as being acquired solely in the private sphere but as women have inhabited the public sphere, they bring with them emotional capital and its benefits. Emotional labour was always identified as being in the public sphere. While volunteer work as an activist is in the public sphere, Arlie Hochschild (1983) formulated the concept as one which occurs only in paid employment. Yet I do not think I have ever felt more beholden to any work activity - volunteer or not - than I did and do to DTJ. Seven years after its inception, I still think about it daily, sometimes hourly. This chapter tells the story about how the Destroy the Joint activists felt about their work; and in what ways those feelings shaped their participation in this activism.

Chapter nine, the conclusion, summarises the findings of this thesis, its limitations and what's next. At this feminist regeneration, I conclude there is some hope that feminist digital activism makes change. I hope my thesis has the potential to contribute significantly to a new understanding of the feminist political struggle. Specifically, the project challenges current practices and ideologies which see online activism as a largely top-down movement (in the vein of 'progressive' 'authoritarian' groups, or top-down movements, such as GetUp and Avaaz). As Shaw (2012, p. 196) writes: "Online communities... function to develop new activist discourses, ideologies, and ideas, and [to show] areas for activism". She identifies some feminists as wishing to convert others to feminism through their online practice of feminism. It is nearly impossible, in an overarching sense, to measure impact, but it is

possible to make claims about change and how that change was brought about. This group has not yet ‘destroyed the joint’, but it continues to work towards its goal.

This thesis has implications for the practice of feminist digital activism, including the benefit of encompassing members with previous structured activist experience, tools and practices for using online groups as forums to provide support for other activists; and the importance of including activists with diversity of skills and interests for long-term sustainability.

## Chapter Two: A brief history of sisterhood, from waves to the web

Back in 2005, I heard a young woman ask the feminist media critic Judith Williamson what was to be done about the parlous state of representations of women in advertising. Williamson paused, and then replied, ‘The problem is that sexism didn’t go away, we just stopped talking about it.’ She then went on to explain how ‘we’ (the assumed feminist audience) had allowed the word to be mocked and hijacked by the media, and because no one wanted to be seen as ‘uptight,’ ‘frigid,’ or ‘humourless’ the term sexism fell out of use, latterly acquiring a quaint, old-fashioned ring to it—in a way that was strikingly not paralleled by notions of racism or homophobia. ‘One thing we could do, then,’ Williamson concluded, ‘is simply start using the term again.’ (Gill, 2011, p. 61)

And we did.

In this chapter, I will briefly review the existing research and theory on feminism as a social movement, with a view toward the contemporary trajectory of feminist organising through digital media. This chapter also situates DTJ in a continuum of feminist activism in feminism’s - perhaps - fourth iteration, generation or wave, and situates this Australian activist group in feminism as a social movement, as a demonstration of what Alison Crossley (2017) calls waveless feminism, a feminism which is not “serene or flat” (p. 20) but which has myriad currents, some stronger than others. Debra Minkoff (1997) argues that social movements experience different trajectories, with differing and competing contexts which impact those trajectories. This chapter provides this context for this particular form of feminist digital activism.

Feminism is often described as a series of waves (Nicholson, 2010; Munro, 2013; Taylor, 1989; Dahlerup, 2013; Donovan, 2012). However, I argue along with, for example, Deborah Stevenson, Christine Everingham and Penelope Robinson (2011) that the term generation is more helpful. The idea of waves tends to minimise the work women do between what is constructed or perceived by others as crests or peaks in movements. The Australian feminist generation, circa 2012, took a communicative turn in the instance of DTJ. However, social movements are reproduced by their histories and feminism is as much subject to its histories as any other social movement, bringing with it repertoires, politics,

what Francesca Polletta and James M. Jasper (2001) describe as ‘tactical tastes’.

I contend that when feminists speak truth to male power, they can only enact this through their own lived experience of activism, and through their collective agency. If the personal is political, feminist activism, through the adaption of visibility politics, allows us to make the political personal.

There is also some deliberation over whether waves of feminism exist, whether they can each be delineated; and indeed, what each wave stands for. There is not the same trivialisation of other social movements, no mention of labour movement waves or ‘new Left’ waves or even waves of neoliberalism. In fact, the concept of what organisational continuity actually means is contested. How many movements actually meet that test?

### **Feminism as a social movement**

Feminism sits in the broader context of social movements and its collective expression exemplifies Charles Tilly’s concepts of political movement theory (Tilly, 1999) and the exposition of what he termed WUNC which encompasses the factors of common identity constructed by those engaged in activism: worthiness, unity, number and commitment. This is explored more fully later in this chapter and used in conjunction with Dahlerup (2013) but briefly: worthiness evaluates the worth of the project; unity describes movement solidarity; number is clearly the quantity of those involved; and commitment asks for continuity of individual actors.

Key challenges of feminist movements are - more or less - the same today as they were when identified by Myra Marx Ferree and Patricia Yancey Martin (1995) in their edited work based on a 1992 feminist conference - how to organise collectively across gender, race and class - and how to effectively deliver social change. To meet and defeat these challenges, feminists conduct campaigns, use different ways to conduct those campaigns, and certainly fulfil at least WNC. Sometimes feminism can be a little short of the U, made apparent by contemporary debates on intersectionality, white privilege, sex work, trans inclusivity/exclusivity, class and myriad other ways in which feminists divide themselves (The TERFs, 2014; Ortega, 2006; Carby, 2007; Hamad and Liddle, 2017).

Among all the arguments which divide feminists from each other, there are two other challenges facing feminism as a whole. One, it has a bad name, perhaps, as Joan Buschman and Silvo Lenart (1996) argue, because it is identified with militant acts, bra-burning (just the least of it) and man-hating, and is stereotyped in mainstream media and in popular discourse. Two, it is considered unnecessary because the feminist battles are ‘won’. Post-feminism is widely debated but Sarah Gamble (2004, p. 44) puts it best, it is used as a term to indicate “joyous liberation from the ideological shackles of a hopelessly outdated feminist movement” while pretending that there is also no need for the feminist movement

In addition, the concept of postfeminism, or of a feminism that ignored structural inequality, emerged the further into neoliberalism we sank (Keller and Ringrose, 2015; Rottenberg, 2014; Scharff, 2016). I argue that the ‘feminism is dead’ argument could be perceived as a tool to discourage women from working in feminist activism, as if collective activity had been shown to be a failure; would be certain to invoke backlash (Reger, 2012) and the only way to achieve equality would be to achieve it on your own terms, in your own way. In short, neoliberalism urged us to forget our sisters. Despite longstanding media claims (Bolotin, 1982; Razer, 2016; Hill, 2015), feminism is not dead. It is, instead, as a movement, home to many niches while maintaining a collective identity. Kaitlynn Mendes, Jessica Ringrose and Jessalynn Keller (2019) have described this current wave - generation - as popular feminism which rises up in response to popular misogyny (Banet-Weiser, 2015). As Sarah Maddison and Marian Sawyer (2013) say, there is no necessity to write obituaries for feminism.

In order to be a social movement, according to Tilly (1999), feminism must satisfy WUNC. Drude Dahlerup (2013) also contends it must have organisational continuity, shared identity and core ideological purpose (Dahlerup, 2013). These two definitions intersect with each other, although it may not be surprising that it is the male social movement theorist who insists that for something to be worthwhile, it also needs to be big in number.

In some respects, each of these attributes overlap with each other. Based on Drude Dahlerup’s thesis, I argue that organisational continuity (or what Tilly might call commitment) asks us to imagine a social movement where the activist network consists of the same personnel, which would only really work if the social movement achieved its goals in a



lifetime. It could be more useful to consider if the goals of the social movement were consistent over its existence, or even its - shared - or collective identity was maintained over a lifetime. It would not matter if the people were different, as long as the aims or the core ideological purpose were the same. It might also be useful to think about the repertoires which are used within the movement both to achieve goals and also to stick together (Taylor and Whittier, 1992; Reger, 2002; Taylor and Van Dyke, 2004).

### **Organisational continuity (or commitment)**

Organisational continuity could be seen as a version of Tilly's commitment. There is some deliberation over whether waves of feminism exist, if that metaphor is even useful or if it elides the feminist experience (Fernandes 2010; Nicholson 2010; Laughlin & Castledine 2010), whether they can each be delineated, and indeed, what each wave stands for. Verta Taylor (1989) argues that social movement theory, which focuses on an "immaculate conception" interpretation – births followed by deaths - fails to recognise the aspects of the continuity of any movement, movements in decline or in equilibrium; and that it also concentrates on the long held classical conceptions of effective social movements as big in number, with a broad base. This is a heroic ideation which, in the lived moment, bears little relation to the actual grind of being part of any social movement, of activism in particular, which is always structured by the structures (Bourdieu, 1979). It may not be possible, for example, for feminist activism to thrive if women have multiple competing priorities (Randall, 1987). Social movements respond to context and that is also true of feminist social movements. What makes social movements gain momentum and lose momentum is still a study in progress, but given solid foundation by Charles Tilly's (1986, p.10) "repertoire of contention" which he says is triggered by what he describes as "current patterns of repression", still very relevant to feminism; the population's "daily routines" and its "accumulated experience with collective action"; and the "prevailing standards of rights and justice". There are different stages of mobilisation and those stages work concurrently with shifts in both the underpinning ideology and the organisations which coalesce around those ideologies. Taylor's (1989, p. 772) view is that "movements do not die, but scale down and retrench to adapt to changes in the political climate", that there are bridges which cross over between different stages of any movement, that all movements experience abeyance. The discussion of the concept of collective identity - a core emphasis for social movement status - by Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier (1992) the way in which a group shares goals to

maintain cohesion, underscores their original premise that feminism does experience continuity, or, as Maddison and Sawyer put it, “remarkable continuity” (2013, p. 8). Old-style activism, based on collective action, is an accepted framework for change and new-style activism, organised, for example, as connective action, is more likely to be treated by some established feminists as trivial, ineffective and treated in an oppositional way. New-school activists, in the other hand, argue that older activists render the new work as invisible. Sarah Maddison (2013, p. 140) writes of a feminist conference in Sydney Australia in 2010:

One of the conference organisers, Gabe Kavanagh, also spoke directly of concerns about an apparent ‘generational schism’ within the Australian women’s movement, reportedly arguing that the work and politics of young feminists in Australia ‘are seldom recognised by more established feminists’ meaning that, in many ways, they are rendered ‘invisible to them’. Kavanagh expressed the view that while feminist ideals have remained consistent, young women’s methods have changed, producing a ‘generational disconnect’. Now, she suggests, ‘Instead of protesting on the streets, as in the 1970s, today’s young feminists campaign online.’

As a result, and as Julia Schuster (2017) argues, some of that online feminist work is invisible to older feminists, who may not be active online or even present online. In addition, what is considered to be the affect of older feminism – as “humourless victim” feminism (Bulbeck, 2010, p. 21) – is rejected by younger feminists.

### **Shared and collective identity (or unity)**

Collective identity refers to the way that those involved in a social movement see themselves as a group and articulate a shared or negotiated worldview. It is a result of a distributed, collective conversation and the way that conversation is first individuated and then returned to the collective identity. Of course, not all feminists are included in one big collective conversation, but all may have the opportunity to participate in smaller conversations which have been influenced by other discourses in a larger collective. A collective identity, as far as it exists, is not a unanimous, homogenous position with no contestation along the way. Collectives are not homogenous or even heterogeneous but there may be an acceptance of a common position. Shaw (2012) in early work on feminist digital activism finds that networks of Australian feminist bloggers negotiate political discourse with

each other through their blogs but also more broadly. Not everyone can see or hear everyone else, and yet define themselves through a common language or sense of the collective. This may even be true if many members of the collective disagree with one another, for example in disputes around sex work or trans inclusivity. Shaw also discusses the process of moderation, linking and mutual support which appears in this kind of grassroots activism – as well as the way in which participants move in and out of networks defining and redefining their actions and their activism through the rearguing and reconstruction of argument which she describes as discursive activism (Shaw, 2013) and which builds solidarity.

Collective identity is how those in the movement see themselves in opposition to others. That collective identity permeates all aspects of any social movement. As Verta Taylor and Nancy Whittier (1992, p. 170) put it, it's the “shared definition of a group that derives from members' common interests, experiences, and solidarity”. When looking at collective identity in digital feminist activism, it is vital to recognise the challenges that presents. Cristina Flesher Fominaya (2018, p. 429) recognises analysis of collective identity formation in online movements is difficult because of “the mediated nature of communication” where it becomes fractured; where “social and material life are often infused with elements of anonymity, modalities of hypermobility, ephemerality, and mutability” (Coleman, 2010 p.494). Collective identity is, as Flesher Fominaya (2018) says, rarely permanent and even less so online but there are some key elements which define the boundaries of a collective identity, such as the effective socialisation into movement cultural practices by learning the codes in operation and for members to feel as if they are part of something bigger.

It is quaint now to consider that once scholars and public intellectuals thought that what happened online stayed online with no discernible impact in what was then termed the real world. In fact, Evgeny Morozov (2009) argued it was slacktivism, “feel-good online activism that has zero political or social impact” and Malcolm Gladwell (2010) claimed it should be ignored because it wasn't real activism with its more traditional thick collective ties (Gladwell, 2010). By contrast, present-day scholarship increasingly suggests that social media social movements develop a strong sense of collective identity (Harlow 2012; Milan 2015) in particular through the formation of digital comfort zones (Treré, 2015, p. 869) where activists reinforced “their internal solidarity through practices of ‘ludic activism’.” In the

experience of the administrators and moderators of DTJ, that ludic activism, that playfulness, was a form of support (discussed in chapter five).

However, the challenges of collective identity continue. It shifts shape, according to the participants within each instance of discussion or negotiation, it is an of-the-moment interpretation that is renewed and rehashed and moves within multiple contexts. As Nancy Whittier (2017, p. 382) puts it, tensions emerge “because many groups want both to deconstruct the barriers that separate them from the mainstream and simultaneously to organise around their distinctness as a group”. This is how collective identity, shared values, are forged, through multiple actions and processes. This identity is a key aspect of a social movement.

### **Core ideological purpose (or worthiness)**

We can define feminism through shared ideologies, some of which have moved to, more or less, general acceptance (van Dijk, 2006). However, some aspects of this core ideological purpose, belief or value have been tested because of the nature of third wave feminism (explained later) where specific parameters of equality, such as race and class, are added to the list. My argument would be that equality is equality and broadening it doesn't diminish it but strengthens it. Other central elements of the core belief system include the maintenance of a “system of equitable power distribution” (Thomas, 1999) and more specifically, equality in employment and the family setting (Schnittker, Freese, & Powell, 2003).

We can blame US journalist Martha Lear (1968) for the use of the word waves to describe feminism, which metaphor is now the dominant discourse when discussing our particular social movement. Are there waves? Does it matter? Is it possible that this added scrutiny (hey, why isn't your movement constant in its behaviour?) that women experience as individuals (Mahdavi, 2009; Lapierre, 2008) is also directed at the one social movement where gender equality is central? And why should we use the wave metaphor when it paralyses feminism and sets us against each other? (Gillis and Munford, 2004).

In what has been identified as its earliest ‘wave’ form, feminism was the struggle for equal voting rights, for labour rights and for freedom from violence. First wave feminism is traditionally portrayed as reaching its peak with the struggle for women's suffrage and along

the way, making major gains in the areas of “matrimonial law, property ownership, child custody rights, work and educational opportunities, and government regulation of sexual morality” (Sanders, 2004, p. 23; Magarey 2001) and shifting from Liberalism to socialism, says Olive Banks (1986). Through largely polite, middle-class advocacy, first wave feminism placed women’s rights on the political agenda (Sawer 2013). Second wave feminism, from the mid-sixties to the late seventies, took the position that the ‘personal is political’ (the title of Carol Hanisch’s 1970 essay) to illustrate the way in which patriarchal values and behaviours influenced every aspect of the female existence (Thornham, 2004) and the Women’s Liberation movement, as a foundation of the second wave, focussed primarily on the undoing of patriarchy (Millett, 1970).

The third wave of feminism (Walker, 2001) responded to a number of incidents which transected both race and gender; and in the US at least, was a response to high profile incidents, such as the Anita Hill/Clarence Thomas hearings. Jodi Dean (1997) described third-wave as a response to the attacks on the rights of women. Feminism, she argues, was not dead, in fact it was “able to act with vitality” (Dean, 1997, p.149), able to gain power “from coalition within its own diverse ranks as well as with other political groups” (1997, p.140). Yet that opportunity for coalition also attracted critique, including that some of the next generation feminists set themselves in opposition to second-wave feminism (Henry, 2004).

Third wave feminism turned its focus away from the foundations of inequality, away from fighting poverty and male violence against women, towards an expression of - and concentration on - identity and representation. As Nancy Fraser writes (2013, p.161): “It is no longer clear that feminist struggles for recognition are serving to deepen and enrich struggles for egalitarian redistribution,” While in some respects Fraser welcomed the shift towards what she describes as recognition around “multiculturalism, human rights and national autonomy” (2013, p.160), she also feared it undermined the broader goal of redistribution, and argues for feminism to return to its roots of a deep connection with labour and of a reconnection with equality and the restructuring of the economy.

Yet, these are second-wave views of third-wave feminism and entrench the divisions that wave theory encourages. Ruth Lewis and Susan Marine (2015) develop a more nuanced view

of third-wave feminism, one which draws upon the metaphor of a tapestry, a metaphor first developed by second-wave feminists Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson (1989). The Lewis/Marine tapestry (2015, p. 133) replaces the waves and the generations and reifies all the threads, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, class, “political, cultural and social contexts” into a feminism that unites, rather than divides.

Even in this very brief summary of feminism as a social movement, there is evidence of multiple competing priorities often used to attack feminism and to set feminist activists against each other while at the same time appearing to be, as Jo Reger (2012) puts it, everywhere and nowhere. This might be how you would describe a social movement which gets quite a lot of mainstream media traction, including among celebrities such as Beyoncé, (Keller & Ringrose, 2015) but which leads to very little real change at a policy level.

I argue, however, that social movements traverse a trajectory. The best-organised movements incorporate history, current circumstance and the multiple goals of multiple actors (as described above by Lewis and Marine, 2015), to move forward, meaning to recruit more widely, to mobilise using a variety of repertoires, by broadening appeal through those multiple goals (Polletta, 2014).

So how do these multiple competing priorities locate feminism in the 21st century where it exists ubiquitously online? In the next section I will address this question. As Dean and Aune (2015, p. 375) argue, the metaphor of the wave should “best be understood as a way of framing feminist practice, rather than referring to discreet cohorts of feminists”. The framing of feminist practice in this instance is provided by the role of the internet and social media platforms, and the cohorts are intermediated by the digital organising platforms.

### **Is there a fourth wave of feminism?**

Donovan wrote the first edition of *Feminist Theory: the Intellectual Traditions of American Feminism* in 1985; and the fourth edition (2012) nearly 30 years later. Although sceptical of the use of the word wave, it is one she employs herself and argues the fourth wave (Cochrane, 2013; Darmon, 2014; Munro, 2013; Martin & Valenti, 2012) will be a powerful “resurgence and rearticulation of feminisms past” (Donovan, 2012, p. xiv) and dates its beginning to the Hillary Clinton campaign for the Democratic nomination in 2008. Of those

who identify a fourth wave, a clear commonality is the role of the internet and social media platforms as a space for the feminist movement and women's voices; women for many years were the power users of social networking and more interested in using the internet for communicating with friends well before the onset of social media (Weiser, 2000) and women are still more likely than men to use Facebook to research, to look for information and to learn new thing (Noguti, Singh, & Waller, 2019).

Today much feminist organisation occurs online but the challenges of organising remain. Scholarly research into the new forms of politics facilitated by the internet in the nineties has focussed on whether it would be an effective tool or just a replication of existing power structures. Feminists are digital citizens, part of a networked society (Castells, 1996) and both the value of the digital communication and the ease with which it occurs contribute to impact. In some respects, this makes it easier to see the contradictory structure of interests and values that constitute (feminist) society. According to Marian Sawer and Sarah Maddison (2013, xii), traditional forms of lobbying continue but "adversarial and performative tactics" now occur online. Athina Karatzogianni's 2012 view, expressed just as DTJ emerged, was that the digital affect of discontent and the desire for social change, are not realised; and that even when they are, they don't make a material difference. She says tangible effects can only be operationalised once capitalism is undone.

These current models shall not manage effectively networks, flows, material machines and productive labours at the libidinal, affective, and ideological levels, unless the world system is rebooted as a whole (Karatzogianni, 2012 p. 249).

Her position must then discount social advances such as universal suffrage, divorce, and minimum wage which advances she says only serve to prop up capitalism and buy into oppression. However, I'd argue that the social web is an opportunity to recruit activists and, as Gamson (1995, p. 85) said of recruitment, "activists can bridge public discourse and people's experiential knowledge, integrating them in a coherent frame that supports and sustains collective action". Recruiting matters, participation matters, no matter the vector. As Prudence Chamberlin (2017, p. 107) puts it, "[w]hile social media is not at the centre of all fourth wave activism, it has transformed dissemination and participation such that the cultural context is significantly different from that of ten years ago".

In 2007 (ten years before Chamberlin wrote) there was no opportunity for broadcast feminist communities such as Hollaback! and Everyday Sexism. Harvey Weinstein's behaviour was still a secret. Now, feminism is seen. Feminism is on every social media platform, it's the word on every star's lips, it's a UN campaign led by Hermione Granger or at least her real self, Emma Watson. It is, as Banet-Weiser (2018, p.884) puts it, both "hypervisible and normative".

In that moment of hypervisibility, at the time Chamberlin's book was published in 2017, the communities which aggregated around #beenrapedandneverreported and #metoo became sites for activists to recruit, to organise and to mobilise (Mendes et al 2019) and that process is now well-acknowledged and documented. Australian feminist bloggers negotiated political discourse with each other through their blogs but also more broadly. Frances Shaw (2012) wrote of feminist blogging networks in Australia they not only build networks among bloggers, communities, but also build what she described as "investment in feminist claims" by participants (p. 232). These investments in feminist claims may develop as micro-campaigns - or meeting points - which Jessica McLean, Sophia Maalsen and Alana Grech (2016) posit as characterising the "ongoing productive space" that is DTJ.

More importantly, however, Shaw also discusses the process of moderation, linking and mutual support which appears in this kind of grassroots activism – as well as the way in which participants move in and out of networks defining and redefining their actions and their activism through the rearguing and reconstruction of argument or discursive activism (Shaw, 2013). Shaw's participants used the word microactivism. But how does this kind of activism translate to political change? How does this grassroots framework co-exist alongside more traditional activist frameworks? Is it a kind of organising? And let's recall Ferree who, long after her work in 1995, now says the development of feminist organising makes contemporary feminism transnational (at least in the English-speaking and digitally accessible world): "For all these reasons, networks – informal, decentralized and increasingly electronic – have become the hallmark of transnational feminist organizing in the present time" (Ferree, 2007). Examples include #metoo and Slutwalk (De Benedictus, Orgad, & Rottenberg, 2019), as well as Association of Women's Rights in Development which began as a more traditional form of organising (Harcourt, 2013).



DTJ, an online feminist action group based solely on Facebook, fits the criteria of loose, multi-issue (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; 2013), a contemporary activist network which intimates a future – and even a present – that moves away from actions which operate in traditional ways around advocacy and require high levels of organisational resources (read, costs). Shaw (2012) documents this online or digital activism or ‘microactivism’ which may complement the Bennett-Segerberg (2012; 2013) model at the grassroots level and may lead to an exploration of the move away from collective action for feminists to connective action. Digital activism is usually civil and non-violent, making what the Digital Activism Research Project (Edwards, Howard, & Joyce, 2013) calls “an organized public effort, making collective claim(s) on a target authority(s), in which civic initiators or supporters use digital media” and Hands (p.47, 2011) argues that the concept of digital activism slips out of the hands of capital at the urging of some of its handmaidens, technocapitalists, who urge consumers to have their own mobile technologies and therefore their own control (internet access willing):

By putting technology into the hands of people . . . technocapitalism is unwittingly opening itself up to a new cycle of democratisation and social, economic and political flux (Hands, 2011, p.47).

Digital activism provides a process to enable the construction of a social identity which can be measured by the schematic of Worthiness Unity Numbers and Commitment (WUNC) developed by Charles Tilly (1999, 2019) and discussed earlier, however this measure has some interpretational challenges in the context of internet interaction. As Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg succinctly put it: “Critics doubt that loose multi-issue networks that are easy to opt in and out of generate the **commitment**, coherence, and persistence of action required to produce political change” (2013, p. 59).

### **Existing research on Destroy the Joint**

Some scholars have mentioned DTJ either in passing as an example of digital activism or as a focus. To contextualise my research within a growing body of analysis, I will provide an overview of this previous research on DTJ. The analysis and conclusions are all worthwhile however they do not focus on the process of activism itself or the ways that activism impacts

on activists. In some instances, individual activists from DTJ have been interviewed but there has not been a methodical analysis of its activists and their activism.

Several recent analyses of contemporary feminist activism in Australia now recognise the pivotal organising role that DTJ has played, some more comprehensive than others.

Ann Curthoys (2014), in a broader overview of gender in the social sciences and citing a renewal of feminism, reported that: “We have seen a rise in women’s organisation around these issues, as in the remarkably successful Facebook site, Destroy the Joint.” Marian Sawyer too (2013) sought to place Destroy The Joint as a sign of feminist renewal. “A highly successful feminist mobilization promptly took place on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube under the rubric ‘Destroy the Joint’ . . . its witty images of women destroying the joint ‘using only their gender’ attracted a large following.”

Again, in passing, and in an update to their major work *Key Concepts in Gender Studies*, Jane Pilcher and Imelda Whelehan (2016) include Destroy The Joint’s work as an example of cyberfeminist activism, a media watch organ, “selecting and exposing the worst instances of sexism” and specifically mentions *Counting Dead Women*, “the running total of women in Australia killed at the hands of violent men”. They set Destroy the Joint in the context of networked feminism, where a public voice, a collective response to sexism, is fashioned on the social web. “Cyberfeminist activism like this shows the power of the Internet as well as the continuing hazards for women”, said Pilcher (2016, p. ix).” They also posit that the “potential for global feminist organising is technically there but possibly not widely taken up”. (Pilcher, 2016, p. 25)

Verity Trott (2019) describes Destroy The Joint’s peripheral role in the campaign against the visit to Australia of a misogynist pickup artist. She considers Destroy The Joint to be a formal feminist organisation because it has “a public collective identity, comprise[s] a formalised (although not necessarily public) team of people behind the administration of the Facebook pages, operate[s] under a set name and [is] contactable and publicly recognisable”. There are no specific findings ascribed to Destroy the Joint although she does talk about the way in which ‘formal’ digital feminist organisations straddle two of Bennett and Segerberg’s activist typologies (2012, 2013): crowd-enabled and organisationally-enabled connective action. Usefully, Trott extends connective action to make both crowd-enabled connective action and

organisationally-enabled connective action more transparent, to examine the structures of online feminist activism in Australia. It is possible in the smaller Australian setting, separate from international mass mobilisations, to identify actors and their roles in connective activism.

There is, however, in-depth research on Destroy The Joint. This included work by Jessica McLean, Sophia Maalsen and Alana Grech (2013; 2015; 2016; 2017) and Jessamy Gleeson (2017). McLean and Maalsen (2013) were the first to examine Destroy the Joint and examine the “trajectory of the feminist revitalization in new media and beyond” looking at the way in which DTJ occupies space and time and those authors use theories of human geography rather than theories of activism, utilising the spatial analysis framework adapted from Rose and Fincher (cited in McLean and Maalsen, 2013).

Through this framework, they identified the space DTJ occupied on the internet and explored the context and the ramifications of both DTJ and Julia Gillard’s misogyny speech. Broadly, they found that “DTJ and its associated campaigns are precisely the type of social activism and social life that do not leave organisations and institutions unaffected” (McLean & Maalsen, 2013, p.254). McLean and Maalsen claim that through social media, “women have the opportunity to engage in new spaces of resistance and be creative in this resistance . . . a spatial account of these relational processes shows how powerful voices are cutting across domains that may not be as easily compromised without the use of sites like Twitter and Facebook”. They also cite the ubiquity of the technologies which enabled Destroy The Joint in partnership with the reality of gendered disadvantage.

In 2015, the researchers used Destroy The Joint as a simplified and descriptive case study of feminist revitalisation, “broad-based and effective, unified but not uniform” (McLean & Maalsen, 2015, p. 327). They used their former paper (2013) and a brief summary of early campaigns to argue that campaigns facilitated by social media are effective in producing change. In 2016, joined by Alana Grech, McLean and Maalsen entered into a collaborative research process with Destroy The Joint, asking those who participated on the page to reflect on DTJ, place themselves on a map and complete a survey. The total number of completed responses was 888 and the maps showed that those who completed the research activity were not situated in any specific area or location. In addition, the analysis of those surveyed found

online feminist activism, as practised by Destroy The Joint, used a variety of different practices “in mundane and sometimes spectacular ways that are unpredictable and compelling” (McLean, Maalsen, & Grech, 2016, p. 174).

Much of this research and analysis ignores the communicative aspect of DTJ, the discursive activism (Shaw, 2013) which assists “in the definition of a continuously negotiated feminism-to-come” and that the claims developed online are made visible and therefore are able to have “real-world effects, not least in the lives and lifestyles of participants and the ways that they engage politically” (p. 130). In that context, she cites Destroy The Joint as an example of a movement which has contributed to some of the renewed visibility of feminist politics (p. 118) but does not go into further detail. Casey (2016) described Destroy The Joint as succeeding past its original campaign and an example of “collective-action activist groups” (p. 13) but again mentions it only in passing. In addition, and to add to the analysis of the communicative aspect, Zufferey (2018) recognises Destroy The Joint’s work as a contemporary iteration of consciousness-raising and feminist resistance, in contrast to the style of feminist activism which she had experienced. As she reflects:

Feminist activism remains important to challenging women’s ongoing oppression, but it does not exist in the same form as it did in the 1970s. Banner-type protests continue . . . [but] online feminist activism is now a powerful medium for women to get organized and voice their concerns against violence and sexism. (Zufferey, 2018, p. 69)

Gleeson (2016; 2017; 2018) has explored Destroy The Joint in three papers through the use of interviews with four DTJ activists in total. In her 2016 work, she examined three online movements, ‘Sack Vile Kyle’, ‘Destroy The Joint’ and ‘Collective Shout’ and within that, interviewed two Destroy The Joint moderators on the issue of digital labour in feminist organising and what impact digital labour has on both activist labour and activist burnout. She found that emotional labour was tied to activist burnout. In her 2017 work based on these interviews, she found that Destroy The Joint was able to disrupt a dominant discourse while at the same time, morphing into a long-lasting movement which has benefitted a wider feminist cause by challenging existing power structures. Gleeson (2018) in her third paper on DTJ and again basing her arguments on interviews with four participants and one external

activist, argues that DTJ, along with other online feminist activism, should develop policies on intersectionality (further discussed in chapters three and five) in order to prevent what she describes as the “silencing of digital voices” and, as such, “feminists risk isolating important voices for the movement beyond the traditional white, middle-class woman”.

To conclude, there have been a number of findings about the operation and impact of Destroy The Joint. These findings include that Destroy The Joint is an iteration of networked feminist activism which has led to increased feminist visibility in Australia (Shaw, 2013; Sawer, 2013; Curthoys, 2014; Trott, 2019). More specifically, Pilcher and Whelehan identify the key campaign of Destroy The Joint, Counting Dead Women, as an example of cyberfeminist activism which gives women a public collective voice.

In addition, a number of scholars, including McLean (2013; 2015; 2016; 2017) and Gleeson (2016; 2017; 2018) that have identified Destroy The Joint as a space for women to engage in public resistance in a new way, such as discursive activism, and that social media provides a platform which enables social change. From the point of view of the activists, only Gleeson identifies the digital labour of activists as a form of emotional labour and ties that to activist burnout.

This chapter argued that the wave metaphor as applied to feminism is ubiquitous but not necessarily useful or accurate. It also makes the claim that feminism as a social movement meets both Tilly’s (1998) requirements for a social movement of worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment and those of Dahlerup’s trident: organisational continuity, shared identity and core ideological purpose (Dahlerup, 2013). These overlapping characteristics incorporate history, current circumstance and the multiple goals of multiple actors. It sets Destroy the Joint in the context of a feminist social movement and surveys existing research about DTJ, some of which positions it as part of early 21<sup>st</sup> century feminist revitalisation and as an example of connective action. Yet the existing research does not sufficiently explore the communicative aspects of DTJ which acts to both frame feminism and to create a public self. Therefore, this thesis is aimed at investigating whether Destroy the Joint was able to bridge the usual divide between current activist and feminist practice by generating a movement operating at the grassroots level. In the next chapter, I will outline the methods and methodologies used in this research.

### **Chapter Three: In the mix: methods, methodologies and researching as a feminist about my sisters**

In this chapter, I will outline the methods and methodologies I used in researching this thesis: the thematic analysis of qualitative interviews from a single case study. At the conclusion of this chapter, I provide a table listing the participants and some of their individual attributes with an analysis of those attributes.

I had not planned on doing a PhD and was only just in the process of completing a masters by research. However, if there was one thing I really wanted answers for, it was the question of what constituted effective sustainable feminist organising in Australia. I'd been a feminist since the age of 16 and seen some campaigns succeed and so many campaigns struggle. In the middle of 2012, feminism in Australia looked to be in trouble. It couldn't even mount a good defence of the first woman Prime in Australia, Julia Gillard. Of course, that's where Destroy the Joint came in (and more of that in the next chapter).

Destroy The Joint was a case of Australian digital feminist activism, perfect for exploration. It had successful actions in a particular time frame which I will explore later in this thesis. If it worked, why and how did it work? As a cofounder and an active member of Destroy the Joint, I had knowledge of the movement and insider knowledge of its actions.

My research questions were stated in the introduction but I will repeat them now.

Who builds digital feminist activist communities and how are they are built? What are attributes of a sustainable feminist collective and how are those characteristics developed and sustained over time? How is information about the key concerns of social movements communicated? How do digital feminist activists get their messages, ideas and concerns out there? In what ways do feminist online/digital activists contribute to and transform the public sphere? And what is the experience of these feminist digital activists? Are there ways to minimise burnout?

These questions informed my decision to use the case study methodology which provides me with the ability to study an iteration of digital feminist activism in depth. In order to do that, I would utilise qualitative interviews so I could explore the backstory of this particular instance

of feminist activism, and how it operated. I was granted ethics approval for this research, *Feminist Activism in the Digital Age* (approval number **2015/792**).

In addition, as a feminist, it was important to me that this research adhere to feminist principles of research methods and approaches. I was particularly influenced by those principles outlined by Acker, Barry and Esseveld (1983), which argue that the aim of feminist research should be to contribute to women's liberation; to use an approach which would not be oppressive to women, and to end with research which critiques dominant intellectual traditions. Approach matters, or, as Gayle Letherby puts it, what is important in feminist research is "a sensitivity to the significance of gender within society and a critical approach to the research process" (Letherby, 2011, p. 2).

At the end of my data collection and analysis, I can say I have both failed and succeeded in trying to adhere to those principles. I do not know yet whether the work on activist resilience will actually improve our lived experience as activists but that is my goal. I would also argue there are no research methods which do not oppress women to some extent because if there is any one fixed element in research, it is the time element. I do not know any women who have much free time – and certainly far less than men (Sayer, 2005) - so any request for time is an imposition, although none of the interviewees explicitly said so. As Mattingly and Bianchi (2003, p.999) wrote of their findings at the beginning of this century on the gender differences in the quantity and quality of free time, "[m]en and women do experience free time very differently. Men tend to have more of it."

### **Case studies**

Case studies are the perfect instrument for feminist research because they allow both a deep dive and a diversity of voices. Berenice Carroll (1976, p. xi) writes of the importance of case studies in feminist research: "Theory must remain at best hypothetical, at worst unreal and barren" without the rich depth of case studies, without the experience of diverse groups of women.

Destroy The Joint is a discrete example of feminist organising in Australia. From its inception in 2012 to the end of 2018 it has had hundreds of thousands of interactions with nearly 100,000 people who follow and/or like the page, some of whom have come and gone and come again and gone again. Behind those interactions are the people who put the page

together, who devise the campaigns, who post the posts, who moderate the posts. It faces the outside world but has an internal life with those behind the scenes. It is multi-layered and complex, the useful subject for case studies, which are a qualitative approach to investigating a particular bounded system or example or in some cases, multiple bounded systems or examples, over time, through in-depth research involving multiple data sources (Yin, 2006). Its size and longevity make it a solid candidate as a case study to expand understanding of feminist digital organising.

The case study method allows an intense study of social phenomena through intensive analysis of a single case, while drawing on all aspects of the case (Gerring, 2006). Relevant data are gathered and organised in terms of the case to provide a holistic view, including both the outward-facing data and the behind-the-scenes data, in this instance, the use of CrowdTangle. A case study may be conducted over any instance - individuals, groups, processes, societies, episodes. In some respects, Destroy the Joint represents all of those things. The characteristics of case studies are similar across instances: bounded systems, the integrity of the selected case, studied over an identified period of time, observed in the naturalistic setting and inclusive of the context; and multiple data sources, such as researcher observation and interviews with participants (Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg, 1991; Mills, Durepos & Wiebe, 2010; Yin, 2006).

However, the results of single case studies of single instances may not be generalisable. There are three kinds of case study: intrinsic, where understanding is limited to a specific case; instrumental, where insight can be developed into a single issue or theory; and collective, where several cases are studied in order to understand a phenomenon and build generalisability (Zainal, 2007). As with any methodology, there are strengths and weaknesses. The strengths of a case study include the opportunity for both depth and insight. Studying a phenomenon over time allows both flexibility and rigour. Weaknesses of the case study include the risk that it will be time-consuming; that there is researcher bias and interpretation; that there is a cost of maintaining any research over time; and, as mentioned earlier, the lack of generalisability. In addition, there is a risk of poor case selection (Baxter & Jack, 2008). However suitable I thought case studies would be to this research, there was also a long research history with the use of case studies in feminist and activist research (Ackerly & True, 2010; Ayers 2013). As for researcher bias and interpretation, at an epistemological level, every single choice we make in our lives comes from a place of



subjectivity, so that is a risk not just in the use of case studies but in any research. Geertje Boschma and her co-authors (2008, p. 100) summarise decades-long debates in the social sciences as regarding “the subjective nature of interpretation and the influence the researcher has on the construction of evidence in recorded interviews and participant observation”. What I think matters is a direct result of who I am and what I am. As she writes, “We bring many ‘selves’ to the research” (Boschma et al., 2008, p. 100).

All research is more than just a list of facts, organised in paragraphs. The way that information is arranged is a direct result of the frame of the research and the researcher. Every choice I make, from the area I choose to research to the way in which the final thesis is constructed, is a result of decisions I made over the course of this work. I attribute particular meaning and elevate some themes over others (Brown, 1996; Mehra, 2002). Those decisions, those choices, are all informed by who I am. I tried to reflect on my process as I went along, to turn back on myself (Steier, 1991) as I did my interviews, to consider my deeply held assumptions (Agger, 2006) about interviewing, about writing and about feminism. I attempted to take a feminist approach to my research by reflecting on my own beliefs as a feminist and to my own practice as a researcher. As Debbie Kralik (2005, p. 250) writes: “As our lives present us with challenges, changes and experiences, our perspectives also shift. Feminism is a dynamic and individual experience, as well as a social and political movement”. This is particularly true when researching a case study of feminist digital activism as an insider researcher.

### **Case selection**

Destroy The Joint is a relevant case study for feminist activism in Australia. It has remained focused on feminist goals since its inception in 2012. It has won a number of significant campaigns and continues to be involved in Australian political life. Its resources on fatal violence against women are used regularly by mainstream Australian media and administrators of Destroy The Joint are consulted as experts in this area. It still exists when other similar online feminist activist groups have disappeared or become inactive. By some measures, Destroy The Joint and its Counting Dead Women project provide an example of successful activism and therefore findings on the research into this case can provide useful guidance for other activism. In addition, it provided an opportunity for insider research, as I have been involved with Destroy The Joint since its inception.

My involvement in Destroy The Joint provided an occasion to choose a case which allowed an exploration of Australian feminist activism as it unfolded, an opportunity to research as I participated. It is an online feminist action group based on Facebook and it fits the criteria of loose, multi-issue: easy to opt in and out of which is a central characteristic of online activism in the neoliberal age, where politics is both personalised and privatised (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; 2013; Baer, 2016; Salime, 2014). Further, exploring Destroy the Joint's position in the Bennett-Segerberg typology (2012; 2013) is a goal of this research. The exploration of the typology also provides a framework to understand whether Destroy The Joint was able to maintain its grassroots, connective action origin or whether it reframed itself into what Bennett and Segerberg (2012; 2013) described as organisationally-brokered. If so, what pressures brought such a change to bear. For example, a grassroots connective action movement is more horizontal, with multiple leadership events, whereas pressures such as those arising from what Stefania Milan (2009) calls a dictatorship of action can force change in a movement.

Single case methodology works in particular when there is an event and where interviews can provide multiple perspectives (Ackerly & True, 2010). I have tried to synthesize those multiple perspectives to provide a thesis around the attributes of activists by reading the transcripts of those interviews on many occasions before allowing multiple themes to emerge. This thematic analysis will be explored later in this chapter.

### **Why interviews?**

After 35 years of using interviews as part of the repertoire of journalism, I considered I understood how to undertake an interview. In the course of my work, I have interviewed a wide range of subjects, from US presidents on airport tarmacs to children with measles. I am, I thought, confident with the process. And, of course, the interview is a common data source in the social sciences as a process of eliciting information from a respondent through asking questions or seeking reflections on the meaning of their lived experience and practice (Berg, 2001; Seidman, 2006). It appeared to be a good match between the skills I already had and the skills I would need to complete a doctorate.

There was, however, another reason to choose interviews. I am a feminist researching feminist activism and, as Shulamit Reinharz and Lynn Davidman (1992, p. 19) put it:

Interviewing offers researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories . . . particularly important for the study of women because in this way learning from women is an antidote to centuries of ignoring women's ideas altogether or having men speak for women.

Interviews also mean participants in the research use their own words (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992, p. 19) which would provide a rich resource through the systematic analysis, allowing difference to emerge despite the structure.

If there was a way to match the research method with the subject of study, interviewing appeared to be the best approach for a feminist researching feminists and would, through using quotes, capture the original voice in its own terms.

In the social sciences, there are three distinct types of interview: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. I rejected structured interviews as more suited to a clinical setting where questions are standardized, designed to ensure that the data will be able to be similarly categorized (Essau & Petermann, 2013). In this instance, a totally structured interview would not encourage or permit the interview subjects to answer to their fullest understanding. Semi-structured interviews, while in-depth, allow some categorizations across instances but also give the opportunity for the subject/participant to range more widely in response (Halperin & Heath, 2012; 2017; Galletta, 2013); and unstructured interviews allow the subject/participant to shape the interview, often found in oral histories (Ruspini, 1999).

My own professional journalistic experience showed me that the best interview question was nearly always the last one: is there anything else you would like to add, the perfect open-ended question, one which will “elicit a full and meaningful response” (Adams & Lee-Potter, 2017 p.11). But as an academic researcher, it was important to have structure to yield results which would be generalizable or at least comparable to one another - standard preparation for each interaction would be both useful to provide a scaffold and to make it possible to group answers. (Roulston, 2010), which was why I elected to use semi-structured and attempted to keep the tenor and tempo of the interviews as consistent as possible. This meant that while I could ask specific questions which answered the queries I had about Destroy The Joint and the feminist activist experience in Australia, there was steadiness to the interviews in order to

make it possible to compare across the responses. In addition, there were specific concepts around feminist organising that could only be understood via interview.

As Reinharz and Davidman (1992) say, a style of more open-ended interviewing has a prominent place in feminist research, relying as it does on the researcher immersing herself in social settings. It also aims for what is described as intersubjective understanding (Buch & Staller, 2007; Levesque-Lopman, 2000) between the interviewer and those interviewed, a way of explaining the way that a good interview, much like a conversation, progresses the understanding of all involved. Ann Oakley (1981) argued for a feminist style of interviewing which aimed for intimacy and included self-disclosure. I tried to interview in the most natural way possible although I was fighting off my tendency to interview like a journalist.

Journalists know what they want from their interview subjects however participants in academic research cannot be led in that way. I had to let go of the control and allow people to answer as freely as possible while still being prepared enough to enable the information exchange to take place in an academic style. In some respects, my place as an insider worked to support this as I usually understood the background or the context of those who responded to the questions. In addition, there were a number of occasions in which the people interviewed suggested themes or approaches. The subjects became the researchers. They were “participants or collaborators” in the same project (Wilkinson, 1986, p.14).

Successful academic interviewers need to build rapport – that much it has in common with journalism – and then ensure that each interviewer response is noncommittal and nonjudgmental. Oakley (1981, p.231) describes an interview as an interaction:

“Interviewing is rather like marriage: everyone knows what it is, an awful lot of people do it, and yet behind each closed front door there is a world of secrets.”

Yet this process is not seduction and betrayal, as explored by Janet Malcolm (1990), where a journalist empathises in order to extract as many secrets as possible for the benefit of the story. It is trying to provide the blank slate on which the interview subject can reveal as much or as little as she wants.

The key elements of researcher conduct for an interview for research purposes are: listen, probe, avoid comments, validate and review (Doody & Noonan, 2013). There is one key element in common with this style of interview and a journalistic style of interview – before completing the interview, it is also important to invite the participant to add any additional

information which may not have been covered in the more structured parts of the interview. The interview then concludes. Nonverbal cues must also be developed to instil confidence in the participant, such as occasional eye contact and what a journalist might call a “noddy”. It signifies you are listening and nodding in response to the answers (Beaman & Dawson, 2009). While I did use this technique for the interviews I did in person, there is a similar technique I utilise for phone interviews, which includes making the noise “mmmmm” or “yeah” when someone is speaking.

I also tried to be mindful of time when I interviewed, alert to sounds of impatience or anxiety or of the sounds of need in the background, recognising that women’s time is colonised by multiple competing priorities. I chose to do most of my interviews by phone for that very reason. You have a much lighter footprint on someone’s life if you are not in their space. I will explore other ways in which I tried to conduct feminist research later in this chapter. I suspected that the structure of these interviews would be different depending on the participant. That turned out not to be true – these interviews turned out to be very similar in structure, although different in length. Some subjects had a lot to say, some interview subjects had less to say. In general, however, the questions were delivered along this format: a short introduction; simple closed questions; more complex open-ended questions (Teddlie and Tashakkori, 2003); and a final question asking the participant to add additional information. I used follow-up questions as a tool to seek further explanation by the participant. The interviews all took place in Australia in person or by phone. The shortest interview was 40 minutes and the longest was just short of two hours. All of the interviews were recorded and the recordings were then transcribed in order to move to the next stage, data analysis.

### **Recruitment process and pool for interview**

There are three groups of people involved in Destroy The Joint (DTJ). They are: a) the administrators and b) moderators responsible for the page and c) the people who participate on the page. Occasionally groups a and b intersect with group c. I mainly interviewed administrators and moderators. The administrators are those who take responsibility for the page’s policy, for its strategies, for its actions and for the majority of its content so the participation of administrators over the period of DTJ’s existence in this research was crucial. I interviewed all but two of those who were administrators over the course of DTJ’s existence. The moderators of DTJ are the second set of eyes for any proposed post. While

moderators were not and do not have responsibility for the page, they provide extraordinary feedback, support and guidance for the page and they also take responsibility for enforcing the tone of the page, using their own judgment and then using appropriate Facebook tools. I also did a small survey of people who participated in the page, using direct Facebook messaging, although this yielded few responses. To understand how Destroy The Joint works as an organisation, the views of the administrators and moderators are crucial, therefore it was vital to interview as many of the past and present moderators and administrators of Destroy The Joint as would participate in interviews. I also interviewed Destroy The Joint's contact at Facebook Australia in order to gain some insight expressed on behalf of the platform.

The sample size of those involved with Destroy The Joint is 30 interviews with administrators and moderators conducted over six weeks in 2016. I conducted one interview with Destroy The Joint's contact at Facebook. I interviewed around two-thirds of the available pool of people who have ever been involved in the founding, the administration or the moderation of Destroy The Joint. Of the administrators – which came to be the key group in terms of decision-making - I interviewed 84 per cent. I recruited the participants by email, mostly interviewed over the phone, recorded all the interviews and then transcribed them.

As a cofounder of the Destroy the Joint movement and the Facebook page which is its organising mechanism, I am acutely aware of my connection with every single person involved in this process and, as such, was able to easily contact them. I acknowledge the contention around insider research and discuss that at length later in this chapter. However, there is no-one who knows more about Destroy The Joint than me. I have been a part of the page from inception to the present day. I have carefully considered those concerns, and proceeded with the research. In addition, the majority of the participants made public their involvement, including some who have listed their involvement on their public social media accounts, including LinkedIn. Coercion is difficult to measure and made more difficult when you know the subjects (Dugosh, Festinger, Croft & Marlowe, 2010). However, I do not and did not wield structural power over any of the participants. All the activities of Destroy The Joint are entirely voluntary, although Destroy The Joint uses a roster system for posts and moderation and if a task is rostered, it loses some of its voluntary status.

There are several elements to be considered around recruiting subjects known to the researcher, in particular, a concern around any perceived coercion of recruits (McConnell-Henry, James, Chapman & Francis 2010). It is true that recruits may participate because of a desire to "help out"; or a feeling of obligation so I approached possible recruits at arm's length, through emails or Facebook messages. For some participants, it also provided a forum to critique both the page and my involvement in the page.

In addition, in no instance do or did I have a financial relationship with any of the possible participants. I do not and did not employ them and am not employed by them. I am also not employed alongside them in any workplace. I did not offer payment for participation and those recruited to the study were able to withdraw from the study at any time.

### **Insider research**

I approached this thesis very mindful of my position as an insider researcher, with close experience and understanding of the activists of Destroy the Joint as one of those activists. Nancy Naples (2013) argues the dualities of insider researcher and outsider researcher which she says mask power differentials and experiential differences between researcher and researched. More importantly, she says, no position is fixed. The boundaries are loose and shifting and the positions are experienced differently by those within the research relationship, "constantly being negotiated and renegotiated" (Naples, 2013, p. 103) in each and every interaction.

Whether I am insider or outsider or both at once, it is certainly true that my relationships with my Destroy The Joint colleagues experienced some of those shifting boundaries especially around their experiences as moderators (a distinct set of people within the Destroy The Joint organisation). If I could sense that an interview subject was reluctant to critique the administrators, I would try to use encouraging expressions to support any response. I would also add that we could not improve as a group without critique. This usually was enough to support moderators in their criticisms. Administrators did not seem to have the same feeling of reluctance.

There are some advantages to being an insider, the obvious advantage of access is clear. There are also a number of disadvantages, including that of perceived bias or subjectivity (Greene, 2014). Yet I am an insider researcher and I cannot imagine being able to do this

work without being an insider. How would you get the trust? How would people be happy to speak to you? I know that when I have been interviewed about feminism or about Destroy The Joint in particular for academic research, I am more guarded with strangers than I am with people I know and very rarely permit my name to be used. As Colombina Schaeffer Ortúzar (2015) writes: “What I did is closer to *observant participation*, because I used my role as an activist ...to ‘enter’ the field and have access to people and organisations . . . it is difficult to separate previous experiences and knowledge from new ones.”

I also reflected constantly on my position. When I started working at a university in 2008, I had no idea what it meant to be a reflective practitioner but I started doing a graduate certificate in teaching where we were asked to read Schön (1983), to get us to think more deeply about our roles as teaching academics. What I discovered was the usefulness of the concept of reflexivity, forcing myself to think about my own practice and what shaped it; and then changing and shaping my work as my understanding of my academic practice changed and was shaped (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). I went back to Schön (1983) to remind myself of some of his ideas as I set about doing this thesis, to remind myself that I had the ability to go slowly, to think it through, to make complex judgments about Destroy The Joint if I gave myself plenty of time. This was also a useful tool when I interviewed people with whom I’d had conflict, that I had a lot to learn from those activists too. Emotions and understanding are so highly connected (Boud, Keogh & Walker, 2013), which was true both for me as I researched but also in my own experience of this activism.

There are many benefits to insider research but also many challenges. There was one other major challenge for me as an insider researcher, which was how to negotiate friendships. It can be difficult to hear criticism from people you consider both friends and allies. As Jodie Taylor (2011, p. 1) argues, “While being intimately inside one’s field does offer significant advantages, it also reshapes the researcher’s role in and experiences of her own culture and those within it.”

Those criticisms also acted as a vaccine against treating Destroy the Joint and the results of this research as a spectacle (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992), as something from which I could make myself distant. They also made me reflect on my practice across my activism and my research, they challenged my presuppositions. (Bourdieu & Wacquant 1992, p.39).



### **Other data collection**

Aside from the interviews, part of my data collection included posts from the first post of Destroy The Joint in 2012 (2012h) to the last post in December 2016 (2016a).

This data was secured using CrowdTangle, described on Google Patents as:

The CrowdTangle software analyses the attributes of content posted on Facebook. It does so by:

1. Obtaining, at a server, a post from a source on a social networking platform, the post comprising content, a content type, and a time stamp;
2. Determining, for the post, an engagement metric during each of a predetermined set of time periods;
3. Generating, at the server, a representative engagement metric for a particular time period selected from the predetermined set of time periods, the representative engagement metric being based on the engagement metric of the post during the particular time period;
4. Obtaining, at the server, a selected post from the source on the social networking platform;
5. Transmitting, from the server, a score corresponding to a relative performance of the selected post compared to the representative engagement metric

(U.S. Patent No. US20150169587A1, 2014).

This CrowdTangle data provided a bounded sample for my data analysis and I used it to compare and contrast campaigns conducted by DTJ. I originally accessed this CrowdTangle data through connections at CrowdTangle within Facebook but this data is now more openly available. It provides a series of measures of underperforming and overperforming posts, benchmarked against other posts on a given page. These are comprehensive analytics which provide metrics for posts.

### **How the data was analysed**

Data interpretation is a challenge in qualitative research based on lengthy interviews. I chose thematic analysis, sifting through the data for similar ideas or concepts or themes emerged

across each of the interviews. Thematic analysis is an accepted qualitative research method, which Sofaer (1999, p. 1101) argues, provides:

[R]ich descriptions of complex phenomena; tracking unique or unexpected events; illuminating the experience and interpretation of events by actors with widely differing stakes and roles; [and] giving voice to those whose views are rarely heard.

Thematic analysis is also a way of managing thousands of words of data without losing the context. It is an immersive experience yet allows for both summary and organisation (Lapadat, 2010) within the vast immersion. As Richard Boyatzis (1998) puts it, it is a way of both observing and quantifying. Themes are detected as patterns emerging repeatedly in any set of data and this methodology is appropriate because it allows for analysis and interpretation of how actors experienced online feminist activism. While thematic analysis is descriptive, it is possible to present findings that are meaningful. I had to organise the data in a way that was both thematic and interpretive but also told the feminist story (Buch & Staller, 2007). Perhaps another researcher may not have found the themes I found – or not found them to be as compelling. Qualitative researchers use thematic analysis to develop insights and understandings from the repeated emergence of themes and patterns which develop in the data but themes also emerge from what the researcher knows about theory and existing research. In addition, how we feel about what we hear and read shapes our analysis. Probably the most compelling connection for me was the link between the core concept of emotional labour and the way in which the stories of emotions emerged from every single interview undertaken.

I imagined well before I started my interviews and my coding that there would be multiple narratives, that the observations and recollections of those involved in this particular feminist activism in Australia would provide a huge range of perspectives. What truly surprised me was the similarity – how often women mentioned how they felt, the range of their emotions, the emotional labour of working as an activist - and I mention elsewhere that one of the very first interviews I did, with the activist I call Constance, the use of the word “feel” as a stem appears more than 20 times. There is an emerging field in activism research about feelings and affect much of it negative (Kennelly, 2014; Papacharissi, 2013; Reger, 2004) yet there is also room for further research on activism which deals with joy or pride. My research

interrogates feelings and not all of those feelings are negative, not every activist experience is about burnout.

There were some very useful instances of quantitative analysis, which provided facts and figures (Cooper, Schindler & Sun, 2006) and the narratives or stories from this research were then amplified through the use of qualitative approaches. As Sofaer (1999) argues, it can be difficult to count or enumerate experience; the number of times an event occurs may not necessarily be congruent with its impact.

In this case, qualitative analysis and interpretation is more likely to be able to provide an understanding of how feminists experience online activism. The type of qualitative analysis I have chosen for this research must be one where individual feminist voices are not lost in the analysis and one where Shoshanna Sofaer's (1999, p. 1011) "rich descriptions", provided by feminist activists and others, could be read, allowing each participant, each observer, each actor, to be observed by their own experience, from their own experience. These will be the actors' voices.

A range of qualitative approaches could have been employed however the use of thematic analysis was particularly appropriate because that style of research is largely descriptive, "investigators are challenged to present findings that are both meaningful and useful" (Ayres, 2008). In my study, I used feminist thematic analysis to locate themes within the data which the participants themselves raised, either directly (where respondents explicitly said "you should write about this") or indirectly (for example, much of the discussion about feelings emerged as part of the chapter on emotional labour). Although there does not appear to be a direct definition of feminist thematic analysis, I tried to emulate those researchers in nursing, in particular, to "capture the values and meaning that these [participants] attributed to their understanding of feminism and feminist identity" (McDougall, 2013).

As well, qualitative researchers can develop insights and understandings from the themes and patterns which develop in the data. Ayres (2008, p. 868) describes the process well, partly because she acknowledges one of the key areas for which thematic analysis is criticised that the researcher has already developed a "view" about what will be found. She writes:

In thematic coding, the analyst frequently begins with a list of themes known (or at least anticipated) to be found in the data. When data for thematic analysis are collected through semi-structured interviews, some themes will be anticipated in the data set because those concepts were explicitly included in data collection not least due to the questions that are asked. However, an inductive approach also matters.

In a detailed description of applied thematic analysis, Greg Guest, Kathleen MacQueen and Emily Namey (2011) argue its strengths are well-documented: thematic analysis is suited to large data sets, is suitable for group research, can sit alongside quantitative techniques and can be used to study topics other than individual experience. They note that the only limitation is that perhaps thematic analysis, subject as it is to picking main themes, may miss some of the nuance within the data.

Of course it is difficult to approach the data without subjectivity particularly in insider research. But what surprised me was the themes which emerged from what I considered to be quite mechanistic questions: who, what, where, when, why. Even the “when” carried responses about time and the feelings about time. Emotional labour was a major theme in this data, and emotional labour contains both emotion and labour. And labour takes time.

I could have done fewer interviews to get the same themes – but I did not know that at the time, before analysis had begun. I remember presenting a work-in progress, sometime in my third year; and detailing my struggles with coding. How deep should I go with my themes, how wide, how many nodes and subnodes? A former student, newly graduated, gave useful advice: “I put together a Rolls Royce of coding – but I only needed the Mini Minor.” I took this advice and built a model which was more like a Mini Minor with lovely detailing.

As David Firmin (2008, p. 149) argues in his essay on themes:

In qualitative research, data collection typically occurs to the point of saturation.

Essentially, this means that researchers continue interviews to the point where little new information is shared by participants. In other words, people continue reporting essentially the same ideas and the law of diminishing returns is at work in the information-gathering procedure. Collecting more data, at that point, does not produce novel results.

Researchers may “gloss over” the methods used during thematic analysis (Howitt and Cramer, 2007, p. 328). In an attempt to avoid “glossing over” I reread the interviews multiple times, had arguments with myself over what really mattered, and kept going until I ran out of interviews. I had 18 themes at the end of this process but even as I prepared to synthesize what it all meant, I could see how some of the themes would work together. A good example is the interconnectedness of the two themes of information activism and Feminism 101, which brings feminism to the general public, and that discussion forms part of the chapter on the capital and habitus of activists (chapter five). The major themes in this research do not have one-word descriptions. Instead, I have put together for each theme a phrase or a question which I believe encapsulates the extent of each data set but also keeps the highly personal aspect of this research data set and which relate, through key concepts, to the questions asked of participants.

1. How my lived experience through work and previous activism has informed this iteration of my activism
2. How I felt about this activism and the time it took up in my life (subtheme - how online is different to offline).

Themes one and two connect with each other and form the basis of the chapters on emotional labour and the habitus and capitals of activism. I have also used a subtheme of time within the chapter on habitus and capitals.

3. What feminism means in general and what it means to me now
4. In what ways are aspects of communication (writing, speaking, researching) key activist activities?
5. What is the impact of Destroy The Joint and its campaigns, in particular, Counting Dead Women?
6. Is feminism and feminist activism sustainable for me, for Destroy the Joint and in general?
7. How did it all work? Did it do anything useful?

Other themes which emerged include emotional labour, daily activism, sustainability, burnout, emotional responses to a range of campaigns, recruitment, differences between

online and offline campaigning, time, feelings, labour, meanings of feminism, sustainability, and the mechanics of Destroy The Joint.

In this research, there was a tension between the activist life experienced online and the content of the interviews. Just as our personal boundaries have become looser, we are also subject to the intensity and scrutiny of a life lived socially, yet contemporary research practice has not yet developed a framework to respond. The messiness of “problematic distinctions between categories such as private/public, personal/political, and virtual/material” complicates every project (Morrow, Hawkins & Kern, 2014, p. 527) and even interviewing participants about how they felt as digital feminist activists brought up their own feelings of conflict and struggle.

### **My table of feminist aliases**

At the outset of this research, I thought it may be appropriate to use the real names of the participants and in 2015, I was granted permission to interview those involved in Destroy The Joint as a moderator or as an administrator, the Facebook contact for DTJ and those who participated on the page. I was also given permission to name the participants if they were happy to be named. As my research continued, I made the decision to give the participants pseudonyms. This was because once I had completed my interviews, I realised participants were sharing very personal stories of what feminism meant to them. Sometimes, as they shared, they were revealing parts of themselves that I considered may affect their jobs or their role in any future feminist activism. I thought about naming them after mythological figures, just as my supervisor did for her PhD, so I chose the mythological figures of the feminist movement, the women who came before us. I decided to use the names of feminists listed on the Wikipedia page (Wikipedia, 2019).

### **Educated middle class radicals: an analysis of those who participated in this research**

Of the 30 participants interviewed, 25 hold a bachelor’s degree or higher, more than double the percentage in the general population aged 20 to 64 of Australia (31.4 per cent according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2018). The remaining five completed year 12. Six of the participants (20 per cent) are located in regional Australia, compared to one-third of the general population (Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health, 2018). Further, 21 (70 per cent) were members of unions at the time of the interviews, compared to 14 per cent, which is union density among Australian employees as measured in 2016 (Gilfillan &

McGann, 2018). Activism – that is, active participation in a civic or a political group - in Australia, as measured by the ABS, is stable and low. Just 19 per cent of the general Australian population, aged 18 years and over, were active participants in either a civic or political group. The percentage has been steady over three consecutive surveys (ABS, 2015). This contrasts starkly with the participants of Destroy The Joint where 80 per cent of participants were directly involved in activism prior to DTJ’s inception. For 20 per cent, DTJ was their first experience of activism and for a further three participants (10 per cent), their first experience of feminist activism.

I did not ask questions about income nor did I ask questions about each individual’s own perception of class but a forensic analysis of the role of class and income in Australian feminist activism is certainly an opportunity for further study. Radicalism in the middle class has a long history and is well-documented (Bonnett, 2013; Cleveland, 2003; Cotgrove & Duff, 1980; Nicholls, 1985; Parkin, 1968; Quinn, 2017). It emerges when there is an upsurge of cultural critique (Brand, 1990), and that is particularly relevant to feminist organisations in the contentious interaction which is the attempt to disrupt the patriarchy, the prevalent culture. In addition, the radicalisation of the middle class occurs when there is a break between social integration on one hand and political regulation on the other, caused by the “unintentional side effects of economic and social modernisation” (Brand, 1990, p. 41). Bagguley (1992) argues that middle class women play a key role in contemporary feminism in response to changing forms of patriarchy, in particular, around the shift from private patriarchy (domestic setting) to public patriarchy (for example, employment).

Nickie Charles and Khursheed Wadia’s (2018) analysis of UK Feminista (established in 2010), an organisation of much younger feminists than DTJ, based on interviews with UK Feminista activists, revealed a high proportion of middle class and well-educated feminists with high levels of social and cultural capital. Gleeson (2018) in her third paper on DTJ and again basing her arguments on interviews with four participants and an external activist, argues that DTJ, along with other online feminist activism, needs to develop policies on intersectionality. What would a policy on intersectionality look like? Is it possible to recruit for ethnicity or race or for different abilities to a volunteer group? These are certainly questions to be answered in further research.

## The activists of Destroy The Joint

In this data set, three people of colour were interviewed. I can only make this claim based on appearance, a risky way of assessing ethnicity or race, as I did not ask any questions about ethnicity or race. The same is true of disability. I know from my personal conversations with the activists of Destroy the Joint that a number of both past and present moderators and admins have experienced mental health issues, and one has a significant physical disability. However, others within the interview cohort may have experienced undisclosed disability.

As I will explore more fully in the chapter on the habitus of activists, there were a significant number of activists who had postgraduate qualifications and union membership compared to the Australian population. Major details are laid out in the following table.

Pseudonym	Job	Union member	Previous activism	Prev. feminist activism	Education	Age	Metro/Regional	DTJ <sup>1</sup>
Alice	Communications	Y	Y	Y	Bachelor's	30s	M	
Andrea	Retired from small business	Y	Y	Y	Teachers' college diploma	70s	M	
Anita	Researcher	N	N	N	Postgrad	30s	M	1st
Anne	Librarian	Y	Y	Y	Bachelor's	60s	M	
Bell	Admin assistant	Y	Y	Y	Bachelor's	40s	M	
Bella	Community worker	Y	Y	Y	Bachelor's	50s	M	
Bessie	Community worker	Y	Y	Y	Bachelor's	40s	M	
Constance	Union official	Y	Y	Y	High school	40s	R	
Dora	Admin assistant	Y	Y	Y	High school	30s	M	
Eileen	Union official	Y	Y	Y	Bachelor's	50s	R	1st feminist
Elizabeth	Admin assistant	N	N	N	High school	40s	R	1st
Emma	Admin assistant	Y	Y	Y	Bachelor's	20s	M	
Emmeline	Small business	N	N	N	Bachelor's	50s	R	
Eva	Admin asst	Y	Y	Y	Bachelor's	50s	M	
Faith	Marketing	N	N	N	Bachelor's	40s	M	1st
Gunilla	Retired	N	Y	Y	Bachelor's	60s	M	
Helen	Nurse	Y	Y	Y	Postgrad	60s	R	
Inez	Union official	Y	Y	Y	High school	30s	M	
Jessie	Union official	Y	Y	Y	Bachelor's	40s	M	
Joan	Human resources	N	Y	Y	Bachelor's	40s	M	
Jocelynn	Social worker	Y	Y	Y	Bachelor's	60s	M	
John	Temp worker	N	Y	Y	Bachelor's	50s	M	1st feminist
Julia	Filmmaker	Y	Y	Y	Bachelor's	50s	M	
Louisa	Publishing	N	N	N	Postgrad	40s	M	1st
Millicent	Doctor	Y	Y	Y	Postgrad	30s	M	
Patrick	Union official	Y	Y	Y	Bachelor's	40s	M	1st feminist
Phyllis	Teacher	N	N	N	Bachelor's	60s	M	1st
Rosa	Union official	Y	Y	Y	Bachelor's	40s	M	
Seb	Academic	Y	Y	Y	Postgrad	30s	M	
Sheila	PS, nursing background	Y	Y	Y	High school	60s	R	

<sup>1</sup>Whether Destroy the Joint (DTJ) was their first ever form of activism (1st) or first ever form of feminist activism (1st feminist)

Figure 1: List of activists and attributes



## **Chapter Four: Working the feminist networks, networking for feminist change (or old activists and new tricks)**

I've been a little bit bemused by those colleagues in the newspapers who have admitted that I have suffered more pressure as a result of my gender than other prime ministers in the past but then concluded that it had zero effect on my political position or the political position of the Labor Party. It doesn't explain everything, it doesn't explain nothing, it explains some things. (ABC News, 2013)

These were the final words of former Australian Prime Minister Julia Gillard, in response to her ousting by her parliamentary colleagues in 2013. Gillard was Prime Minister for just over three years, and during the course of her leadership had been under constant attack, much of which focused on her gender (Summers 2013).

As a number of writers and researchers have concluded (Sawer, 2013; Appleby, 2015), female leadership arouses misogyny and sexism. In the case of former Prime Minister Julia Gillard's ascension to power, her elevation unleashed "a media crusade of sexism and misogyny previously unseen in Australian political history" (Appleby, 2015, p.283). In addition, and as mentioned in the introduction, Gillard's prime ministership had a gender affinity effect (Sawer, 2012; Denmark, 2012) and the media became more interested in the gender 'card' and 'wars' (Johnson, 2015; Trimble, 2016).

In that context, this chapter sets out the formation of Destroy the Joint and surveys the structure and processes of DTJ. It will also explore how the activists came together as an iteration of crowd-enabled connective action but transformed into organisationally-enabled connection action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; 2013)

### **Key events in the formation of Destroy the Joint**

On Friday, August 31, 2012, on Alan Jones's regular morning program, he interviewed the then deputy leader of the National Party, Barnaby Joyce (the Liberal Party and the Nationals always operate in coalition at a Federal level. At this time, both parties were in opposition and not in government). The pair discussed the Prime Minister's decision to fund education in developing nations. Joyce said the funding was a waste of money. Jones responded by saying women political leaders were wrecking Australia. He named Prime Minister Julia Gillard,

Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore and Christine Nixon, a former chief commissioner of Victoria Police, as leading destroyers of the joint. Malcolm Farr reported on August 31, that Jones told listeners \$320 million would be spent by Australia promoting Pacific island women in business and politics. He said that: "The Prime Minister] said that we know societies only reach their full potential if women are politically participating," he told listeners. "Women are destroying the joint - Christine Nixon in Melbourne, Clover Moore here. Honestly" (Farr, 2012).

On the evening of August 31, following those remarks, there was intense social media activity on Twitter (Lupton, 2014), led by Canberra resident Anne Cahill Lambert. Once Lambert tweeted what she had heard, Twitter trended with it. Writer Jane Caro tweeted, "Got time on my hands tonight so thought I'd spend it coming up with new ways of 'destroying the joint' being a woman & all. Ideas welcome." A few moments later, Melbourne plastic surgeon Jill Tomlinson, later both an administrator of Destroy The Joint and from 2012 ongoing, the sole operator of the @jointdestroyer Twitter account, started using the #destroythejoint hashtag. As Jessica McLean and Sophia Maalsen (2016, p. 327) observed:

Within one day, thousands had tweeted their own versions of acts and intentions to quash sexism and misogyny and a new digital activism moment and movement had begun.

The #destroythejoint hashtag trended on Twitter for four days (Tomlinson, 2012, blog in Crikey). Late on the night of September 1, 2012, the then secretary of the NSW and ACT branch of the Australian Services Union, Sally McManus, with more than 20 years experience of organising and now secretary of the peak union body in Australia, the Australian Council of Trade Unions, who created the Facebook page (facebook.com/destroythejoint). About two hours later, according to posts on the page, 200 people had liked the page. Seven years later, Destroy the Joint is still engaged in activism drawing attention to feminist issues and by 2019, the page had more than 98000 likes. McLean, Maalsen and Grech (2016, p. 327) describe Destroy The Joint as "a broad-based and effective unified but not uniform organisation that aims to shine a light on sexism and misogyny". It was true that thousands were tweeting about #destroythejoint, however, we

did not know until many years later that this was a new “digital activism moment and movement” because we had only created a series of ad hoc communicative acts around the sites of sexism and misogyny.

Women on Twitter described ways in which they #destroythejoint or were #destroyingthejoint (Bastow, 2012). Participants adopted the hashtag and used it to form a community on Twitter. The community shared values, goals, targets and humour. It bound the participants together while at the same time allowing individual personal expression. That impetus led the creation of the Facebook page, as detailed earlier.

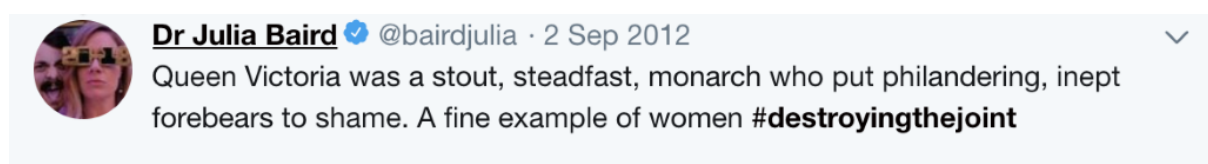


Figure 2: #destroyingthejoint tweet



Figure 3: #destroyingthejoint tweet

Through his ‘destroy the joint’ comments, Jones had placed himself in the sights of feminists, which facilitated the mobilisation of the DTJ community in late September.

Occasionally I have trouble concentrating on feminism and that was particularly true on Saturday, September 29, 2012 when my beloved Australian football team, the Sydney Swans, were in the Grand Final. It is a game of four quarters and the third quarter was tortuous. Their long-time football rivals, Hawthorn Football Club, called the Hawks, scored five goals in a row. And even after the game finished, with a ten-point victory to the Swans, I was still watching, all the replays, the interviews, singing the team song from the couch. I usually watch everything with two screens, the television and the mobile phone, but I was ignoring Twitter. At 7.42pm, there was a tweet I couldn’t ignore from @BrendenWood (2012) who then worked as a news producer for Southern Cross Austereo, an Australian commercial radio network. Every Saturday night, he would buy an early edition

of the Sunday Telegraph, the local Sunday tabloid then owned by Murdoch's News Limited, and send out an image of the front page on Twitter. On this night, he tweeted the front page of the newspaper which pointed to a story about Alan Jones (introduced above). The story was about a speech Jones had made at a function held to raise money for the Young Liberals, the youth arm of Australia's conservative party. In that speech, made days earlier, Jones claimed that the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard's father had died of shame (Marshall, 2012). Unbeknownst to Jones, Marshall had recorded the event (Price, 2012).

Jones was quoted as saying:

Every person in the caucus of the Labor Party knows that Julia Gillard is a liar. Everybody, I'll come to that in a moment. The old man recently died a few weeks ago of shame. To think they had a daughter who told lies every time she stood for Parliament. (Marshall, 2012)

The reception of these remarks was negative and described as a loss of common decency in the public domain, argues Megan-Jane Johnstone (2015) and the comments themselves provided a key transformation point for DTJ, sparking the page's first call to action, initiated by the 'died of shame' comments.

Those operating as administrators on the four-week-old Facebook page throughout that evening began posting. The first post, less than an hour after the appearance of the @brendenwood tweet, operated as a directionless call-to-arms. "Sisters and brothers, it is time to #destroythejoint. Tomorrow, the Daily Telegraph will run this despicable story" (Destroy The Joint, 2012a).

It used an image of the Wood tweet. It attracted 132 comments and was shared 98 times and while all but a handful of comments were critical of Jones, there was no action asked and none taken, although some of the commenters suggested petitions.

In the next two hours, a number of posts were made on the page, one drawing attention to Virgin Mobile's sponsorship of the 2GB website (Jones's home radio station) (Destroy The

Joint, 2012b), which was followed by another post (Destroy The Joint, 2012c) linking to the complete Jonathan Marshall story (2012).

By 10pm that evening, Destroy the Joint admins posted the basic elements of an action, “Want to destroy Alan's joint? Here's the emails for his sponsors - tell them what you think about their decision to help keep [it] on air.” This was followed by a list of sponsors (Destroy The Joint, 2012d). There was no visible strategy although the first post on September 30 suggested a rally two days later. It received little traction. Looking back on that post now, the admins had yet to recognise that this kind of action, connective action, operated online (Destroy The Joint, 2012e). The next post returned to foregrounding activism which could take place online, requesting those on the page to assist with contact details for the board of Macquarie Radio Network.

About midday on Sunday September 30, Alan Jones apologised for his remarks about Gillard, at a press conference called by his employer, Macquarie Radio Network; and broadcast live. He acknowledged that “all the criticism that has been levelled in this instance is legitimate”. Towards the end of that press conference, Jones was asked by a reporter: “What do you say to the advertisers today that are queuing up to pull their own advertising?”

Jones replied:

The advertisers aren't queuing up to pull their advertising. That's a matter for the station. I'm confident the station understands quite clearly what my position is on a lot of issues and that the advertisers equally understand that and it will be business as usual. (ABC News, 2012)

Even as this was broadcast, the campaign built momentum. In response to the calls to action on the page, which included listing contact details for each company which advertised, those advertisers were removing advertisements both from the Alan Jones program and also other programs on the station and other artefacts of 2GB, such as the website.

There was extensive media coverage of this campaign. Sally Jackson, in *The Australian*, said that DTJ was able to harness public anger through social media “into a unified and extraordinarily powerful digital battering ram”. By October 8, there was no advertising on the Alan Jones show, through a combination of the withdrawal of the majority of advertisers and the decision by MRN management to remove any remaining advertisers. As Macquarie Radio Network's then executive chairman, Russell Tate, told *The Australian*: “The strategy promised to solve two problems in one: answering the advertisers' dilemma over what they should do, while removing them as targets for the protesters' ire.” (Jackson, 2012, para. 28). Shares in Macquarie Radio Network fell from 64c to 54c during this period (Jackson, 2012).

In some ways, this feminist campaign action used traditional and familiar strategies, for example, participants challenged power through boycott, but the means of organising the strategy was through another power, the power of connective action. This was an online feminist campaign which “affected a corporation in a material sense” (McLean and Maalsen, 2015, p. 329).

### **Building the page**

In the intervening weeks between Jones's remarks about women destroying the joint and Jones's comments, cited earlier, at the young Liberal function in Sydney, feminists aggregated a community that had had enough, not just of Alan Jones, but of the entire tone of the national conversation around women. Those who became involved with Destroy The Joint as activists posted information to the page daily – but there were no calls to action. On September 2, 2012, Rosa posted what could be characterised as the page's first attempt at agenda-setting (McCombs, 2009) or agenda resetting by posting a story by Australian feminist Anne Summers:

A great article by Anne Summers written earlier this year recapping how women political leaders have been treated in Australia - it has gotten far worse over the years and it is a fever pitch at the moment. It will be up to us to put a stop to it. (Destroy the Joint, 2012f)

This became Destroy the Joint's key political claim and reason for being. By September 4, the number of likes had climbed to 4443. If agenda-setting in the sense meant by McCombs (2009) is about highlighting issues and reframing salience on what is constituted as having a news value, Destroy The Joint was, for Australian feminists, about forming a collaborative consensus on contemporary Australian feminist issues, in particular and initially, the treatment of Gillard. In addition, the continued climb of likes could be taken as evidence that the 'likers' shared this view of what was relevant or had 'news value' to Australian feminism. Jessica McLean and Sophia Maalsen argue (2013, p. 247) that the appeal of Destroy The Joint is about the combination of accessibility of social media and the style of the communication: "People joined, and continued to join, the campaign in part because of the pleasure derived from aligning feminist thought with decisive action and lampooning the naysayers."

In this way, the page operated as a feminist news site for four weeks. It shared information, on regular feminist events such as Reclaim The Night, the event seeking to make streets secure for women; and the Ernies, an annual event held at NSW Parliament House to 'honour' the most sexist comments of the year. It celebrated the appointment of the first ever female umpire to an AFL Grand Final, Chelsea Roffey. It also highlighted mainstream media articles, such as those by veteran NSW Labor politician and former president of the NSW Legislative Council Meredith Burgmann and feminist elder stateswoman Anne Summers, on sexism in Australia.

I think within a day or so it had 5000 [likes] which seemed to be a lot. I was expecting really just to post articles, post bits of rants and things like that, but basically more of a sort of voice to keep on top of this [misogyny] and to fight back. (Rosa, in interview)

At the time of the first campaign which began on September 29, 2012, DTJ had around 11,000 page likes on Facebook. At the same time its Twitter account @jointdestroyer, operated nearly entirely by plastic surgeon Jill Tomlinson, had 4000 followers. In June 2019, the Facebook page has more than 99,000 page likes and the Twitter account has over 22000 followers. The adjacent graph shows likes accumulated over time on the Destroy The Joint Facebook page:

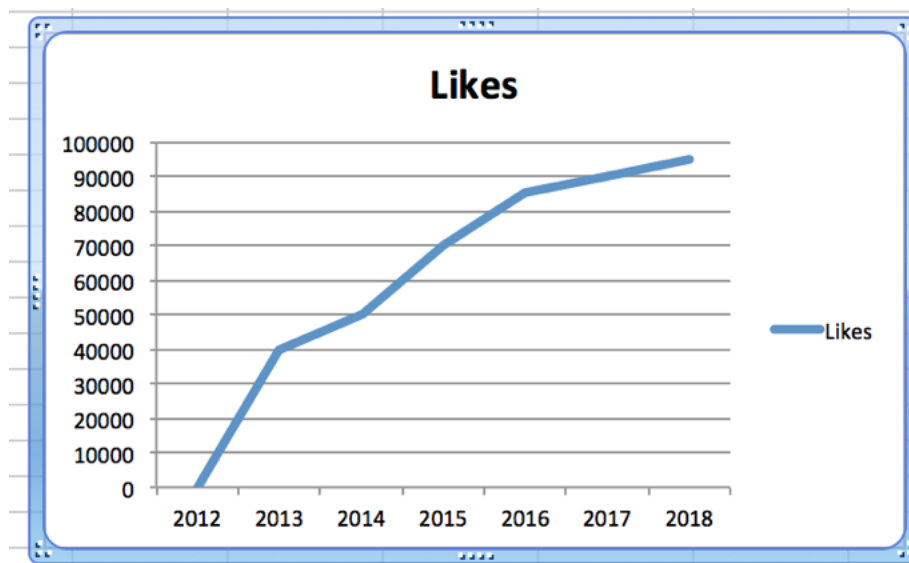


Figure 4: Growth in the number of Facebook likes of Destroy the Joint over time

In December 2012, Destroy The Joint admins were asked to write about our activism for Jane Caro’s new book (2013). Jill Tomlinson, the activist who had started the hashtag, wrangled all our views into one coherent story, explaining the recruitment of over 40 volunteer moderators and some of the challenges.

As the Tomlinson et. al. (2013, “Birth of a Movement”, para.7) wrote:

The sheer number of engaged individuals required significant effort to keep a semblance of order. We didn’t know each other – in fact, most of the DtJ administrators had never met or heard of each other – but the crowdsourcing approach worked.

Some of the tasks she listed as part of this activism included listening daily to 2GB breakfast radio, procuring more than 110,000 signatures on an online petition to 2GB advertisers; listening daily to 2GB Breakfast Radio daily to create a list of its advertisers; asking people to call the advertisers and express their thoughts in a civil manner:



We researched. We created a pledge. We created memes, montages and word clouds. We created posting guidelines and a list of hundreds of profanities for a blocked word list. We answered thousands of questions. (Tomlinson et al., 2013, para.7)

Specifically, in these initial days, Destroy The Joint pushed for companies to withdraw their advertisements from the Alan Jones program and used various calls-to-action to enact that campaign. By the end of the operation, Macquarie Radio Network revealed the loss of advertising had cost it somewhere between \$1 and \$1.5 million, the withdrawal of more than 70 advertisers and a longer-term impact (Jackson, 2012).

The campaign became more targeted, more organised, using familiar organising techniques over time. Rosa and others began discussions through Facebook messages with others to recruit page administrators:

We sort of had our discussion there that everyone got on board about that strategy to start on targeting the sponsors. Then it just became quite a big logistical exercise to do everything it needed to make that happen, like all the organizing that had to happen. People who were listening in. Doing a list in the morning. Doing the post. Using all this technology [and] the momentum of the campaign. (Rosa, in interview)

Since that time, the group has conducted a number of campaigns across a number of issues but Destroy The Joint's first stated purpose was to highlight "sexism and misogyny" in Australia, particularly in light of the "treatment of Australia's first female Prime Minister" (description from the Facebook page itself). At the time the page was created, the 'About' section of the Facebook read: "This page is for people who are sick of the sexism dished out to women in Australia, whether they be our first female Prime Minister or any other woman." The posts on the page will be further explored in chapter seven.

### **Context, backlash, doubts**

These events took place at a time when Australia was experiencing, if not a backlash, then a backslide in attitudes towards gender equality and equality "continued to be supported only insofar as it [did] not alter gendered divisions of labour in the home" (Van Egmond, 2010, p. 165). The challenge for Australian feminists was to use social media to reset the agenda, in

order to elevate equality, to “draw attention to the problems for which the old guards are held accountable” (Popkin, 2007, p. 6). Destroy the Joint provided a platform to provide information and news, to highlight key issues for women, to reshape the political argument and to force a reshaping of the agenda.

Over this period, there was some also some media interrogation of the origins of Destroy the Joint and whether it had organisational input. Was this really a grassroots movement coalescing around the hashtag? Or was it a front for either unions or the Labor Party (Fife-Yeomans, 2012)? According to conservative commentator, Andrew Bolt (2012), Destroy the Joint was a front for organisational political actors, such as unions and the Labor Party. These accusations conflated the actions of individuals with collective ties with formal organisational actors; as if political participation must always be structured by those organisations. These commentators were unable to separate the individual actor from those individual actors’ other allegiances. This was a personally very difficult time for me. I received a significant level of harassment and abuse both online and offline and dealt with it in various ways (Jane, 2017). In addition, but also experienced personally, the university at which I work was subject to campaigning around my employment (personal communication, 2012) as well as mentions of the University of Technology as my place of employment in a move which I found intimidating (Henderson, 2012; Smith, 2012). There was no recognition that the creation of the page emanated from the social and cultural capital of the administrators and moderators, which made it possible for this campaign to function “as if” it was the creation of an organisation. This is further explored in chapter five, the Habitus and Capitals of Activists.

A number of media commentators doubted whether the Facebook page could continue for any length of time and our efforts were belittled by almost everyone in mainstream media, from Clem Bastow (2012) of Fairfax’s *Daily Life* to Helen Razer (2012) to a slew of commentators in Fairfax and News. The then publisher of popular media news site *Mumbrella*, Tim Burrowes said it would not continue to exist although he later acknowledged it had some impact (Price, 2012).

### **How the activists wanted it to work**

Amid all the campaigning, those involved formulated some guidelines for those wanting to interact with the Facebook page. The following two images provided those who interacted with the page some idea about what the page stood for and guidelines for interacting on the page. The posting guidelines provided some guidance for those moderating the page on any given day. The first image: "Our Story" positions Destroy The Joint as standing for gender equality and civil discourse and about providing a community. There have been slight updates over time but the key points remain the same –equality, community, civility. The second image asks those who participate on the page to keep in mind the community's aims.

The Facebook page says in its "about" section (Destroy The Joint 2018a):

Destroy The Joint stands for gender equality and civil discourse in Australia. The name "Destroy The Joint" came from the on-air comments of 2GB broadcaster Alan Jones, who stated in an on-air discussion on Friday 31 August 31 2012, that "women are destroying the joint". This misogynistic comment was transformed into a witty Twitter hashtag that trended for 4 days. This Facebook page was set up independently to what was occurring in the twitterverse on 2 September 2012 to provide a community for those who are sick of sexism in Australia. The term "destroy the joint" or "destroying the joint" has entered the Australian lexicon. It rejects the suggestion that women are destroying the joint and represents a call to action for Australians who reject sexism and seek a civil and decent society. We're not out to destroy the joint - that was someone else's description. We're rebuilding it with good humour and optimism.

Posting Guidelines for Destroy The Joint (2012g):

When posting or leaving comments please be respectful of others. We expect that Facebook users interacting with our Facebook page will make sure that their conduct is not:

- threatening, abusive, defamatory, indecent, harassing, or offensive;
- unlawful or misleading, or breaching any law or regulation;
- spam or advertising;

- aggressively argumentative, overly repetitive, bullying or "trolling";
- breaching intellectual property laws, infringing third party rights, or attaching content without appropriate attribution; or
- irrelevant to the Destroy The Joint Facebook Page.

Destroy The Joint reviews posts and comments from time to time and can remove any post, comment or user that it considers breaches the guidelines above.

While Destroy The Joint encourages open and robust conversation, the views of Facebook users interacting with its page are not the views of the administrators of Destroy The Joint.

The About section and the posting guidelines were about trying to develop an environment in which non-violent conversation and discussion could occur.

### **From many working individually to one working with others**

Over nearly seven years, the posts are always focussed on sexism and misogyny, or the ways they are manifest. However, not all campaigns used the method of pressuring advertisers as described above. Some other successful strategies include pressuring telecommunications provider Telstra on the provision of silent numbers to victims of family violence, highlighting police procedure which resulted in the jailing of Indigenous women who withdrew charges of domestic violence, as well as pressuring advertisers, providers, and venues. In some cases, DTJ worked in concert with other campaigners such as unions or other nongovernment advocacy groups. This included the DTJ campaign which began in July 2013, with partners including Oxfam, Ethical Work, the Textile Clothing and Footwear Union of Australia (TCFUA) and Australian Unions, to pressure Australian clothing companies to sign the Bangladesh accord to protect clothing workers in Bangladesh. This campaign originated because of the deaths of textile workers in Rana Plaza, when the building collapsed on April 24, 2013. Workers were ordered to come back to work in the building despite the fact that cracks had appeared. The campaign lasted six months, with regular posts describing which manufacturers had signed on to the Accord. Destroyers were asked to sign petitions and to send emails. More than 80 companies signed on to the Accord after the joint campaign. Eventually, Pacific Brands signed on; and Pacific Brands, Target, K-Mart and

others agreed to publish the addresses of the Bangladesh factories in which they manufactured (Destroy The Joint, 2013).

Another example of Destroy the Joint advocating in concert with others occurred in 2017. DTJ began to pressure state and territory governments to introduce strangulation laws as the presence of nonfatal strangulation in a relationship increases the risk of fatality. It put pressure on men's awareness group White Ribbon to move White Ribbon Day from the International Day of Elimination of Violence Against Women to a different day. Other campaigns had less success: a campaign demanding refugee removal from detention centres attracted media attention but affected no policy change.

### **The evolution of an informal organisation**

In 2019, Destroy the Joint remains a collective which is organised by a group of individuals. It has a small administrative structure and a somewhat larger group who moderate the page. It exists only on Facebook and Twitter as a findable entity. There is no web address other than the Facebook Page, and no mailing or office address. The origin and original iteration of the Destroy the Joint movement could most easily be categorised as crowd-enabled connective action, fitting the taxonomy of Bennett and Segerberg's model (2012, 2013), using both Facebook and Twitter to gain momentum.

As the interviews with participants show, there was initially little formal organisational coordination of action and no lead organisational actors, although it is clear from the interviews that, the majority of administrators and moderators had significant experience as activists. Of all those interviewed, six had no prior activist experience, although one of those had been a member of the Liberal Party. The initial group of individuals mostly did not know each other previously. These people, on average, had a vastly different activist experience to the activist experience of Australians and this will be explored more fully in chapter five, the following chapter, but it is useful to know that union membership and union roles in this cohort of activists are vastly different to the average Australian experience.

From this group of disparate individuals, it is notable that an activist network with such longevity and reach was created and the reasons for this will be explored further in chapter five. The stimulus, the comments by Alan Jones, provoked a response from a wide

group of (mainly) tweeters whose avatars/handles identified them as women and it could be argued the hashtag #destroyingthejoint and later, for brevity's sake, #destroythejoint, used at the time of DTJ's establishment, was one iteration of a personalised action frame (Bennett & Segerberg 2012, 2013) which will be explored more fully in chapter seven.

In a very brief span of time, the activists with the most experience had developed strategies and tactics. These activists did not, however, have organisations or protocols which could deliver those strategies and tactics. As Bennett and Segerberg acknowledge (2012, 2013), face-to-face organising and offline discussion shapes activity even in crowd-enabled connective action, but the theoretical emphasis on crowd-enablement ignores both the internal momentum of collectives and the tyranny of structurelessness (Freeman 1972). Those who had been in the union movement brought with them a habitus honed over that time, and they brought that to bear in the organisation of Destroy the Joint. They functioned as coaches for those with less organising experience. Most of the activists did not stick to their original skill sets. Activists shared the skills they had, which provided learning opportunities for those who didn't have them.

Long before Adrienne Maree Brown published *Emergent Strategy* (2017), her book about using patterns within a group to develop the group's goals, it was useful to acknowledge the varied attributes and shortcomings of those within the group. DTJ developed from the skills and attributes of all those within the group. The strategy emerged from the interdependence and connectedness among the individuals. What Bourdieu describes as capital, the 'usable resources and powers', were repeated across individuals in the group: the prior activist experience; the prior specifically union experience at a senior level; the desire to act for change; the willingness to adapt to new forms of organising and mobilising. In addition, there was, for the most part, the openness to learning from each other. Only one moderator, Aaron Darc (Razer, 2013), a brand strategist who claimed to have expertise in the area of marketing feminism, left because admins and moderators would not do as he instructed. His particular cultural capital did not resonate with the rest of the activists.

Capital forms status, and capital produces its specific effects in specific conditions (Bourdieu, 1990, p.122). Therefore, those who had the most organising experience (in a non-online

setting) in DTJ were able to use that accumulated cultural capital to provide leadership in the area of organising. As Rosa said:

I don't think there is a difference except that online campaigning happens faster. It happens faster because time is compressed because you are spending more time together talking about things than you could possibly do because of the issue of time and space normally. In order ... If you think about it ... To organize a rally about equal pay there would have to be meetings. You have to organise meetings to have meetings. To have rallies, to do all of that, and social media just allows people to organise in a much quicker way. **It was very easy just to immediately just apply the wisdom built up over years to social media.** (Rosa, in interview)

There were complementary skills in this group of activists. Some were organisers, others were communicators, graphic designers, social scientists and others. In combination, these activists applied to relevant skills to the process of DTJ. In terms of communicative acts, the activists had a process which provided feedback on proposed posts, an opportunity to refine, not just political messaging but also sentence construction, punctuation, punchiness. Those who understood the logic of visual communication - because that was the cultural capital they brought from their career - tried to teach others about what worked and what did not.

Emmeline, whose majority contribution is the visual look of DTJ, said of her experience in visual design:

I had on-the-job training in my early years, with an advertising agency, which basically teaches you how to sell. So, that's where these premises come from. Now, even though Destroy the Joint isn't exactly selling a product, we are selling an idea, and it's all part of marketing. So, anything that I've picked up over the years, and anything that I've actually instigated myself, through experience and observation, is put to use for Destroy the Joint. (Emmeline, in interview)

She taught others in the admin group some of the skills needed to make the images for the page. Six years later, she still does almost all of the graphic work for the page because, no matter how much she shares and teaches, 30 years of practice makes a difference.

## **The processes of Destroy The Joint**

Destroy The Joint worked as a call to action - as process - using social technologies to organise within what Brown (2017, p. 67) calls the “learning pains of organising for depth in the age of social media”, and putting structures in place to coordinate actions. Decisions around these structures were not hierarchical. Decision-making took place in private Facebook groups rather than face-to-face or on the phone but there was agreement on process. Those who participated in the campaigns were asked to undertake actions - to protest by taking action of some kind. The call to action is motivational framing (Snow and Bedford, 2000). It provides those who observe with reasons to engage, a framework for that engagement of agency. Moreover, a well-developed call-to-action provides a gateway for involvement and it is through this gate that the path to activist agency lies. Gamson’s (1995) view on recruitment to causes is that activists must “bridge public discourse and people’s experiential knowledge, integrating them in a coherent frame that supports and sustains collective action”. An effective call-to-action acts not just to get others to act individually but to be part of something bigger, to be part of the action as a collective act.

McCaughey (2014, p. 2) says “creation and spread” of content has been transformed into a standard tool for social movement organizers, not as a substitute for “real” action. It was this ‘creation and spread’ intersected with the interpersonal networks with digital networks on a digital platform which enabled this iteration of connective action; or as Bennett and Segerberg (2013, p. 35) put it:

When interpersonal networks are enabled by technology platforms of various designs that coordinate and scale the networks, the resulting action can resemble collective action, yet without the same role played by formal organisations.

Rosa and others leveraged their own personal networks through Facebook by gauging in which ways she was connected to others seeking to become part of this action. Some of the activists had lead roles in organisational settings, what they acknowledged in interview is that what they brought to Destroy The Joint was the experience of activism, the dispositions and traits brought from professional work to this work as a volunteer activist. For example, Jessie, Rosa and Jocelyne brought with them techniques of protest, learned over many years in other



social movements. This had shaped their habitus (Bourdieu, 1977), their dispositions and traits, developed over time.

“There is a stock [of techniques] and it shapes protest activity. Protesting presupposes learned activist know-how. It is rooted in habitus,” says Crossley (2003). While protesting may well be rooted in the habitus, social media was not. This was a new ‘technique’ for everyone in the admin group. Crossley adds: “We should never underestimate the potential of agents to invent new techniques to add to the stock [of techniques].”

Yet when Alinsky (1971, p. 113) said, “Change comes from power, and power comes from organization. In order to act, people must get together”, he was outlining the process of community organising where it is ‘trained’ organisers in particular fields who organise. While the majority of those involved with DTJ at its inception or now had previous political engagement at various levels, only a small proportion came from community organising. Some had organising experience from unions, some were involved parents at their children’s schools, some had community organising experience in areas such as reproductive rights, some had volunteered for the Labor Party or the Greens.

The activists engaged in a central feminist project with varying degrees of expertise in organising. Two threads brought this group together, the political thread of opposition to sexism and the communicative thread of social media. There was no top down organising, except inasmuch as structurelessness (Freeman, 1972) breeds leaders, but no organisation with a structure with decisions made by the few for the many. Destroy The Joint functions as an exemplar of crowd-enabled connective action because of the absence of a lead organisational actor (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; 2013) but has also morphed into something more resembling organisationally-enabled connective action over its duration. What began as classic connective action, a collection of ad hoc campaigns organised through Facebook and Twitter (in particular the campaign against Alan Jones) altered substantially.

The Bangladesh Agreement campaign set DTJ on the path to becoming organisationally-enabled; and that was embedded at the onset of the significant Counting Dead Women campaign (which will be explored in detail in chapter seven). It turned DTJ into a more professional organisation. DTJ still used connective action but it did so in a way which was organisationally-enabled. It permitted DTJ to develop links with experts, become used as a

source of expert information and facilitated professional relationships with other campaigners in this area. It also provided a forum for fundraising. Two other significant campaigns will also be analysed in chapter seven of this thesis. However Counting Dead Women, the continuing campaign on fatal violence against women (Destroy The Joint 2019), is now the key issue for Destroy The Joint; and the other is the related campaign for legislation around non-fatal strangulation. Activists within DTJ were able to leverage the experience with the Counting Dead Women campaign for the strangulation campaign.

Despite the organisationally-enabled connective action undertaken by DTJ, it was and is a community functioning as a discrete group. It was and is both structured by - and has structured - the platform on which it operates at both a very intense and fast-moving level. This intensity increased tension and put some pressures on the activists.

### **Tensions between past and present forms of activism (or, old habitus dies hard)**

The formations of social movements are always a process in action, always becoming rather than being. In the case of DTJ, there was also a friction between old ways of activism and new ways of activism. These activists had become active, in the majority of instances through traditional organisationally-enabled collective action. They had acquired their habitus in that space and with the attendant social and cultural capital. Now they were activists on a social platform at the outset of crowd-enabled grassroots connective action, where Facebook was the organising platform. Although some were quick to acquire new dispositions, new traits, the old and the new sometimes came into conflict. No matter how much some of the admins loved the new form of organising, others were sceptical. Shifting loyalties caused some anxieties and discontent among the activists. That first shift, from an outpouring of grassroots fury and ad hoc and spontaneous campaigning to a more organisationally-enabled fury, distanced some of the moderators.

In the Bennett and Segerberg typology of networks (2012, p.756; 2013), three models are devised: the first, a connective action network which is self-organising, resists formal coordination or organising; and could also be described as grassroots; the second, also connective action but has ties to formal organisations; and third, the more traditional collective action network, with strong organisation input. In each of these models, digital has an important role. Destroy the Joint, by any measure, began as earlier described, an

outpouring of grassroots fury; but shifted to a more organisational basis over time. The engagement with other organisations over the Bangladesh Clothing Accord showed the benefits of acting in concert. As described earlier, the change from crowd-enabled to organisationally enabled became complete with the commencement of the Counting Dead Women campaign, which provided a conduit for funding from the community and gave Destroy the Joint a different status. It also provided the impetus for other organisations to recognise DTJ as an entity, for example, Our Watch.

One of the moderators, Inez, was a woman who identified herself as a woman of colour and someone who also had extensive experience in the union movement. Unions, in the Bennett-Segerberg typology, are organisationally-brokered collective action. Inez did not find the change from a grassroots movement to one more organisationally-enabled as sympathetic to the values she wanted to align with as a volunteer rather than as an employee, where, as a union employee, her working life was clearly structured.

I did Destroy the Joint for about two years and in that period of time it felt like it changed quite significantly from when I first came on board. At the beginning, the very very beginning, it had a less professional feel to it and a more activist sensibility to it. Later on, it felt like it became a lot more professional therefore we had to be a lot more careful, for its very own reasons which make sense but it lost its appeal for me.  
(Inez, in interview)

The habitus, as ever, is deeply embedded and the quickly shifting and atypical dynamics of a crowd-enabled connective action network unsettled a number of the activists, for multiple reasons. While Inez very much wanted the grassroots aspect to continue, others struggled with the tensions between grassroots and organisational. Constance, a moderator who became an admin in the first few months, also struggled with the shifting structures:

Other times with this kind of structure that we have, that we're kind of trying to navigate our way through, it's just created itself as much as anything.

She described the congregation around the hashtag as one which “just created itself”, organized by the platform, around the shared value of #destroythejoint.

Constance was also a union organiser with a background in community services and she was used to traditional chains of command so felt some discomfort around the mobile internal structure of this group.

Having lines of authority can be difficult. Like who actually gets the final say where there is a disagreement? That's difficult to manage and that has led to me having problems with some of the moderators, where, as an admin who is responsible for where the page is going, being able to say, "Actually, no. You can't do that. Stop doing that. You are not doing what this page is meant to do" (Constance, in interview).

This concept of responsibility in an activist group weighed heavily on this admin's shoulders. She has a great deal of campaigning experience in her work and she felt – and continues to feel up to 2019 – that campaigns must be planned to be successful. She said that she resisted being “in charge” because of a desire for flatter structures but also worried about who would take responsibility for any necessary decisions or any negative short-term outcomes:

I try not to put any authority out there but I think that the administrators should have that final word on what's going to impact the page. Where that's not respected, I've found that difficult too. (Constance, in interview)

Constance is also a person who discouraged admins and moderators<sup>3</sup> from interacting with the public DTJ page, that is, the interaction with the public page should prioritise the voices of those not directly involved in the interaction. She argues it is key to keeping the discussion and debate free-flowing:

Keeping the backend from over-interacting with the front end is probably one of the biggest [challenges] I think keeping that to a minimum is a challenge. Moderators get bored. They want to engage in the conversation which is understandable or they want to engage with the issue and sometimes they can overlap that with their role as moderator with Destroy the Joint, and so could admins. That's always going to be a challenge I think, because when everything is calm and we haven't got any big flying campaigns which will attract trolls, there's not a lot for moderators to do except for

watch the conversations. It's challenging to keep them interested, but not personally engaged. (Constance, in interview)

Other admins described the structure as one which differed according to what activity was being undertaken. Helen said:

There is a top down, because we [admins] set the agenda from day to day, in terms of what we think is to be talked about on any particular day, but the conversation itself that is had among Destroyers is pretty free-flowing. We also take ideas that are put up by Destroyers, and work them in the moderator and admin groups to see if they're viable as posts. It's got a bit of both. I think it's possibly more directed, but where there is a groundswell, I think we can recognize that and go with it, if it chimes with our overall goals. (Helen, in interview)

One of the few men who worked on the page and who had extensive experience in the union movement was clear in his view that DTJ had a non-structured approach to organising and campaigning, in contrast to his own experience. Patrick said:

My experience, and it was for a limited time, is it was a group of similarly-minded community activists that were willing to take grassroots action to make that change occur. That's always special about it. (Patrick, in interview)

He embraced the social qualities of this particular form of activism, because of the capacity for outreach and saw it as an opportunity for wider engagement and recruiting. "It can inspire other people to join a group of Destroyers and say: 'All right, we want to tackle something like gender inequality,' or whatever the issue is."

Another moderator, Bell, described the way she saw the structure: "I don't think we're grassroots, and I don't think we're like a normal company. [...] I think we're sort of a collective with a leadership". Leadership mattered to some of the moderators. Some embraced clear direction, others felt excluded and angry. One moderator, Gunilla, who left after a disagreement on the support of sex work as work, said:

I did get the impression that whilst it was important to have clear leadership, but also there was an openness to being open to contributions from the others. It was fairly democratic and open to involvement by all those involved. It depends on what kind of leaders you got. I mean, I think that what there needs to be is ... I think you need boundaries, and also, that's what leadership does, is provide boundaries for the organization so you don't have people going off half-cock and doing stupid things. **I think leadership provides those boundaries.**

She also said that she thought DTJ was not a union and not a party: "I guess it's grassroots, but more like GetUp, it kind of feeds from grassroots stuff". Despite Gunilla's disagreement with the values of the group (she was the only activist to argue that sex workers and sex work should not be supported), she maintained good relationships with DTJ after she left and had a (mostly) positive view. Others actively preferred the flatter structures, seeing this structurelessness as a true representation of the way in which feminist activism should operate, prefiguring the feminist society as it should operate.

Another moderator, Emma, was recruited to the page in an entirely grassroots way. Although she had some prior experience in unions, she was not recruited to the movement through those networks but because her mother pointed it out to her. She said, "I would say it's a cross between like a grass roots GetUppy kind of thing, and <sup>the</sup> union, because it is group-oriented":

[My mother] called me the day the page started and she said, "Oh, there's this page starting up with a funny name." Like, "This is what happened. This is how it started and you should join it." I liked this page in the first couple hours that it started and overnight it was up to a couple thousand and the next ... You know, tens of thousands, so it's growing really, really, really quickly . . . people make that happen. (Emma, in interview)

It was notable that those with experience of professional campaigning expressed a perception that DTJ was more grassroots, while those who saw themselves as grassroots tended to see DTJ as heavily professionalised. Those who had never engaged with activism of any kind struggled to describe what they saw. One moderator who became an administrator briefly,

Faith, had no prior activist training or knowledge. She described DTJ as “organised chaos . . . Australia’s largest grassroots feminist organisation”. She was recruited through Twitter in the first few days and had absolutely no activist experience of any kind. Her view was that DTJ recruited as many bodies as it could and hoped “that it will work out . . .”:

It was a trapeze act. Just when you thought somebody was going to [fall and get] smashed to the ground, somebody else would come swinging through and grab them. Even if they needed to disembark from the trapeze, someone would somehow get them safe. We do a platform, so that they could climb down. I don't think anybody crashed to the ground amongst the mods and admins at the time, but it was ... a lot of stress. (Faith, in interview)

That busy period of forming around the ideas of DTJ and running a campaign against Alan Jones was probably not a good time to be recruiting people who had no idea what it took to make digital activism work, as Faith herself acknowledged in interview. The combination of episodic and sustained activity even surprised long-term activists. Seb, who was a mod for a short time and is now an academic, said:

I see it much more in the grass roots and connective dimensions of activism. I think it facilitates a number of conversations. It encourages people to pursue their own thinking and then pursue their own actions in different ways. But at the same time those grass roots because it's [also] mobilizing people not on the ground and it's made up of people who are engaging in these various struggles on a daily basis themselves, often leading to particular target of actions whether it's writing to an MP or protesting a particular act. (Seb, in interview)

Those who were professional activists or who had been regular activists all their lives brought the habitus of professionalised activism, in particular, the embodied habitus of mobilisers and organisers, while those for whom activism was an occasional foray brought the habitus from the field of their respective occupations to Destroy The Joint. Yet there was one element which the majority of these activists had which made them a greater force together than separately, and that was the combination of their cultural capital, whereby the

vast majority of these activists brought with them an intense and personally-invested knowledge of feminist concerns. They could talk the talk of feminism.

For the most part, individuals were seen as having status acquired from their originating field. And again, the majority brought with them strong communication skills of one kind or another. While online communication was once considered the province of men, now “women have not only adopted mediated technology such as social networking as a means to maintain relationships, but have also increased the integration of text-based communication more than previously thought” (Kimbrough, Guadagno, Muscanell, & Dill, 2013). The combination of a number of factors: the desire for feminist expression; the #destroythejoint hashtag, and the opportunity to discuss it on social media was a perfect moment to form connections, to take connective action, to share values and to frame solidarity. That conflation of various forms of expression as enabled by connective action propelled the communicative turn.

From an organising point of view, it also meant that there had to be a great deal of internal communication. It could be argued that the flatter structures in DTJ occurred because these activists did not have close ties, were not all members of some other organising group, and for the most part were not connected to each other. For these reasons, internal communication was imperative. It is useful to say that aside from the Facebook page itself and the four groups which work to structure the page and its campaign, the number of backchannel chats were numerous, including competing individual and group Facebook chats, text messages, Twitter DMs, and occasionally phone calls. It turns out that constantly writing/speaking your feelings is one aspect of the communicative turn in this experience of feminist activism. This can be good when it’s dealing with “the creating and sharing of plans for and implementation to achieve disciplinary representation in leadership and other positions of power” (Heinert & Phillips, 2017, p.132) and less good when people in those backchannels are all just complaining about each other.

This chapter provided the historical context for the formation of DTJ. It offered a brief exploration of the effect a woman Prime Minister had on women’s engagement with politics; and the way in which that ‘gender effect’ provided the impetus for the recruitment and mobilisation of Australian feminists engaged in digital activism. It gives a detailed



account of the first campaign of DTJ and its impact, as an iteration of crowd-enabled connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, 2013) in an Australian feminist setting. In addition, it portrays and analyses the workings of the group of administrators and moderators, as they sought to develop a way forward for DTJ including the development of basic strategies as the group continued. Through this process, this group shared skills and attributes with each other to campaign against sexism and misogyny in Australia. It provided some insight into the conflicts and challenges involved in connective action feminist activism in Australia. It also introduced data from the interviews with activists. In summary, this chapter described the evolution of digital feminist activism in Australia through the example of DTJ and introduces the concepts of habitus and capital which will be more fully explored in the following chapter.

## **Chapter Five: Go prefigure - how habitus and capitals shape digital feminist activists**

This chapter explores the becoming of Australian feminist activists, in particular, the feminist activists of Destroy The Joint. I use two main concepts developed by Bourdieu to undertake that exploration, habitus (1977) and capital (1986), and the concept of prefiguration (Boggs, 1977). Prefiguration is what activists bring to bear on their activist experience and is a specific choice to embody our political ideals, the embodiment of our politics. Within that prefiguration, they bring their habitus and their varied capitals. To explain further, activists bring their embedded values, skills, beliefs, experience and knowledge, the sum of their habitus and various capitals, to activism and this prefigures their ideals. In the sharing of the skills, knowledge and attributes which shape capital, capital both structures agents on the field and the field itself. Bourdieu lists three forms of capital: economic (money, property rights); cultural (education, skills, class, taste, preferences) and social (connections and networks), although I will be discussing emotional capital in another chapter. This chapter illustrates what these activists brought with them to the Australian online feminist activist group, how their activism evolved during their involvement with Destroy the Joint, and how what these activists brought to their activism shaped that activism. I will now set out an explanation of the key concepts.

### **Why values matter: prefigurative politics**

In the framework of prefigurative politics, activists try to be the change they want to see. They believe their aims can only really be shaped or achieved by conducting themselves in a particular way, enacting their politics in line with their values, ideologies and beliefs. Carol Boggs (1977) who first conceptualised prefigurative politics, argued that prefiguration is ‘the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal’ (1977, p.100).

In other words, you must prefigure – or be - the change you want to see. Amid a revival of prefigurative politics in social movement literature, Van de Sande’s (2013) recent work on Tahrir Square boils it down to three key ideas: 1) bringing the future ideal into the present; 2) experimenting with those ideals; and, 3), as he puts it, “a reformulation of the means-ends distinction”. He applies prefigurative politics to the occupation of Tahrir Square, where

activists tried to create their ideal alternative society in the present. They experimented with new ideas and forms, and where openness and consensus were:

reflected in their practical organisation the ends envisioned in the process. The organization of Tahrir Square as a stronghold of resistance. In short, what took place, what was done, was more than a means to an end. (Van de Sande, 2013, p. 236)

It was, he argues, “a sort of social laboratory in which a new political community began to take shape”.

What would a social laboratory produce if it was trying to create a new, feminist, political community? A prefigurative feminist community would have a particular shape. For example, it would be shaped by women for women and resist patriarchal values. If one believes that a feminist society would have a flattish structure, women-shaped and women-led, with open organising and consensus decision-making, that’s what you would try to exemplify in any activist activity if you were trying to prefigure your ideal feminist community. If you thought feminism should be the antithesis of capitalism (because capitalism embeds the patriarchy), you would resist any capitalist enterprise. Which makes it hard if, for example, the entire platform of your feminist actions relies on the existence of a capitalist enterprise, the Facebook corporation.

Cynthia Lin, Alisa Pykett, Constance Flanagan & Karma Chávez (2016, p. 302) reconfigured a feminist prefiguration. Like Mathijs Van de Sande (2013) above, that too had three central elements of what feminist activism should look like: “relationality, self-determination, and intersectionality”. In practice, relationality describes how these activists related to each other, in stressful times and in joyful times. They related to each other despite their differences because of their similarities. They came together to organise because they had the same concerns about central issues for feminism. Self-determination is best explained by the expression “nothing about us, without us”, which describes centring power in the hands of those who have experienced injustice. Finally, intersectionality recognises that we must recognise multiple competing burdens or as Audre Lorde (1984, p. 183) wrote: “There is no thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not live single-issue lives.” Be the change you want to be and respect and honour those with whom you work to make that change.

There was no reluctance to use platform capitalism to benefit the feminist project. What the administrators of DTJ saw were the endless possibilities of the platforms. Nancy Fraser (2013, p. 211) explains the contradictions well. She says that at its beginning, second-wave feminism critiqued what she describes as “androcentric, state-organized capitalism”. That generative critique of what she describes as state-organised capitalism had three separate elements - economic, cultural, and political - when exploring gender injustice. But she says that as time passed, those “three dimensions of injustice became separated, both from one another and from the critique of capitalism. With the fragmentation of the feminist critique came the selective incorporation and partial recuperation of some of its strands . . . second-wave hopes were conscripted in the service of a project that was deeply at odds with our larger, holistic vision of a just society” (Fraser, 2013, p. 211).

In other words, Facebook profited from our activism and, as you will see in the chapter on campaigns, it also made a platform where more trivial concerns were rewarded. From the CrowdTangle data, the case is clear. Those who interacted with the Destroy the Joint Facebook page far preferred BuzzFeed videos to discussions of policy change, as will be further explored in chapter seven, on Counting Dead Women. As Sheila Rowbotham, Lynne Segal & Hilary Wainwright (1979) wrote, there is a need to push back against any form of political participation which is structured by capitalism:

We need political forms which consciously help people to overcome the continual mining of our capacity to resist . . . how can we struggle for prefigurative changes to an organisation which reproduces the relationships of power dominant in capitalism? (Rowbotham et al., 1979, p. 132)

That argument may have been sustained in 1981 - but in 2018 capitalism has colonised so many forms of communication, some would argue all forms of online communication (Dahlberg, 2014), that it is hard to avoid, both in the public and private spheres. Sheila Rowbotham et al. (1979) could not foresee that a primary organising platform for resistance would be also be a capitalist enterprise. As early as 2004, Lincoln Dahlberg identified the way in which corporate control marginalised some voices online. As Srnicek (2017, p. 55) argues platform capitalism tends towards gatekeeping, convergence and “enclosure of ecosystems”, the structures of which may be incompatible with feminist aims to dismantle patriarchy. In spite of the possibility of corporate control and marginalisation, Facebook was

where these women (and a handful of men) from DTJ met to plot feminism and to attempt to build a feminist movement because the audience for feminism was already there.

I will also link that form of political group-making, prefigurative politics, to the Bourdieusian concepts of habitus (1977, p. 72 in the first instance) and capital (1986), as it is situated in feminist digital activism. These activists had pre-existing social and cultural capital as activists but it was the intersection of both social and cultural capitals with habitus which predisposed these activists as prefigurative, or, as Leach puts it more specifically, working towards a “decentralized, directly democratic, and often consensus-based authority structure” (2013, p. 1). Prefiguration of feminist activists for feminist activism supports a more open style of organising and mobilising, which is both structured by connective action and enabled by connective action. In particular, I will look at the way in which these activists shared knowledge, accumulated through their cultural capital, supported by their social capital, to develop their core positions, or more precisely, to focus on what really mattered to them and how those goals could be moved forward, both shaping and in line with their prefigurative ideals.

The Australian feminist activists involved in Destroy the Joint brought thick ties, their social and cultural capital which predisposed them to particular causes, in particular feminism, bringing them to their respective activism as part of DTJ. In doing so, they connected their accumulated experience of collective action to connective action through their habitus, the dispositions and traits accumulated through both their previous jobs and their previous activism. My analysis of interview data in this chapter will make clear the importance of these concepts to making sense of DTJ. However, my analysis of the data will also show that activists and actions are transmuted by the digital platform, because the digital platform organises the field and, in some cases, mobilises the agents, in a way which is different to previous experience. In this way, contemporary activism on digital platforms is different to traditional collective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, 2013; Chadwick, 2007; Couldry, 2015). While it may be true in the instances covered in the literature, in particular, Bennett and Segerberg, that those who participated in connective action organised entirely in that connective action setting (2012; 2013), those who participated in DTJ brought with them their accumulated experiences, including their experiences of collective action, which structured and shaped their interaction with connective action.

### **Why values matter: Prefiguration**

As explained earlier, in a prefigurative framework, activists try to be the change they want to see. Andrew Green and John Street say prefiguration (2018, p. 172) is about building “an idealised present in the future” – for feminists, that can mean resisting what Jo Freeman described as an overstructured society (1972), one where men dominate the discourse and the organisations. For Freeman, this resistance led to chaos, to structurelessness, which in turn made it impossible to make change. But somewhere between structurelessness and authoritarian reporting lines was where the activists of DTJ wanted to sit, somewhere where the power and leadership was more evenly distributed, where everyone had equal say over the directions of the group.

There was, is, an opportunity for feminist communities to embrace democratic structuring and be politically effective. Jo Freeman (1972) outlines the key elements: rights, responsibilities, distribution of resources and information. For feminists, Freeman’s views are the ideal instructional manual on how to create feminist communities and keep them feminist: “They [tyrants, power seizers] will not be in such an easy position to institutionalize their power because ultimate decisions will be made by the group at large. The group will have the power to determine who shall exercise authority within it.”

The search for authority and distributed leadership continues. While Carl Boggs’s (1977) characterisation of prefiguration as a new form of social movement did not succeed in shifting power relationships within social movements, it did leave a legacy for those social movements. Wini Breines (1980) described that legacy as “a new politics of participation and process” (p. 419) and, decades later, both David Graeber (2004) and Darcy Leach (2013) acknowledged its developing presence in social movements, including feminism. Contemporary examples include the Detroit Black Community Food Sovereignty Network and We are BRAVE, a reproductive justice organizing project (both cited in Lin et al. 2016).

The disposition towards prefigurative politics of those involved with Destroy The Joint shaped the group. Activists choose to be prefigurative. It is not possible to immediately intuit what kind of politics you want to practise until you have had a range of experiences. As Julia said, in interview, of the way in which her activism shaped her politics: “Political activism can work in weird ways too because you saw what actually went on in the world.”

Patrick too, had previous experiences which made him recognise the link between experience, politics and political activism. He said, in interview:

My dad was made redundant from his job at Parks Victoria. They were getting rid of rangers. We lost our home. My school got merged. A number of things happened at once. I worked, trying to work out what this means in the world. Very quickly, it was linked to politics. The Liberal government of Victoria had decided to do a number of things. That meant my school got merged, and my old man lost his job, and the charity that I was donating my time to got defunded. . . . Yeah, at that moment, the political actions got fired me up. I decided, "All right, maybe I've got to do something about this.

As these moderators explain, their lived experiences and their socialisation shaped their dispositions. Their previous activist experience shaped their prefigurative inclination, in the case of Julia, she saw what went on in the world and wanted to contribute to positive change. In the case of Patrick, his experiences at school helped him recognise that he had to "to do something about this". He brought with him the lived experience of the effects of governmental decision-making and that set him on the road to activism.

### **How prefiguration links to habitus and capital**

I argue that prefiguration, the embodiment of political ideals, has clear links to the concepts of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977) and social capital and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). Habitus is the embodiment of cultural capital, the way what we know shapes our disposition. Prefiguration, as explained earlier, is a specific choice to embody our political ideals, the embodiment of our politics. In addition, our social networks, our social capital, feed into our cultural capital because those networks add to what we know. Social capital is who you know and who they know, the entirety of an agent's social networks. Diani (1997) and Hanna-Mari Husu (2013) both argue social movement networks rely on previous social capital and then generate new forms, so it could be argued that the confluence of platformed social networks with social movement networks increases the capacity to reproduce, to extend, social capital. In the case of those involved with Destroy The Joint, the previous activist experience of participants meant extensive social networks, able to be

mobilised quickly or brought to the group, either short- or long-term, when needed. Cultural capital, in this case, is what activists knew and how they knew it.

The activists of Destroy The Joint have, collectively, accumulated hundreds of years of experience in feminist activism. During interviews, each identified the issues they considered key for feminists: violence against women, reproductive rights, bodily autonomy, poverty, equal pay, equal access, sexism, misogyny, bias against women. These are the responses of activists whose identification of these issues resulted from their previous experience of activism (including those whose entire experience of activism was DTJ itself). These key issues informed the core positions of the activists of DTJ and a resulting word cloud illustrating frequency of core concerns appears below.

What matters to individual activists is informed by their experience, their context and their education, their social capital and their cultural capital. It also impacts on the key concerns of the movement.



Figure 5: Word Cloud illustrating frequency of core concerns



Those capitals shape habitus, which is both culturally and socially produced, by and through those social and cultural capitals. What these activists brought to Destroy The Joint with their lived experience shaped the movement, and DTJ would not have formed without those activists and their experience. The formation of DTJ tapped into a mood for change, a feminist tendency, and those activists formed part of a feminist generation (Olcese, Saunders & Tzavidis, 2014, p. 541). To reframe Olcese et al.'s (2014) words, "Members of any political generation are more likely to do direct action and be structurally available" could be to argue the position that members of a feminist generation in the digital sphere are more likely to take connective action and be structurally available. Online makes it possible to always be structurally available, or as DeLuca, Lawson and Sun (2012, p. 501) put it, to be in a cycle of "perpetual participation". I will expand on this later in the chapter.

These activists are shaped by the social and cultural capital accumulated through activism, and that capital is shaped by the habitus, the embedded dispositions and traits of activists. However, those dispositions and traits have been altered by the experience of activism in the age of connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; 2013), from traditional top down organisationally-enabled collective action to crowd-enabled connective action. While Brian Loader, Ariadne Vromen and Michael Xenos (2014, p. 149) remind us that "access to social and cultural capital is often used to ensure unequal social distinctions between citizens," more specifically that could be applied to activists, there is something to be said about the way in which activists have been structured by the structures they have previously encountered in their activism. In some instances, these activists have resistance to the new structures of connective action as, for most, the entirety of their activism has been structured in collective action; and therefore their actions are structured by the structures, no matter how freeing or liberating connective actions feels. That embodied habitus is difficult to resist.

Of the 30 complete interviews, 22 of those interviewed had current membership of a union (73 per cent), and 9 were union representatives of one kind or another. This included being delegates, organisers, or in the senior ranks of union hierarchy. This contrasts with the broader Australian community, where membership is around 15 per cent. Unions build activists with a particular habitus that includes "collective identities, repertoires of action, power resources, representative capacity and the strategic capacity of the union representatives" (Murray, Dufour, Hege & Lévesque, 2010, p. 314) and it is this habitus which these 22 activists who had belonged to unions brought to Destroy The Joint. The

activist profile of those who are admins and moderators of Destroy The Joint is homologous in terms of political engagement – 24 had previous political experience of one kind or another, including in the union movement, with a minimum of ten years of experience in activism before joining DTJ.

Just under half of those 24 began their political engagement aged under 20, including joining their parents at rallies, marching against government cuts to education, marching against the monorail. Their acquisition of activist traits began when they were young. One moderator, Sheila, who later became an admin, said she came from a ‘left-wing family’ with a father who always encouraged her to join her union:

There was thinking in the family that you join a union and you look after other people, that sort of thing.

That mindset – or habitus – shaped her. She joined her local community association, became secretary after a couple of years and eventually became president.

That built my self-confidence to go on and do other things . . . I’m still very active in the union movement. (Sheila, in interview)

This kind of pattern was repeated in the experience of other activists in DTJ: the young schoolgirl who joined her teachers and other students at a rally protesting cuts to education, the toddlers who attended rallies to protest the invasion of Iraq or cuts to childcare funding. Not all of these experiences required an active participant - the toddler at the childcare rally rode on the shoulders of a parent - but the process of participating even at that level shaped participants’ values and beliefs and formed part of their narrative of previous activism. Jessie, a long-time unionist who began as an admin, but left after the combination of a bout of illness and also impatience and irritation with others in the group, said:

I come from a family that embedded in me a sense of the importance of thinking about justice and fairness and equality and taking action and doing things when things weren't right. That is part of my being and who I am. I don't really imagine being an activist is a thing I do; it's what I am. (Jessie, in interview)

She brought with her the union habitus: the dispositions and traits she brought with her from union activism and union workplace habits which, as Jane McAlevey (2016) argues are movements with progressive goals set for more than the workplace, for lives beyond work. Jessie did not have a way to participate in her union which was different to the way she participated in DTJ. She was McAlevey's (2016) archetypal person in a union:

[T]he people in unions, who are called workers, and many of the same people after they have punched the clock at the end of their shift and put on their SMO (or “interest group”) volunteer hats—people who are then called individuals. (McAlevey, 2016, p. 2)

As Jessie said in her interview, “It’s what I am.” Jessie explains how she developed habitus, shaped by the cultural capital and social capital her parents brought to parenting. As she puts it:

I suppose throughout my life, I have been active about things big, small, and otherwise, and known for speaking out and standing up for people. That manifested in my teenage years, being a bit of a troublemaker. Into my working life, I worked in social services and community services, and always looking for ways to make the world more fair and make things more fair for people. I think the evolution of my activism is when I found union.

The purpose and connectivity of activists are in flux, shaped by their social capital. After six months in Destroy The Joint, my own activist network was absolutely dominated by people who were active in the union movement and who, as a side activity, urged me to become a delegate of one union or another (I belong to two, the MEAA for journalists and the NTEU for higher education workers, but am not a delegate for either). The vast majority of those who are or were involved as moderators or administrators in Destroy the Joint had experience in the union movement, as a member, an official, or a position in the union hierarchy. While a few had no experience of feminist activism, they had all experienced feminist activism in some small way, such as attending rallies or flash mobs or signing petitions, an example of feminism's interconnecting networks and an illustration of its capacity to “generate new ties and solidarities” (Diani, 1997, p. 142).

Throughout the interviews, participants related their experiences of how their early activism shaped their current activism. Rosa too had the experience of early immersion in activism. She attended rallies because the state government had made cuts to education. It shaped her later participation.

I remember at that time you were seeing the direct impact on your school. You just see you've lost a teacher in the middle of year 11, not very good. The teachers having discussions about it. Then going to the actual strike day. I remember that very clearly where, you got on trains in suburban Sydney and there [were] streamers hanging out of the trains. You were on the train with your teachers and with students from all over the place. We went to the domain in Sydney and there was, I [with] 50,000 people there. That very first feeling of being part of something big and powerful, which only really gets replicated at big mass events . . . that had a large impact. (Rosa, in interview)

Alice recalls her earliest political participation.

And I think my earliest memory is being at a protest as a very young child about childcare, on my parent's shoulders. I think that's my earliest memory. I have memories of going to rallies as a teenager and that sort of thing [but] I think I came to it in a more very active sense a bit later, when [a friend] said to me that she was going to have a feminist conference. I think getting involved in that was really, probably, a big starting point for me, in terms of that sort of involvement. (Alice, in interview)

Of those interviewed, eight said DTJ was their first experience of active feminist political engagement and of those eight, two were men who were very politically active in other areas of interest. The majority eschewed engagement with political parties, however ten either were currently members of political parties or had been members of one of three political parties: the Australian Labor Party, the Australian Greens and the Liberal Party of Australia (two women, who had been members of the Liberal Party in their early 20s because of its alignment to small business). This is very high, in comparison to estimates in 2019 of less than two per cent of Australians with political party membership (Price, 2019).

On the whole, political parties were not viewed by these activists as a way to participate for feminists. One moderator, Emma, explained why her membership of the ALP was brief: “They are just part of the patriarchy.”

In the majority, these activists had consciously decided to structure their activism away from traditional party politics to activism which clearly aligned with their values and beliefs and which was accessible. Pippa Norris (2002), writing on environmental activism, highlights the value of non-governmental protest politics including petitions, boycotts and rallies as forms of protest politics which are not passing phenomena but “on the rise as a channel of political expression and mobilization” (Norris, 2002, p. 11).

This is a cohort of people who were joiners yet were resistant to party membership. There was not the same resistance to union membership by these activists and perhaps one explanation for that disparity could be that the unions to which these people belonged were largely female-dominated, such as service, education or health unions. These activists were happy to join organisations where they could see a direct correlation between the organisation and their political aims.

There was no clear pattern to previous involvement in feminist groups but they included a range from Women’s Electoral Lobby to flash mobs for Reproductive Choice Australia to organising a feminist conference in 2010 in Sydney at the Teachers’ Federation to volunteering at a women’s refuge or shelter.

Diani (1997, p. 143) argues that social movement networks “rely crucially on previous social capital and have to be able to generate new forms of it if they are to exert a lasting influence over their social environment”. In some ways this goes towards explaining the ability of a group of people to move beyond the fact that they, with few exceptions, did not know each other (or at least did not know each other very well) to being able to form the new ties and solidarities of which Diani writes. As Sheila, who was a mod and then became an admin, said in her interview: “I don’t know a lot about the background of the other people on the page except that they are feminists”. The solidarity with, and commitment to, feminism created thick collective ties.

Diani’s argument also goes some way to explaining the way in which the social capital of feminist activist networks was utilised both to connect and to enable what Husu (2013, p.

275) says is a “specific understanding of social problems” and the cultural competence needed to identify those problems. As she puts it, activists not only need to have expertise and the ability to validate their positions, they must also “have legitimacy based on the possession of capital and habitus that indicates their class position in the society” (Husu, 2013, p. 275).

What Husu (2013) means is that activists must ‘know’ what they are doing to make change. As well, beyond knowing, as well as having the habitus of feminism, activists must have the cultural capital - the knowledge - to back up the positions taken, particularly when trying to resist patriarchy. It does not hurt to have the networks either, the social capital of knowing other feminists or those aligned with the feminist position. In the case of Destroy the Joint, these women brought with them accumulated knowledge and practice of feminism, both at a practice level and at a theoretical level. That combined with the weight of organising experience among the members of the group, including that gained from the field of unions, made it possible for this group of women to have legitimacy.

I argue that a long-time dedication to feminist activism and to the specific causes around feminist activism would bestow legitimacy based on the possession of capital in this area and further embed the habitus which becomes embodied through that possession of capital. As Stephanie Lawler writes, habitus carries the concept of history (2004, p. 111) - not just personal but also social or collective history, and is generative rather than determining or deadening. The feminist habitus of the DTJ activists is relational, in other words, it makes sense in relation to the field on which it is situated and in the relationship of each activist to each other. Habitus exists, “in relation to each other [and] is profoundly social” (Lawler, 2004, p. 112).

DTJ attracted those who had previous activist experience and who were, in the majority, already activists. They had developed their own habitus of activism. Second, each of those activists brought social and cultural capitals with them. Finally, all these forces shaped each other on the field of online feminist activism in Australia in a particular time, as Julia Gillard’s position as prime minister was under attack. The vast majority of activists involved in DTJ had prior activist experience. They were sensitised to the repertoires of activism; and in the context, where Gillard was under attack, looked for a way to fight back.

Rosa, who had lengthy experience in the union movement, had a strong emotional response to the treatment of Gillard:

I remember the months beforehand [Gillard] and just feeling this rising sense of guilt over as there as a bystander. (Rosa, in interview)

Constance too was motivated by the treatment of Gillard:

I'd been following what was happening with Julia Gillard and that just really resonated, so as soon as I saw the page I just thought, yes, this is [what] we need to deal with. (Constance, in interview)

Jocelyne, in interview:

Well I was livid about the things that Alan Jones has said about Julia Gillard and increasingly so. When those final comments came out about her father should have died of shame I actually went looking online for something that would help me deal with my anger about that and I found Destroy the Joint and I became involved fairly early on in putting information together that would be used as the basis for calls for action.

Of the 30 interviews, all but three actively mentioned the treatment of Gillard as a mobilising force. The online platform made it possible to mobilise a feminist tendency which created a feminist generation or fourth wave (as discussed in chapter two). The social media networks and their content led to an increase in visible feminism (Duffy & Pruchniewska, 2016).

Four years later, Bella, a moderator at the time, said:

I think that feminism would have given a big high five when Destroy the Joint was started. In the past there was no really collective national voice, people would have responded as individuals, or as organizations they might have written their own letters. There wasn't that collective outrage at some of those things.

That collective outrage was mobilised in a particular way because of the capitals of the activists involved in Destroy the Joint. More specifically, capital is the set of “actually usable resources and powers – economic capital, cultural capital and also social capital” (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 114) and it is capital which forms difference between agents, based on overall accumulation. In this next section, I explore cultural capital and social capital and how they apply to the feminists of Destroy The Joint. The feminists of DTJ, or as they could also be described, the agents on the field of online feminism in Australia at a particular time, are structured by their positions in social space, in this case, feminist activism and they are formed by both their social and cultural capitals; and their shared values, formed by those capitals (Svensson, 2014).

### **Further exploration of the capital of activists**

The exploration of the impact of social class, an extension of economic capital (money, property rights), on digital activism has been outlined by Jen Schradie (2018) where she argues that even in an online setting, class makes a difference because of time, income, resources, power and abilities. As Schradie (2018, p. 71) says: “The digital activism gap may make collective action more difficult for groups with fewer resources and more working-class members.” This could be further explored in an Australian context. In the DTJ context, it is difficult to ascertain the social class of each of the activists, however, each had time at their disposal; as well as work which was flexible. In addition, the vast majority of these activists, 25 from 30, have, at the very least, a bachelor’s degree from a university. Only six live outside Australia’s capital cities.

Bourdieu (1986) observes cultural capital as embodied (how agents express their dispositions mentally and physically); as objectified (the objects which confer cultural capital); and as institutionalised (whereby institutions confer that cultural capital). Those interviewed mentioned their previous experience as a credential: a way of explaining their credibility, their status and their position, a way of claiming their skin in the game, for example, over 70 per cent of those interviewed had previous – and long-term – investment in and experience of feminist activism.

Those participants with previous experience were all women. In contrast, the three men I interviewed talked about their lack of feminist organising as a gap in their own activist experience. The capital they brought to Destroy The Joint was from the previous experience



of organising in other spheres. One short term moderator, Patrick, who helped out during the Alan Jones campaign said that in his workplace he was using his experience with Destroy The Joint to build women's capacity within his organisation. He said:

What we've done ... is we've decided to really heavily invest in our women's team and organising through a feminist framework. We haven't done that previously in the past, and that's meant that the type of work and action that we saw took place has given hope that we can make broader change.

I look to Destroy the Joint as a little bit of a model . . . to get a lot more people to come together to make change. I was massively impressed and very humbled to be accepted at the time to help out. When that moment around Alan Jones had wrapped up, or we'd got lots of victories, I was more than happy to step aside, too, and make sure that there was space for women to do the work in that feminist agenda. There were so many amazing women doing such amazing work. (Patrick, in interview)

He stepped aside from moderating after a few months:

I think that's the right thing to do. It is not the role of men to deliberately or accidentally find themselves in the space of mansplaining or taking over or taking away from others that type of work. I think you've got to be sophisticated about that. (Patrick, in interview)

Patrick recognised that in feminist organising, he was missing embodied cultural capital, that is, he was not a woman and had not previously been involved in any feminist organising, although the values were congruent with his own.

Social capital is also acquirable, not necessarily through intent, through context such as time, society and class. It is the networks that people move in, the 'who you know'. Social capital is most clearly explained as membership of a group, either constituted physically or symbolically. Social capital increases when the group or groups are bigger; or when individuals are members of many groups, which then expands the capacity of the networks. (Bourdieu, 1986). In the example of DTJ, the agents on the field of feminist activism (despite its many and varied internal differences) had a clear purpose expressed during interviews

which was to work towards equality and to end sexism and misogyny. While they may not have known each other explicitly before DTJ, they ‘knew’ each other in terms of recognising familiar values. Activists explicitly said feminism was their number one allegiance in terms of their activism, and for some, the employment they had aligned with feminist values. Those whose main work was not in community services or health were employed in female-dominated unions.

One of the activists, Bella, had worked in the field of family violence for a long time, in community services. She said she became most engaged with Destroy The Joint when it began the Counting Dead Women campaign. She said:

I have been involved with [work around] the deaths of women for a long time . . . it's part of social activism that I've always been party to, so I found [involvement with DTJ] quite a good experience. (Bella, in interview)

While capital is, as explained earlier, usable resources and powers, habitus is both culturally and socially produced. It is how we operate in the world:

The habitus is the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in order for those products of collective history, the objective structures, (e.g. language, economy, etc.) to succeed in reproducing themselves more or less completely, in the forms of durable dispositions. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 85)

### **Habitus on Time**

Habitus is our reflexes, our embodiment. That develops through the exposure we have had, to whom, what and when. These activists often speak of their specific dispositions and traits, including the constancy of their attention to Destroy the Joint, all encompassing, “perpetual participation” (DeLuca et al., 2012). They feel as if they are always on, all the time. Checking the website hundreds of times a day, watching all the feminist networks, and following news sites. These activists participated every single day. From their interviews, it is possible to describe their activism as reflexive, so deeply embedded that it becomes embodied, even if it was embodied not before their involvement. The notifications of social media trained these activists to become deeply habituated to responding to those notifications, conditioned to checking responses.

Patrick, in interview, described his actions as being “constantly on. First thing in the morning, last at night, always helping with the moderation job.”

The following three extracts from interviews give more depth to the feeling of being “constantly on”. In Millicent’s case, she describes the quantity of output and attention, Joan talks about time; and Faith describes DTJ as a “virus”.

Millicent:

In the early days of Destroy the Joint, it's possible I was checking Facebook for notifications possibly even 10 or 20 times a day, depending on what was going on at that time, but when there's not a big campaign on, and also when I'm distracted by other things, because I've become busier at work over the 4 years, it may only be just twice a day in terms of Facebook. I try and ensure that with Twitter I am at a minimum tweeting once a day, but then there may also be days where I tweet in a big campaign up to 50 times a day.

Joan:

I was having a look at a lot of, spending a lot of personal time, looking at various pages and spending a lot of time and energy on that, as well, and emotions.

Faith, who looked at the page “multiple” times a day, described the evolution of the page as like a “virus”.

Ultimately beneficial virus, but it certainly grew like a virus at the beginning it just went like, "Woah. What the fuck have we got here?" It was crazy. Viruses aren't all bad. There are good viruses. It went viral, I supposed. There was an awful lot to do to stay on top of it.

While this developed the activist habitus, it also had a strong emotional impact, which is discussed in the following chapter. These activists were shaped by the social and cultural capitals accumulated through activism past and present, and that capital is shaped by the

habitus, the embedded dispositions and traits of activists, which also changes as activists participate. While I might have thought about abortion law reform on a daily basis as a young woman during my involvement with that campaign, there was no immediate action to take from minute to minute. Social media notifications have changed that. There is always something to do, or to attend to. It is perpetual activism and, more than ever before, we must respond in-action (Schön, 1986).

### **Every day, a little bit more**

All this practice, formed by the significant intersection of the habitus and capital of these activists, is underpinned by what Misha Schubert (1996) in her work on young women and feminism, described as daily activism. This refers to the opportunity to “use every conversation, every social choice, every decision about how they interact with people and live their lives to make political statements” (Schubert, 1996, p. 59). It is, she writes, a conscious decision to “integrate activism into . . . daily lives” (Schubert, 1996, p. 59). A number of scholars discuss daily activism in passing, as a habit of political agency (Braidotti, 2010), and undertaken by a variety of different actors in civil society. Dixon (2001, p. 8), for example, describes it as a way to support social transformation and goes on to list those who undertake that form of activism: “mothers, farmers, people of color, youth, sex workers, immigrants, artists, queers, indigenous peoples, factory laborers, teachers, environmentalists, service employees, poor folks, and all of the other overlapping, diverse sectors of our society”. It was clear from interviews with the Destroy the Joint activists, how many of them considered they conducted activism every single day.

Over half of those interviewed specifically mentioned that they committed activists acts every single day, for a number of difference reasons, because they thought it was important or because it was a habit borne of years of being activists. Julia (in interview) said:

Character is formed by habits, [you] get into the rhythm of doing something, that's part of your life.

Bell (in interview) also said:

I don't know how to do it any differently. I'm a really strong believer in the personal being political. My whole life is activism. I am an activist. I am activism. I don't know if that's a word, but do you know what I mean?

For these two activists, their activism consists of “multiple micro-political practices of daily activism or interventions in and on the world we inhabit for ourselves and for future generations” (Braidotti 2010), of a continuous, unceasing application of activism to daily life. Some, such as Rosa and Constance, recognised the privilege of being able to be a daily activist as part of paid work, others became daily activists when life circumstance changed, such as Gunilla, who became retired during the course of this project, or when digital activism enabled daily practice, which would previously have taken more time or not been possible, as in the case of Elizabeth, for whom care of a child with a disability meant she had limited time at her disposal.

Finally, Bella, who has practised daily activism for over 40 years, said it was not possible to be an activist involved in the prevention of violence against women and confine it to one's job:

You can't work and survive in that area if you just view it as a job. It's not, it sometimes tragically consumes you but if you don't have that passion to bring it out systemic change for women then you've got to get out of it.

These women exemplify the work of Judith Boice (1992, p. 195) who argued: “The first lesson for the daily activist is to realize that any act is a political act.” While this could also be construed as part of prefigurative politics, Boice clearly links those ideals to daily practice, as a way of insistent deliberative politics. She goes on to write: “The great challenge is to make the small, the daily, and the mundane acts of life into a statement of how you want the world to be.” (Boice, 1992, p. 195).

This chapter explored the becoming of Australian digital feminist activists using the concept of prefiguration to survey what values, ideologies and beliefs were brought to DTJ. Using the lenses of habitus (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72) and capital (Bourdieu, 1986), this chapter analyses

the habitus and capitals which activists brought to DTJ and how that shaped the movement. These feminist activists were shaped by their previous experiences and activism which also developed their understanding of how organisations of any kind work. In the case of the feminist activists of DTJ, this accumulated understanding then formed new intentions, prefigurative ideals, towards any new activism. As key issues for the activists as individuals, they identified a range of issues, including violence against women and reproductive rights; and 90 per cent of the participants in the research identified the treatment of former prime minister Julia Gillard as a mobilising force. Crucially, the vast majority had prior activist experience, specifically in the union movement. The values, knowledge and understanding they brought with them to any new movement caused them to choose particular issues and campaigns but their previous experiences impacted on the way they interacted with DTJ and that previous activist engagement shaped their participation. In the case of DTJ, the desire to organise and act according to feminist principles shaped the way DTJ began. Features included no leaders, flatter organising structures and clear communication. Whatever impingement these features might have had on an idealised feminist model of organising, they also brought considerable advantages in terms of cultural and social capital. This chapter also surveyed the way in which these activists shared knowledge, accumulated through their cultural capital, supported by their social capital, to develop their core positions. In addition, these activists also identified daily activism as key to their activist practice. The following chapter surveys the way in which these activists utilised their social and cultural capitals in the service of activism.

## **Chapter Six: Information - why Feminism 101 matters, a heuristic for information activism**

Activists use their cultural and social capital for the purposes of supporting their activism, as discussed in the previous chapter. This chapter surveys the way in which these activists utilise their capitals, as outlined here, to form new internet publics, using the “communicative turn” (Scannell, 2009, p. 210). It explores the use of this communicative turn in a feminist setting which provides feminist networks with an opportunity to engage in low-stakes participation, such as sharing on social media (Knappe & Lang, 2014). This is undertaken with the intent to inform and to mobilise. This set of actions constitute information activism (Halupka, 2014). This chapter outlines the way in which DTJ puts information activism in a connective action setting into operation or use, and provides a detailed heuristic.

### **The communicative turn and twist as an expression of cultural capital**

The hashtag is low-stakes participation and it is also a clear example of the communicative turn of feminist activism, as a way of forming networks. Knappe and Lang (2014) identify that as a new part of the repertoire for movements, using that communicative turn, that hashtag, to recruit and to mobilise. Participants gather around a meme, a post, a hashtag. In the case of the #destroythejoint hashtag, it proved both a mobilising point and a recruiting tool for feminists which then developed into DTJ. As Knappe and Lang (2014) point out:

Generating internet-based issue publics can be relatively low cost and timely, yet can produce effects far beyond the web. This communicative turn suggests that more women’s organisations across Europe might be able to network and turn up the volume from whisper to voice.

But does the creation of an internet-based public have a lasting impact? It depends what you mean by lasting impact – but you would have to argue that shifts in public and political discourse are a lasting impact, particularly when the shifts come after a long period of stasis (Bennett 2012, Juris 2012). For example, Occupy Wall Street changed the way we discussed inequality and, as Smucker (2014, p.75) puts it:

Indeed OWS’s initial success in the realm of contesting popular meanings was remarkable. Practically overnight the nascent movement broke into the national news

cycle and articulated a popular, albeit ambiguous, critique of the economic inequality and a political system rigged to serve the ‘one per cent’.

The communicative turn builds internet publics, heterogeneous, episodic, occasional. Feminist internet publics, for example, range from the humorous, such as the memes created for Binders Full Of Women<sup>3</sup> to GamerGate,<sup>4</sup> which, as Renee Barnes explains (2018), functioned to bring attention to the broad issues gender-based harassment in gaming, DTJ is, at the time of writing, seven years old, with multiple political wins to its name, referenced in the mainstream and in academic journal articles (as discussed in chapter two) and is an example of a feminist internet public utilising the communicative turn. In addition, DTJ is an iteration of discursive activism (Shaw, 2012), a form of political discourse among feminist bloggers which builds investment in core values. In Frances Shaw’s newer work, she aligns some aspects of digital behaviours with what her research participants called microactivism (2013). Knappe and Lang (2014) and Shaw (2012; 2013), provide the direct link between feminist activism and connective action; and, as Kavada explains, this constructs the collective as “a process that is constituted in and through communication” (Kavada, 2016, p. 9). These formations are modulated by the communicative turn and provide feminist networks with an opportunity to engage in low-stakes participation, such as sharing on social media, with an “intent to inform, mobilise and activate their publics” (Knappe & Lang, 2014, p. 376). These actions in themselves are information activism (Halupka, 2014).

### **The expression of cultural capital through information activism**

While the sharing of information is often described as process work in activism, or as a byproduct of ‘real’ activism, those interviewed for this thesis spoke explicitly about the sharing of information as a political act.

Cultural capital is what we know and information activism is a function of activist cultural capital. Those who live the life of activists communicate their activism broadly in this way, with a purposeful dissemination of their key beliefs. Activists reveal their cultural capital in many ways (as discussed earlier) as a form of cultural capital and they also show their knowledge of the field (in this case feminism and feminist activism). I would also argue that cultural capital could include what might be described as the ‘length of service’ in the field of activism, meaning the length of time of their personal experience of activism.



For activists, social movements are about recruiting and engaging (McAlevey 2016) so they must share that cultural capital in order to recruit and engage. The knowledge, information, understanding of key feminist issues is constituted by the cultural capital of the feminist activists in DTJ. In the About section of the DTJ page, it explicitly states that the aims of the page are about “gender equality” and, as I have mentioned earlier, what constitutes the areas of gender equality are many and varied. But transferring that cultural capital and sharing that cultural capital through information activism is how to make change. In a prefigurative feminist group there is also the idea that actors need to share, to fully participate and to then achieve consensus; but there is a larger picture at work. As Brandwein (1987, p.117) argues, “The group is more than the additive ideas of each individual. Through the interactive process new ideas are created and a better product is achieved than could result from an individual effort.”

What DTJ and its major project Counting Dead Women both do is an example of information activism, leveraging the cultural capital of the DTJ activists. As Halupka (2015) argues, it is about the consumption, aggregation and distribution of information as a form of political participation and should be acknowledged as a new and valid form of participation because of the way it builds capacity around the feminist cause.

### **Sharing information/knowledge**

As Gerlach (2001, p. 298) points out, activists use a range of strategies and networks, including multimedia technologies, “to share the information that enables them to act in concert”. In other words, activists disseminate information for the purpose of education but also for the purpose of creating solidarity using the concepts in the information. For example, DTJ shares information about rates of family violence, and it shares information each week about feminist events. It is, in this iteration of information sharing, Feminism 101; and as Rosa argues later in this chapter, that information lays the groundwork for understanding.

The information activist’s capacity to stimulate commonality through decentralised and loose networks, while allowing for solidarity building, demonstrates an approach to participation which is at odds with the individualised perspective, pervasive in connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, 2013).

In this way, information activism at its most complex operates as curation across many levels. It operates as:

- a gatekeeping activity which also becomes a mechanism for sharing information/knowledge gleaned from gatekeeping.
- a gatewatching activity;
- a way to contribute to the development of the cultural capital of contemporary feminist activism;
- through sharing, a mechanism to transfer cultural capital, from one individual to another and therefore from one network to another.

What follows can be construed as a heuristic for information activism:

### **Gatekeeping**

Gatekeepers have control over a process, they gather, they filter, they link and they send to other people, as Lu (2007) explains. In the case of DTJ, gatekeeping happens through a number of interacting processes and filters, in some cases, through two private Facebook groups before it is posted to the public page; and through three private Facebook groups if it is about the Counting Dead Women project.

### **Gatewatching**

Gatewatching is a term devised by Bruns (2003, p.34) to describe the transformation of online news media from gatekeeping, where gatekeepers are no longer able to police the news, to a process where “gatewatchers keep a constant watch at the gates, and point out those gates to their readers that are most likely to open on to useful sources”. While Bruns’s work is around journalism, gatewatching is also an activity of the actions of activist social media platforms. DTJ’s gatewatching, for example, has included sources which debunk the communications of men’s rights activists groups. It points to news and events of the day through posts and comments. It ‘watches’ to see what is relevant and to alert those on the page to those ‘useful sources’.

### **Contribution to a shared cultural capital of contemporary feminist activism**

Shared cultural capital binds a group and also defines it. Currid-Halkett’s (2017, p.18) work on cultural elites could equally be applied to activists: “They speak the same language, they acquire similar bodies of knowledge, and share the same values, all of which embody their

collective consciousness”. This concept of shared cultural capital is underscored by the DTJ activists themselves, who talk about the importance of developing understanding of basic feminist concepts, which a number of DTJ activists described as Feminism 101.

### **Sharing or transferring cultural capital**

I argue that among the activists of DTJ there was both knowledge-production of feminism and knowledge-dissemination about feminism, both among the activists and then externally on the Facebook page. That production and dissemination in this context is a cultural capital of feminism, both as individual feminist activists and also as a group. Those who are liberating that knowledge through acquisition, production and dissemination are, in some ways, much like the “professionals of the work of explanation” as coined by Girling (2004, p. 44) - and their relationship with participants on the Facebook page is a mechanism for what Girling describes as a transfer of cultural capital, which then acts to mobilise. That process also underscores the argument that politics and power are now defined and owned by those who can shape information flows, enabling their own influence and disabling the power of others (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; 2013; Chadwick, 2007). The flow of information is always political; and can be deliberately activist. The term information activism was first theorised by Molaro (2009) and repositioned by Halupka (2015) to describe the use of information sharing as a form of political participation. Nowhere is it easier to share information than on social media, from one to many, from many to one, any or many networks; and in any or many directions, a simple copy, paste, click, share (Morozov, 2009; Gladwell, 2010). While some would see acts of sharing or liking political posts as clicktivism, purposeful posting and sharing constitutes information activism (Halupka, 2015). This follows on from the reframing of clicktivism as a negative to a positive (Evans, Halupka, & Stoker, 2014; Vromen, 2016; Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, 2013)

On DTJ, participants “Like” the page because of its explicitly-framed political content. One respondent to a short, anonymous survey about participation in DTJ said he participates on the page because of: “Anger, sadness, sense of injustice, desire to be a better man and better human being.” For him, as for others, participation is not a mechanical act, it is motivated, purposeful, with political intent, despite Stoker’s (2016) claim that such acts are politically themed but not politically engaged. Stoker describes that form of engagement as ‘thin’ and says that participants find it hard to remember (Stoker, 2016, p. 203) what and why they

shared material - however, DTJ operates as a portal for one cause which could be an argument which turns clicktivists into sustained activists, through their ongoing interaction with the page. This participant's response to the anonymous survey makes the case for sustained interaction on the social platform offered by DTJ:

Long been a believer in gender equality, hater of sexism and misogyny. Didn't like the way Julia Gillard was being treated. And DTJ is a great outlet for my left of centre political views, and way to share those views with like-minded people who care about making the world a better place. (survey response)

For this participant, DTJ is a place to share beliefs with others who hold the same or similar views (van Dijck, 2013), a place to identify with others, a place to click, share and like, a place to be shaped and to shape others, to share and share with those who are alike, a custom-built community.

Information activism is a further development and reframing of the concept of networked publics, "the imagined collective that emerges because of the intersection of people, technology and practice" (Boyd, 2010, p. 39) where practice is, or could be conceived of as, the acts of information activism. Information activism is also acknowledged as a "form of political participation that operates at the level of fluid and episodic associations of actors with political causes" (Lunenborg & Raetzsch, 2017, p. 18). While the concept of project-based activism is maligned in social movement theory (Coşar & Yeğenoğlu, 2011), in its favour, it may work to generate episodic solidarity, in a society which tolerates work intensification to its current levels (Potter, 2019; Paškvan & Kubicek, 2017) and where activists may have to take such an intensified approach in order to manage activism in a work context. In addition, in the context of DTJ, with the exception of Gunilla who had retired from full time work, every single moderator and administrator was in full-time work. Specific tasks catered to those for whom activism is not a full-time pursuit. Information sharing of political material is more than a reflex, more than a mechanical process. It is activism, information activism, the purposeful flow of information as a form of political participation whereby protesters use the internet "to be informed" as well as to spread information and provide solidarity (Halupka 2015, p. 1493). His protesters overwhelmingly favoured information-themed answers in their explanation of why they used the internet, which seems

both too general and rather obvious. But it's how they use it which matters: consumption (reading, watching, listening), aggregation (all the material which matters comes into their feed), and distribution. Halupka argues that "an individual drawing upon the consumption, aggregation and distribution of information to 'provide assistance to protestors' will also be looking to provide solidarity, to inform others and to be informed themselves". The next key factor in information activism is information production (Halupka, 2015, p. 1495).

I contend that situated somewhere between aggregation and distribution/re-distribution for the online feminist activism of DTJ is information production, the concept that aggregated information must be produced in a particular way in order to make that aggregated information more distributable, more shareable. For those who produce posts for DTJ, the concept of informing and educating is an integral part of what DTJ's activism is about. It promotes discussion and debate, and it builds solidarity by furthering understanding. It is digital solidarity framing and in this instance, despite its connective action origins, it is not personalised. As one short-term moderator, Patrick, who assisted during the intensity of the Alan Jones campaign put it, to contextualise the inherently political nature of such processes:

I think on some level there needs to be people out there who will hold people to account and will help shift the goalposts about what's acceptable and what's not acceptable. We need a group of dedicated activists to do that job. I don't know if calling people out necessarily will lead to structural change, because I think sometimes those campaigns take some extra fundamentals, but it could attract the type of people to start that change. It can inspire other people to join a group of Destroyers and say, 'All right, we want to tackle something like gender inequality', or whatever the issue is. You need ways in which to get people on what in campaigning would be a letter of engagement. Calling people out is a really good way of doing it. (Patrick, in interview)

As Patrick points out, small actions matter and are cumulative. Sharing and liking accumulates participation at any level. Certainly, for the admins and moderators, it operationalised the connection between their ideas of what feminist action should look like, their prefigurative ideals about what feminism is and how it should function, and how it

actually operates in the 21st century, where activists can mobilise and organise whether participants are known to each other or not.

These many interactions, big and small, provided an impetus to share information online about ending sexism and misogyny and a reason to adopt this as a part of a bigger purpose, to fulfil DTJ's overt feminist actions towards ending sexism and misogyny. It also illustrates the way in which knowledge gained through previous activism in other modes was able to be transformed from a smaller group to a much larger group. Previous experience in collectives was now able to be leveraged through connective action, and connective action provided its own structures of this group.

One participant in the page, Helen, became a moderator and is now an admin. For her the education of those who come to the page was central:

It's only by educating girls and women that you achieve good health outcomes for communities. For me, that's an absolute *sine qua non*. We cannot move forward without absolutely nailing our flag to the educational component. If by information activism we mean the sort of thing that us boring old second-wave people used to call consciousness raising, then yeah, I think we are. (Helen, in interview)

As explored in the introduction to this thesis, much of what DTJ has continued to do is to highlight those issues relevant to sexism and misogyny, as an act of consciousness-raising.

I am a believer in consciousness raising as a form of activism. I think feminist activism has really pioneered consciousness raising as a tool of recognizing that some of the greatest political changes we can make are changes that we make in our personal lives in terms of just how we think about the world, how we experience the world, how we feel about the world. I am absolutely a proponent of information activism. That doesn't mean that I think it ends at consciousness raising or that consciousness raising is a simple a task or a task that will then inevitably lead to results, but I do think that it is an important step and one that can help to facilitate social change more broadly and actually we've seen that in a number of other social movements over the last few decades. (Seb, in interview)

Feminist activism has always sought to raise consciousness by, as Carole Zufferey (2018, p. 67) puts it:

publicly sharing personal and private reflections that aim to unite women in shared recognition of their personal oppressions, to challenge self-blame, to work toward fighting local and global gendered injustices and to contribute to social change.

She also acknowledges consciousness-raising's early shortcomings because, as she argues, it is not enough to make oppression visible: "In the context of a patriarchal society, men are constructed as credible knowers, whilst women are frequently discredited". Since those early days of what was widely recognised as consciousness-raising, feminist activism has moved through various permutations: individual effort, conferences, private meeting, rallies, flash mobs, sit-ins, to, as in the case of DTJ, online feminist activism, which Carole Zufferey (2018, p. 73) specifically describes as "a form of contemporary consciousness-raising—it provides a collective feminist voice, social commentary on sexism and counts how many women have died from domestic violence. DTJ (2017) has counted 21 deaths so far in Australia this year in June 2017 and 73 deaths in 2016."

Helen again:

We're using our access to information, whether it's as researchers or as people like yourself and the others who have their fingers on the journalistic pulse that isn't available to all women. I think we take out into the world a level of information that isn't necessarily available to all women. We offer it to them, and we offer ways of dealing with that. I think that's very much what we do.

### **Information production**

Helen says DTJ takes into the world, or produces, a level of information that is not necessarily available or easily accessible to all women. An example of information production is the series of posts on Counting Dead Women. Counting Dead Women is the principle campaign of DTJ. It works to highlight fatal violence against women. The campaigning aspects of DTJ will be explored more fully in Chapter Seven. What follows is an exploration of Counting Dead Women as information activism.

Helen is the admin who leads the Counting Dead Women research and she is unambiguous about her role in the group as a consumer of information. She says she is not a confident writer but is very good at research, which she says is essential to CDW. Here she explains her daily research routine, which includes checking police reports:

Every day, I wake up in the morning. I go straight to ABC News and News.com Australia. I look and see if any woman has died that we know of, and then, if anyone has, I do everything I can to find out the circumstances and to put together the register notes and the update post for the page [...] then it's basically touch base every hour or so with the admin page and the moderator page to see what's going on. (Helen, in interview)

While that will be the focus of another chapter, I will here briefly explain the process for a Counting Dead Women post. The information within the organising groups of DTJ operates this way. There are four Facebook groups responsible for the information which leads to the posts shared on Destroy The Joint: admins, mods, renos and CDW. Admins consists of administrators of the page; mods is moderators; renos is where individuals can put relevant and useful links or content; CDW (Counting Dead Women) consists of news of deaths and police reports. There are a number of ways for a post to be constructed and they include the clear identification of the death of a woman through violence; a news topic identified by one or more of those involved; a link to a resource which is interesting but not necessarily newswy (most commonly comes through the Renos page); and a request from another group to share their campaign.

There is no set method in how a post evolves unless that post is for CDW when Helen signs off that the death fits the many specific criteria for Counting Dead Women. She may not have seen the initial media report or police report but is notified because she sees a post in the private Counting Dead Women Facebook group. It is also usual for others to post on the deaths in Mods or in Admins. This process may or may not be straightforward depending on whether the death meets the criteria: the dead woman must be over 18 (unless identified as living independently) and, in most cases, there is some wait while police confirm that the death is as a result of violence.



The following Counting Dead Women post from a murder in NSW in August 2018 followed an initial notification from one of the moderators that a woman had been killed in the suburb of Penshurst, in Sydney, Australia. The moderator had seen a report from news.com.au on the death on the morning of August 13. In that CDW private Facebook group, a number of people updated information during the day. A decision was made to wait until a charge was laid. The police reported that a charge had been laid through its email service just before 10pm that night. At least two of the moderators subscribe to that email service.

As web traffic drops off at that time of the evening on the DTJ Facebook page, a decision was made to wait until the following morning to post to the page. It was posted at 8.04am on Monday August 14 (see below). This particular production of a Counting Dead Women post, the one posted on August 14, was not difficult. The information came through quite quickly. The decision to wait for a charge came about because Helen believed this case followed the pattern of cases where a charge would be laid early, thereby allowing the post to provide more complete information which would circumvent speculation. However, in this instance, there were instantly suggestions that this was a 'mercy killing'. Helen deletes this kind of speculation where it is possible to do so, quickly.

While the majority of these posts use similar wording, there are instances where this is changed to suit the particular case. The news story which is linked is always one the considered to have the most information. The news source varies. The image is new for each death as the toll increases. There are instances where we post what is called an In Memoriam post. For example, on August 18, 2018, a news story revealed that in the case of a death in 2017, there had been a conviction. This confirmed for the first time that the death of a woman had been an act of violence and her partner was convicted. This then required a change to the total toll for 2017. The Counting Dead Women team updates the tolls and only once has had to revise a toll downwards.

One Counting Dead Women post can have six or seven admins and moderators researching and reading and writing, in order to give the clearest and latest information about the post. The production of posts is usually workshopped in the private group admin group where discussion is free-flowing and critical. A proposed post goes into the moderators group for feedback. Within the admin and moderator groups, participants acknowledge the expertise brought to the groups by particular individuals: health workers, social workers, those with

expertise in mental health, those working in domestic violence fields, union delegates and organisers, and teachers. All contribute to the collection and production of material. The information is then produced in a way in which the participants on the page recognise as a Counting Dead Women post. Those who participate on the page recognise the symbols of a CDW post. In the case posted on August 14, one of the responses was this:

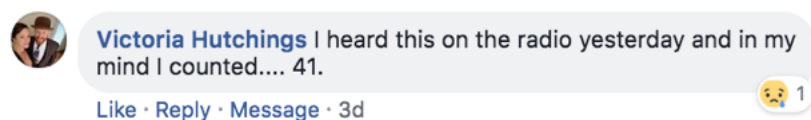


Figure 6: Counting Dead Women tweet

This demonstrates the production of information as a crucial part of the chain of information activism. All of the information producers bring their own skills and knowledge, their own cultural capital, together to this process, to produce an artefact to be used for activism: in this instance, the particular iteration of activism which is information activism and which then must be distributed in order to be used for mobilisation.

### **Information distribution**

In the case of Counting Dead Women, it is the impact of the production that expands information activism. It is more than discussion and debate and therefore it is useful to ask what the chain of distribution is. Halupka (2015) argues that distribution among activists is the end point of this activism, a way of sharing information useful to the cause. Every time Counting Dead Women is acknowledged in mainstream media or elsewhere, it broadens the scope of, and investment in, this toll of dead women. Since its Australian inception, CDW has made regular appearances on all mainstream news platforms, including News, Fairfax, the Guardian, the ABC, SBS etc. It has been acknowledged in both the House of Representatives and in the Senate and also in the NSW Legislative Assembly. The reach of this kind of information activism moves beyond the sphere of activists themselves. This level of activism could not occur without the cultural capital of the admins and moderators because it requires detailed research, clear writing, shareable images and strong social networks. Louisa, who works in the communication industry, identified what she believed was crucial information distributed through the Counting Dead Women campaign.

I know anecdotally, people who knew that there was a domestic violence issue in Australia but didn't know how to counter the claims of certain people, that like, men are victims just as much as women and all sorts of horrible claims about women psychological abusers. I think that Counting Dead Women provided that [accurate] information, which is power, other people could then dispel some of those myths. I would say yeah, I think it's really powerful form of communication. Information and knowledge is power. What I think has been really interesting in Counting Dead Women is getting people who knew that there was an issue the information that they need, to then take that out into their networks as well. (Louisa, in interview)

Rosa explains:

I mean, if you're adding to people's knowledge or understanding or their education, of course you're laying the groundwork for people to make decisions later on. They are then better informed. There'd be a normal framework that we would see things in. (Rosa, in interview)

She recalls thinking that DTJ would be a place where she could post articles, “post bits of rants and things like that, but basically more of a sort of voice to keep on top of this and to fight back” so in her view, having the voice was a way of fighting back. Rosa's theory of change (Weiss, 1998) was that relevant information activated political participation:

I think that social media means that we have more input, more thoughtful input. You've got a whole lot of different ways to think about things, you are sort of forced to unconsciously or by choosing to and it just means that better decisions I think, are made actually . . . you've got to educate and then activate people. I would just see, sharing of articles and that as part of that collective education . . . if it's changing people's views or if you think that education is liberating, how can you say it's not a form of activism. (Rosa, in interview)

A number of the administrators and moderators had strong views about the role of information distribution as part of activism. Alice, in interview, argued that “sharing information is an important part of activism”. Jocelyne, in interview, said it was

“absolutely critical” although she acknowledged that not everyone would use the information to take action.

Getting information out there and getting people to take action on it, that's, I mean you can leave it, some people will take action, no question. Some people will think about it and not do it. Some people will just [be] alone with their outrage that they wouldn't even know where to begin. I think having a page that calls attention to something and gives alternatives if there are alternatives but gives options, I reckon that's fantastic. (Jocelynnne, in interview)

Alice too argued for the relevance of information distribution in activism: “I think keeping people ignorant stops people from doing anything about it.”

However, one risk among a group of feminists, was ensuring that the message was understandable on social media, where concentration is both limited and declining (Carr, 2011, 2017). Within the administrators and moderators, there has been at times heated discussion about whether the level of posts about feminism have been too basic or what might be described as too undergraduate. However, the prevailing view has been that those who come to DTJ's Facebook page arrive with different levels of knowledge and there must be some attempt to engage that spectrum - that it isn't dumbing-down feminism to explain reproductive rights at their most basic.

As one of the first moderators, Jocelynnne, said in her interview:

I think there are times when Destroy The Joint is feminism 101, there's no question about that. There are times when it steps up [so] I'm not sure that that's a reasonable criticism. I think many, many people have come on board with Destroy the Joint and have embraced feminism because they were pursuing campaigns they believed in and the subsequent content has kind of, I think, enlarged people's understandings. (Jocelynnne, in interview)

Or as Helen (in interview) said: “If you don't do feminism 101 every new day, then you don't get to [do] feminism 102 or 201.”

The decision to keep it simple ended up being the consensus position because admins and moderators saw that Feminism 101 could be used as a useful tool to explain key concepts. The more people could use those key concepts to challenge patriarchal views, the more likely it could be for anyone participating on the page to challenge the orthodoxy of the patriarchy. The activists themselves see the relationship between online discussions and actions, where doxa (Bourdieu, 1977), the held views, can be contested in the public space of the DTJ page, among the posts on the page, the comments by participants who share DTJ values and the challengers to those views (in particular, men who post on the page) particularly when they come with different kinds of capital from outside the field (Swartz, 2013).

One of the more experienced activists, Rosa, said she felt strongly that education needed to be a big part of DTJ:

If you're adding to people's knowledge or understanding or their education, of course you're laying the groundwork for people to make decisions later on. (Rosa, in interview)

And another, Faith, said she witnessed posts where people would change their minds about an issue: "I mean, the number of times it would be a comment [like], they are saying, 'Yeah, I didn't get this, but now I do'" (Faith, in interview).

In addition, Bella, whose long-time work in domestic violence services helped shape Counting Dead Women, said: "I think you can't lobby until there's an awareness and education of what you're lobbying for. People won't embrace change or campaign for change until it's galvanized into action."

There are two forms of information activism at play here: the process of information production, and the connective action of those who follow, comment, like, and share. This is far more than clicktivism - they consciously follow a page where they will see information that may extend, align and/or reinforce those beliefs. They are more than audience because they are on the page in the first place because they believe in the cause but they hold their actions to digital following. They can be the end point, the recipients, of information

activism; or they can extend their views and the reach of information activism by interacting with the page, by liking, reacting, sharing and commenting.

Another admin, Millicent, who also operates the @JointDestroyer Twitter account, researches other areas of interest for production on the Facebook page, and shares that information in the private Facebook groups. She consumes information to bring back to the organising groups:

On Twitter, I will search for certain words or hashtags. I might search for feminism, feminist, sexist, sexism. I might search for women and the hashtag #auspol, which will tend to bring up most things that people are tweeting politically about. (Millicent, in interview)

One moderator, Anita, whose job is in non-university social science research, says she follows Facebook pages which intersect with her interests.

I contribute fairly regularly to the Reno Clouds which is where we post ideas, so whenever I'm going through my newsfeed and I find something that might make a good post, I'll put that into that separate group so that people who are the admins who write the posts can decide whether or not that's a good thing to post on. I'll often write a little bit of a draft post for it, if I think it's particularly timely or a really good thing to post on, because if there's a little bit of material already there, it makes it easier for the admins to pick up and they already have something to work with. (Anita, in interview)

In addition - but briefly - the initial campaign to remove advertising from the Alan Jones program on Macquarie Radio Network's 2GB required an enormous amount of research and dissemination. Boycotts have always operated using the tool of information activism but digital platforms increase exponentially the power of information activism.

What activists bring to their activism matters: their habitus, their cultural capital, their social capital. Most importantly, it is how they employ and leverage their habitus and capitals. These activists identified what was to them the central concerns of feminism and were thus able to use their social and cultural capital to activate, educate and organise, particularly

through the use of information activism enacted to build common ground and therefore solidarity. This chapter also provided a heuristic - a method and process for information activism which begins through its sifting or gatekeeping of information, processes that information into a product, then distributes that information as an activist act. That distribution is key as a mechanism to transfer cultural capital, from one individual to another and therefore from one network to another. The next chapter interrogates three examples of information activism.

## Chapter Seven: On campaigning and Counting Dead Women

This chapter examines both the campaigns within Destroy the Joint (DTJ) and the multiplicity of strategic repertoires used by the DTJ organisers in their hybrid campaigning. It will explore how the admins and moderators of DTJ each personally felt about the campaigns of the page and what the admins and moderators considered to be effective and ineffective. In particular, it will investigate the Counting Dead Women campaign, which keeps track of - and disseminates - a toll of fatal violence against women in Australia. It will document how it was devised and then implemented. It will also examine what, if any, impact that campaign has had on the mainstream media coverage of fatal violence against women. It will also look at the artefacts of the Counting Dead Women campaign including the imagery of the campaign, how those artefacts were shared, and the way this campaign performed on Facebook. This analysis underscores the concept of a frame, which, as Charlotte Ryan and William Gamson say (2006, p. 13), organises thoughts, highlights “certain events and facts as important” and renders others as invisible but must also involve “a strategic dialogue intended to shape a particular group into a coherent movement”. Using that imagery and the way it is shared, I will illustrate the shift from the concept of the personal action frame (Bennett & Segerberg 2012; 2013) as a form of political participation to a transnational digital solidarity frame, where those who participate online through the sharing of images do so to state their position in solidarity with others. I argue that this too is a form of connective action, enabled by the internet, which, unlike the personal action frame, emphasises shared values rather than individual interpretation and adaptation. I will also examine, briefly, my own journalistic practice as it relates to these campaigns.

DTJ, as has been mentioned earlier in this thesis, began without much consideration of any long-term campaigns, a Facebook page created without a clear purpose except to share outrage or, as Castells (2012, p. 7) puts it:

Individuals formed networks, regardless of their personal views or organizational attachments. They came together. And their togetherness helped them to overcome fear, this paralysing emotion on which the powers that be rely in order to prosper and reproduce, by intimidation or discouragement, and when necessary by sheer violence, be it naked or institutionally enforced.



Castells was not using those words to describe how women felt in Australia in 2012 but they could be applied to the experience of women in Australia at that time. The gender pay gap was not shrinking. As the report from the Australian Senate's Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Legislation Committee into the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Amendment Bill 2012 put it, inequality continued to be a feature of Australian workplaces: "In 2011 it was estimated that women in full-time paid employment earn 17.8 per cent less than men in similar conditions" (Parliament of Australia, 2012). In addition, crime victimisation data reveals a dramatic increase in the rate of non-face-to-face threats of violence against women, perhaps a precursor of what women experience online today (ABS, 2014).

DTJ's formation was a response to an extrinsic motivation, using a platform which, prior to this episode, was only in limited use in political campaigning in Australia (Burgess & Bruns, 2012; Chen & Gorski, 2010). Castells (2012, p. 233) describes the impact of Internet use as one of empowerment, especially for women, in an age of networked social movements. What women felt they could not do alone, or in small feminist collectives, they could do together when they found others with similar values, particularly in the "hybrid world of real virtuality" (Castells, 2012, p. 233). Yet these women were soon able to articulate their common purpose and their common values, moving from one platform to another, converging the distinct organisational repertoires (Chadwick, 2007) they had acquired in their previous activism and using mobilising techniques from those organisational repertoires, from emails to the sharing of images (Vromen, 2016). As outlined in chapter three, these activists first congregated around the #destroythejoint hashtag on Twitter. That convergence of people and values then provided the impetus for a Facebook page. The initial posts on the page, as outlined below, tried to explain the purpose of the page in the simplest way possible while also providing a muted call to action.

The purpose of DTJ was and is to signal that achieving gender equality was and is important to society and that governments should take approaches to achieve gender equality; and to undertake what Ken Kollman (1998) describes as conflict expansion - an attempt to both broaden public support for a key issue and to mobilise those who might otherwise not have been mobilised. As an advocacy group, DTJ focusses on outside lobbying and mainly uses

public appeal, although one of the campaigns explored later in this chapter used direct lobbying (without face-to-face contact as explored by Dexter in 1969) and then a combination of indirect lobbying and public opinion appeal (Nonon & Clamen, 1991).

It took four more weeks for the admins of the page to develop a more coherent strategy - and when it did, it was specific and targeted - although it did not address the entirety of sexism let alone of misogyny. The campaign to ask advertisers to remove advertising from Alan Jones's program, as described in the history chapter, was really a series of small, symbolic actions without an organised attempt to address the structural underpinnings of inequality.

But as Rosa, one of the admins, said:

I remember back then, even in the beginning, the thing about Facebook is that it did provide safety in that you were anonymous and that no one knew who you were behind it and everyone was scared of Alan Jones, even more than they are now. He seemed to be all powerful. The fact that a whole lot of people could gather and organize without necessarily ... If they could fight back without being subjected to bullying, so we thought, was a new thing.

An early analysis of DTJ's campaigns and outcomes (McLean & Maalsen, 2015) examines small targets and big, from events which promote sexism (easily cancelled) to rape culture, much more intransigent. Where there was an identifiable target, for example, David Koch or John Laws, these involved calls to action.

From 2012 to 2018, DTJ has posted 98 separate posts with the phrase "call to action". They range from Counting Dead Women campaigning to asking distributors and business owners to change particular practices or social media posts. They range from the small and targeted, such as the removal of the word slut from baby jumpsuits, to those which target violence against women. Each of these campaigns resonated to a greater or lesser extent with those who were involved at an organisational level. In the interviews I conducted with administrators and moderators, three of those campaigns were mentioned most frequently during those interviews and I will now describe those campaigns in full: Telstra silent numbers; Indigenous women and their treatment by police in NSW regarding withdrawal of charges of family violence; and Counting Dead Women.

During the life of DTJ, there have been 12 administrators and two of those are also the designated administrators who are responsible for the Counting Dead Women research and the posts for each of the Counting Dead Women posts. I interviewed nine of those administrators and I am one myself. Each of those admins, who are responsible for the campaigns and direction of those campaigns, talked about the impact of CDW, even those who had left before this campaign began. Of all the campaigns, only CDW was mentioned by each and every single admin and, indeed moderator, I interviewed. Even the Alan Jones campaign which was foundational to DTJ (and which gave the group its name) was not mentioned by all the interview subjects, except in passing to acknowledge the way in which this movement began. The first Counting Dead Women campaign post, on May 20, 2014, explored the link between the federal government's decision to slash funding to community legal centres and violence against women.

There were two other campaigns which appeared most frequently in the interviews - the 'silent' campaign to provide free access to private numbers, which first appeared on Feb 23, 2013, and the campaign to change the way in which Indigenous women who withdrew accusations of violence were treated, which first appeared on May 11, 2013. I will first compare the sentiment of these campaigns based on a social media analysis tool and my own comment analysis and then describe the operation and impact of both of those campaigns briefly here and then summarise their impact, if any, on the targets of the campaign.

### **A comparison of three campaign win posts**

According to Cassandra Star and Paige Fletcher (2018) in their review of available academic literature on the influence of feminist organisations on public policy responses to domestic violence and violence against women, feminist activism is "overwhelmingly" (p. 59) successful in influencing policy. The three campaigns outlined in this chapter, albeit limited in either size or scope, were successful. This section addresses, in a limited way, Star and Fletcher's identified gaps in knowledge (2018) about effective types of activism and provides an exploration of three campaigns which were identified as wins, even if only for limited numbers of women. One of these campaigns impacted corporate policy on domestic violence survivors (Telstra); both 'public mischief' and community legal centres changed government policy and practice.

	Telstra	Public mischief	Community Legal Centres
Style	Link, no image	Post only, no image	Link, image
Engagement	436, 29, 45	640, 91, 48	491, 37, 25
Mainstream media	Yes	Yes	No
CrowdTangle score	- small 1.58	+ small 2.7	+small 1.7
Comment sentiment	37+/45	28/48	6+/25
Size of win	10,000 women	120 women	\$30 million

Figure 7: Sentiment score on campaign posts (CrowdTangle)

This comparison table uses CrowdTangle to look at sentiment on these campaign posts. Earlier in this thesis (p.31) I described CrowdTangle. To recap, CrowdTangle:

- Obtains, at a server, a post from a source on a social networking platform, the post comprising content, a content type, and a time stamp;
- Determines, for the post, an engagement metric during each of a predetermined set of time periods;
- Generates, at the server, a representative engagement metric for a particular time period selected from the predetermined set of time periods, the representative engagement metric being based on the engagement metric of the post during the particular time period;
- Obtains, at the server, a selected post from the source on the social networking platform;
- Transmits, from the server, a score corresponding to a relative performance of the selected post compared to the representative engagement metric (Google Patents, 2019)

CrowdTangle is used by publishers to measure how a post is travelling and this tool is used as a way to discuss the comparison table above. The interactions on the Facebook page inform the CrowdTangle score. For example, CrowdTangle uses the total number of interactions, including reactions, shares, likes and comments, on each post to give each post a score. That score is devised by calculating averages for the previous 100 posts on the page which then provides a benchmark against which later posts are measured (Silverman, 2019).

1. This campaign targeted Telstra which imposed charges for private or silent numbers. DTJ's campaign is described in more detail below. The post on Telstra's decision not to apply private number charges to 'Rebecca' appeared on Feb 26, 2013. It had a link but no image. It attracted 436 likes, 29 shares and 45 comments. This win was also well-publicised on mainstream media.  
It had a negative CT (CrowdTangle) score. -1.575757576 because it met benchmark likes (349 at the time) but fell well short with the number of comments (52 was the benchmark at the time) or shares (52, the benchmark at the time). I analysed the sentiment of the comments myself and found that 37/45 comments were positive, and eight critical of Telstra for charging for this service at all.
2. This campaign targeted the NSW government because of the way Indigenous women were treated when withdrawing charges of family violence. The post about public mischief published on May 11, 2013, contained no links or images. It had 640 likes, 91 shares and 48 comments; and on the following days, the win was well publicised on mainstream media. It had a positive CrowdTangle score 2.272727273 because it met benchmark likes (130 at the time) even though it did not meet benchmark comments (47) or shares (32). I analysed the sentiment of the comments myself and found that of the 48 comments, 28 were positive. The others were neutral with some discussing the issue of domestic violence in general.
3. This campaign targeted the Federal government's reduction in funding to community legal centres. This post celebrated the decision by the federal government to restore funding to community legal centres and was set in the context of Counting Dead Women was posted on April 24, 2017. It had both a link and an image, 491 likes, 37 shares, 25 comments. The backflip was well publicised on mainstream media but not attributed to DTJ campaigning. It had a small positive CrowdTangle score of 1.74269005847953 and the sentiment of comments was 6/25 comments positive and the remainder critical of government.

### **Telstra campaign**

In early 2013, in the DtJ Facebook private messages, a woman wrote to DtJ seeking help. She had escaped from years of domestic violence and now had an apprehended violence order

against her former partner. She was in financial difficulty after the separation because of the costs of relocation. She had asked Telstra for a silent number (neither listed in the White Pages nor available on caller identification) but a call centre operator for Telstra had told her that there would be a charge. The amount of \$36 (the cost of that service in 2013) for that correspondent of DTJ, seemed like an insurmountable sum of money. One of the long-time admins describes the impact of this cost as a financial hardship for the person seeking this service - a struggle between needing the safety mechanism and not being able to afford the payment.

As Millicent, the long-time admin, puts it:

The purpose of that campaign was to have the fee that was being charged women to have a silent number waived, because the fee that was being charged was a financial hardship on women who were leaving their partners. It was also necessary for those women to have a silent number in order to protect themselves against further harassment from the usual male partner that they were leaving.

Millicent recalled this campaign as being quite different to other campaigns. This was not outside lobbying and nor was it the kind of campaign which relied in any way on garnering supportive public opinion:

There was quite a bit more behind the scenes liaising with the organisations than had happened with some other campaigns, because I thought it was somewhat different in that we were trying to get somebody onboard with something rather than somebody to detach from something. I am pretty sure that [you were] the one who was liaising with people at Telstra. . . I think there was quite a bit more behind the scenes negotiation happening.

There was quite a bit of discussion among the members of admins as to how the campaign would work. The “behind the scenes negotiation” as Millicent described it was a different strategy to any employed by DTJ until that time. As Griffin and Thurber describe it, “direct lobbying potentially touches or at least contemplates each of the players . . . whose specific behaviour could have an immediate impact on the outcome of the Campaign” (2015, p. 8).

The strategy of direct lobbying was selected partly because the prospect of success in a campaign to encourage people to boycott Telstra in order to pressure the telecommunications giant while exhilarating, was unlikely to work because of a near-universal dependence on phones (Winnick, 2016) and Telstra, in 2013, had over 40 per cent of the mobile market (Marketing Mag, 2014). It was also hard to imagine how such a boycott could operate and DTJ needed another strategy to try to cut through as companies always think activists will criticise them. Saul Alinsky (1971) provided three rules which were useful: power is not only what you have but what the enemy thinks you have; whenever possible go outside the expertise of the enemy; and the price of a successful attack is a constructive alternative. DTJ activists believed they had each of these rules covered, although there was not universal agreement on the use of direct lobbying. No-one ever mentioned Saul Alinsky's name but the rules were discussed.

This campaign was devised by the admins alone and in heated correspondence with one another via Facebook messages and telephone calls. DTJ's mode of operation until that time had to make public demands of the target of the campaign and to put pressure on the target of the campaign. However we agreed that this process would not work, as described above. There was conflict about this approach. Should the approach be to target Telstra in the way DTJ had approached Alan Jones and other smaller campaigns? Or should another approach be undertaken? The success of the Jones campaign was emboldening but at least one other admin felt it would not be possible to ask people to boycott Telstra because of the necessity of communicating with family and friends. That admin dug her heels in. Rosa and Jocelyne acted as mediators and negotiators within the group to develop a strategy but managing the diversity of approaches, strategy and experience was difficult:

[She was] also a particular personality to ... I don't mean it this way, but I'm going to just say it bluntly, a lot to manage. I hadn't really dealt with someone like [her] before either in my day-to-day work and as you know there were those early divisions in the group and people feeling as though ... 'Oh, were people pulling their weight?' or 'were people's skills and experience valued in different ways?'. There was also a lot of super behind-the-scenes work, basically keeping [it] together. I think I had a bit of capital with people so I could use that, which I did. (Rosa, in interview)

Finally, direct lobbying was selected as the best initial approach. The text of the following email was agreed, sent on Thursday January 17, 2013 at 9.00am, to the then managing director of Telstra, David Thodey:

Dear Mr Thodey,

I am a member of the administrative team of DTJ on Facebook - a women's advocacy group which has 23000 members. We campaign against sexism and misogyny and we also highlight issues that are particularly relevant to women. I write today on behalf of the admin group in response to an email from one of our members.

This email was sent to us in confidence. Our member has experienced domestic violence and has an apprehended violence order against her former partner. She rang Telstra seeking a silent/private number but was told it would cost her \$36 a year. She was told that the charge would not be waived "under any circumstance".

That is when she wrote to us, explaining that leaving domestic violence had left her in a very difficult financial situation. Being told that this charge would not be waived was very upsetting. As you can imagine keeping in touch with friends, family and support is vitally important. She feels like she is being charged for being safe and connected.

She said: "It was a humiliating experience to need to spell out the justification for why domestic violence requires a silent number... and then to have it rejected."

Telstra is a leading sponsor of White Ribbon so we are sure you understand what the effects are on women who have suffered domestic violence - and a private or silent number would help many of those women feel safe.

Members of DTJ did some further research about these charges which confirmed the experience of the woman who wrote to us.



Our member was told that waiving such a charge would create an "unwanted precedent".

We are writing to you to make a commitment to women escaping violence. Please set the precedent - to waive fees for silent and private numbers for women escaping violence.

Please let us know your response as soon as possible - we hope to hear from you by the end of the week. We imagine our members would be keen to begin a public campaign about this but, in the first instance, we seek your early cooperation on this matter.

Kind regards,

To summarise, DTJ wrote to Telstra's CEO David Thodey to explain and support Rebecca's case. This was direct insider lobbying, as posited by Thurber and Griffin (2015). We were lobbying for an outcome for one person but we also made the point that we wanted those rules to change for all victims of domestic violence with apprehended violence orders. It took six weeks of regular polite phone calls to the CEO and those to whom he had delegated authority - but on Valentine's Day 2013, Telstra agreed it would fix the issue for "Rebecca", the woman who had come to the page.

The initial posts about "Rebecca" did not seek a boycott, nor did those posts ask people who participated on the page to take action, other than a positive action. However, a threat may have been perceived by Telstra executives based on DTJ's prior actions, which had previously consisted of outside lobbying, in particular to contact or pressure decision makers (Kollman, 1998, p. 3) and to develop a public view of this case. In addition, this campaign built upon an existing campaign by ACCAN which had used outsider lobbying but had not been successful, except to provide what Vromen describes as "diffusion . . . an active process of sharing repertoires and framing among trusted allies, within a formal or informal network of actors" (Vromen, 2016, p. 192). ACCAN's then CEO Teresa Corbin publicly acknowledged DTJ's reframing of the issue after the announcement of Telstra's new policy.

She said: "Suddenly the issue became very public ... The fact that you had a real case, a person explaining exactly how it had affected them" (Swan, 2013).



### Destroy the Joint

February 14, 2013 · 🌐



When a Destroyer wrote to Destroy the Joint, saying she was terrified for her life, we wanted to help.

Rebecca (she does not want to share her real name yet) was the victim of domestic violence and had finally broken free. She moved away from her abuser and set up a new life and new home. But when she sought a silent and unlisted home phone number from telecommunication provider, Telstra, the call centre operator with whom she dealt wanted to charge her around \$36 a year despite the fact that she had an apprehended violence order against her former partner and she was in financial difficulties due because of her situation. That call centre operator told Rebecca that under no circumstances would the fee be waived. Rebecca insisted on speaking to the supervisor who asked for further and private details and then went on to say silent numbers are a privilege and not a right.

Rebecca turned to DtJ for help.

We wanted to see if Telstra would listen to 24 700 Destroyers and fix the situation for not just Rebecca, but for all people who have escaped domestic violence. A DtJ representative contacted Telstra senior management and they agreed to waive her fees and is now set to revise its policy on victims of domestic violence who are in financial difficulties. Before management completes the change in policy, it is consulting with consumer groups such as Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN). The good news is that, at this stage, Telstra will waive fees on a case-by-case basis. Great for all Australians who need this support - and although Telstra is still some way from having one rule for everyone, this is some progress from having a call centre operator tell you that there is just "no way" the fees will be waived.

This is a great testament to our strength that a company like Telstra will listen without this page needing to issue a "call to action" to all of you.

We'd like to thank Telstra for helping Rebecca - but further progress must be made for this to be equitable.

Protecting women from domestic violence should be a key corporate responsibility for all Australian companies, big and small. We will keep talking to Telstra, which supports the White Ribbon campaign to stop violence against women, until they have developed their permanent policy to help and protect victims of domestic violence who have financial difficulties. We think Telstra's response was appropriate and timely. We now look forward to their changed policy.

We will continue to pursue this until the rules are changed for all victims of domestic violence - and we will keep our DtJ community informed.

We would also like to thank Rebecca for letting us share her story so all people in her situation can benefit.

Let's thank Telstra on their page and ask them to keep Destroyers ([facebook.com/destroythejoint](https://www.facebook.com/destroythejoint)) informed about changes to their policies.

<http://www.facebook.com/Telstra>

Figure 8: Destroy the Joint post after Telstra campaign

A couple of weeks later, Telstra issued a statement confirming that it would take a new approach to those seeking silent numbers:

We understand that some Australians require a silent line because their personal safety is at risk so we will be waiving the silent line fee for customers in these circumstances [and for] anyone who has a valid protection order recognising a security threat or is a client of a community organisation providing services to people who are facing a security threat. (Motherpedia, 2013)

Both the Sydney Morning Herald (Swan, 2013) and the Daily Telegraph (Dudley-Nicholson, 2013a; 2013b) credited DTJ for the success of the campaign.

For Helen (in interview), now an admin, it is one of the campaigns which had long term impact: "It's kept going, and has I think possibly ramifications for other service providers in the way they deal." Telstra provides over 10,000 silent numbers to those with AVOs against their partners (phone conversation with Telstra spokesperson).



Figure 9: Destroy the Joint post after Telstra campaign

This campaign was successful. It used direct lobbying at first over a six-week period. It then praised Telstra on the DTJ Facebook page and used positive reinforcement for the telecommunication giant's response to "Rebecca" in its outside lobbying to provide affirmation to the company.

### **Aboriginal women jailed for “public mischief”**

The second campaign to be explored here was more complex. A report in *The Weekend Australian* (Robinson, 2013) had revealed Aboriginal women were being jailed for “public mischief” where they had withdrawn complaints of domestic violence. There were more than 20 cases where these women had been charged by local police prosecutors for criminal offences of “false testimony” as well as “public mischief”, with no police investigation, but instead using the women’s own testimony to convict them. The report in the Weekend Australian provided DTJ with the ‘makings’ of a call to action and some sources who could provide guidance on what was needed for such a call to action.

For five weeks, DTJ campaigned publicly to stop these survivors of domestic violence being jailed and charged for withdrawing their statements. The May 11, 2013, call to action asked Destroyers to email the office of the then NSW Attorney-General Greg Smith demanding a policy change to ensure that such cases were referred upwards to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for consideration of prosecution. Three of the minister’s email addresses were provided: ministerial, office and electorate office.

The post itself was not highly shared or commented upon, compared to other calls to actions: 33 shares, 146 likes and 46 comments (see table). There was no direct correspondence from DTJ as an entity to the minister. The post on the page served only as a call to action.



## Destroy the Joint

May 11, 2013 · 🌐



Destroyers – we need to act to stop the jailing and charging of domestic violence survivors here in Australia!

NSW Attorney General Greg Smith needs to hear us loud and clear to stop the persecution of domestic violence victims who withdraw their statements. Aboriginal women have been jailed and there are 20 cases where they have been charged by local police prosecutors for criminal offences of “false testimony” or “public mischief”, with no police investigation, but instead using their own testimony to convict them!

This week Destroyers were asked to email Greg Smith – but he isn’t listening. Yesterday he said he has “no plans” to act. We need to lend our voices to this campaign to bring about the change Greg Smith has the power to make. He can direct that all such cases be dealt with by the office of the DPP and not local prosecutors. This change happened in the UK after public outcry over the jailing of a woman who retracted rape allegation. The Australian Law Reform Commission president Rosalind Croucher said the current practices represented a “blame the victim” mentality that must be changed.

We can bring this change!

Email the NSW Attorney-General and ask him to issue the direction to the NSW DPP to ensure no-one will ever be charged for simply retracting an allegation of domestic violence. Cut and paste:

greg.smith@minister.nsw.gov.au; office@smith.minister.nsw.gov.au;  
epping@parliament.nsw.gov.au

Figure 10: Destroy the Joint campaign post

In June, five weeks later, journalist Natasha Robinson in *The Australian* (Robinson, 2013) reported that the NSW Attorney General had moved from his original position of “no plans to act” to the Police Minister now issuing this edict:

The NSW Police Force has advised that it will only prosecute someone for making false representations where it can be established that the original allegation was untrue. We are advised that the NSW Police Force provides guidance to its officers to not solely rely on admissions made by a victim when deciding to proceed with such charges.

She acknowledged the work of the DTJ activists:


Feminist lobby group DTJ campaigned on the issue, decrying the prosecutions as ‘a reminder of the harsh way our criminal justice can treat the state's most defenceless citizens, particularly in remote areas.

It urged its supporters to bombard the office of Attorney-General Greg Smith with letters demanding a policy change to ensure that such cases were referred upwards to the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions for consideration of prosecution.

Ordinarily, false accusation charges are dealt with by local police prosecutors.

(Robinson, 2013)

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 **Destroy the Joint** \*\*\*  
June 22, 2013 · Sydney · 🌐

Destroyers!

Great news, we have won a huge breakthrough because of the collective action and power of this community. Domestic violence victims who retract allegations against their abuser will no longer be prosecuted in NSW unless the original complaint is proven false. This is a great win, but we now need to finish the job!

Some five weeks ago DTJ campaigned to stop survivors of domestic violence being jailed and charged for withdrawing their statements. The Weekend Australian had revealed Aboriginal women have been jailed and there are 20 cases where they have been charged by local police prosecutors for criminal offences of "false testimony" or "public mischief", with no police investigation, but instead using their own testimony to convict them. Today Natasha Robinson in The Australian reports, "Feminist lobby group Destroy the Joint campaigned on the issue, decrying the prosecutions as "a reminder of the harsh way our criminal justice can treat the state's most defenceless citizens, particularly in remote areas".

Your actions made NSW Attorney General Greg Smith move from having "no plans to act" to the Police Minister now issuing this edict:

"The NSW Police Force has advised that it will only prosecute someone for making false representations where it can be established that the original allegation was untrue. We are advised that the NSW Police Force provides guidance to its officers to not solely rely on admissions made by a victim when deciding to proceed with such charges."

This is fantastic news and change for the better, however we need the NSW Government to take one more step and refer all such cases to the Director of Public Prosecutions so that these cases are dealt with consistently and with an understanding of the dynamics of domestic violence and the pressure exerted on survivors by their abusers and others. Taking decisions out of the hands of local prosecutors will also be an extra safeguard for Aboriginal women who are particularly vulnerable to being charged or jailed as they face the added layer of racism.

This process of referral has succeeded in the UK and is supported by The NSW Women's Refuge Movement and The Australian Law Reform Commission.

Email the NSW Attorney-General, thank him for his action so far, but ask him to finish the job and issue the direction to the NSW DPP. Cut and paste:

greg.smith@minister.nsw.gov.au; office@smith.minister.nsw.gov.au;  
epping@parliament.nsw.gov.au

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Figure 11: Destroy the Joint post during domestic violence campaign

## **Campaigning techniques**

These two campaigns operated quite differently. In the case of silent numbers, the preparation of the campaign was conducted privately, first within the admin group alone and then through emails and phone calls to those with authority to act, on behalf of 'Rebecca' using direct lobbying. At no stage, in public, did Telstra acknowledge DTJ's role although it was acknowledged in both the Sydney Morning Herald and the Daily Telegraph. One post had no public call to action other than to thank Telstra for its support of 'Rebecca', the other was direct, specific calls to action, using connective action and tactics which Postmes and Brunsting (2002) describe as persuasive rather than confrontational.

One aspect of DTJ's activism is that its remit is very broad: shining a light on sexism and misogyny. That broadness allows a lot of scope but it also tends to structurelessness, a term coined by US feminist scholar Jo Freeman (1972), as discussed in chapter six. As one of the admins Jocelyne said (in interview):

One of [Freeman's] theses was that when you've got no formal structure there's an informal structure that arises by force of personality or whatever, centrepiece, or whatever and that one of the difficulties about that is that it can never be discussed because in reality it doesn't exist or in inverted commas, reality, it doesn't exist.

These two campaigns provided a stark contrast to each other in terms of organisational response. The Telstra campaign is an example of an action taken by 'sheer force of personality'. There was no formal structure to deal with conflict but the person with the loudest voice made the decisions, even though there were others with competing, valid arguments. On the other hand, the public mischief campaign was truly consensus-based, with distributed leadership in terms of decision-making. Yet neither of these campaigns emanated from stated DTJ policy. Stated DTJ policy, if it can be given that grand title, is standing for "gender equality and civil discourse". An interpretation of that could be that DTJ protests against gender inequality and incivility and protest. As Verta Taylor and Nella Van Dyke write, this is the "collective use of unconventional methods of political participation" (2004, p. 263) in order to persuade or coerce. A policy cannot flourish without a strategy and strategies aren't rolled out without actions and tactics.

However, DTJ policy was without specifics and without those specifics, some campaigns could not be fully developed. DTJ's activists believed they knew what the focus of contemporary feminism should be and, by extension, the focus of the campaigns of DTJ.

**What follows is what all the activists said about their key concerns:**

**Dora:** Economic equality and bodily autonomy; **Phyllis:** Equal leadership, end to violence against women, \the gendered nature of law; **Helen:** rape culture, education, violence against women; **Julia:** reproductive rights, pay gap, childcare; **Bell:** violence against women, equal pay, education, equal opportunity; **Louisa:** Violence against women, equal parenting and caring, the gendered nature of economic power; **Emma:** Inclusivity and intersectionalism; **Patrick:** Violence against women, paid family violence leave; **Gunilla:** violence against women, lobbying governments to “taking on policies which protect women”; **Alice:** violence against women, homelessness, gender pay and superannuation gap; **Jessie:** “The structural situation in which we find that there is gross inequality at every turn for women is number one”, domestic violence; **Joan:** violence against women, marriage equality, pay equality, reproductive rights; **Elizabeth:** violence against women, gendered pay gap; **Anita:** equal pay, equal representation in politics, adequate funding for domestic violence services, appropriate sentencing, and ensuring that all family court judges are taught how to appropriately deal with issues of abuse; **Seb:** intersectionality; **Rosa:** gender bias, which underpins everything else; **Faith:** gendered violence, reproductive rights; **Bessie:** domestic violence, sexual assault; **Sheila:** violence against women but in society in general, “there is still a lot of work to be done”; **Bella:** violence against women, economic independence; **Millicent:** Reproductive rights, domestic violence or violence against women, homeless women's rights, superannuation, equal pay, intersectionality; **Eva:** violence against women, gendered use of space; **Constance:** violence against women, obviously, has got to be number one. Equality in the workplace is essential.

Constance, for example, could identify her concerns and was also able to identify and critique areas where the operations of DTJ could be improved:

We could do a bit better with workplace issues . . . we do a lot of workplace issues about whether or not women are getting pressured to wear high heels in the workplace, which is fine and important. They're all important questions. Getting



women onto boards, all those sorts of criticisms that we have around workplace equality.

I think we could get a bit better on that. We could probably tweak it to get it a little less white bread.

The key themes here included the end of violence against women, equal pay, equal opportunity, reproductive rights, but there was no clear path or process on how DTJ might operationalise those aims.

As Jocelyne observed of the group's organisational model:

'Yes, we'll be a consensus model'," but we had never actually worked out how decisions would be made.

As Berry (2015) argues, policy decisions in public interest organisations and groups are not divorced from decisions around strategy and tactics, so everything happens at once because of limited access to money and people. Groups search for what will be effective and efficient but are limited because of time and money. In the case of DTJ, with the exception of a short-term paid administrative position in 2014, everyone else has volunteer status and all but two people had or have full-time employment, which may explain why DTJ's actions and campaigns range from ones with a broad scope which aim to address inequality to ones which are smaller and less ambitious. Without well-developed policies, strategies and actions, the campaigns depend on what 'feels' urgent and are also congruent with values of the administrators. This meant that much of what DTJ did was broadly on an initial ad hoc basis, although benefitting from the cultural and social capital which administrators and moderators brought to the group (see previous chapter). It was also an excellent example of how a consensus model may be subject to three pressures: Freeman's tyranny of structurelessness (1972), Polletta's tyranny of emotions (2002) and Milan's dictatorship of action (2009) while still developing deliberative democratic decision-making, in an attempt to "press other participants to recognise the legitimacy of other people's decision-making" (Polletta, 2002, p. 26).

## **Community legal centres and the Counting Dead Women campaign**

I will now explore Counting Dead Women, which is the longest running campaign DTJ has conducted. In 2014, DTJ began a campaign to highlight fatal violence against women, following on from the British campaign with the same name. I was very keen to use this as a model for an Australian campaign but members of the administrators group were divided. There were concerns around whether such a campaign would be useful, the emotional labour of the work to run the campaign, and whether it would have an impact. While the concept of enumerating fatal violence against women was largely considered to be a good idea - in much the same way that having a national road toll demonstrates the extent of the road toll - there was also some argument about the difficulties of trying to build something new from the ground up. There was also the very real concern of how a campaign about fatal violence against women might be derailed if posted on Facebook, for example, by men's rights activists. However, the British model provided a strong example of a successful campaign. One of the administrators phoned the founder, Karen Ingala Smith, to ask her how she felt about Australians appropriating her work. She was very keen and "said having international partners in the project made change more likely – a 'united we stand' kind of approach" (Price, 2014).

Helen, first a moderator, later an admin and the key researcher of Counting Dead Women, said:

My very first inkling that it was a possibility for us was when [one of the admins] rang me. I was aware of the work that Ingala Smith had been doing in England, but it didn't actually occur to me that we could do that. Once [she] had called and we talked about it a bit, and I looked more in depth at what [she] was doing, yes, it suddenly became clear, 'Yeah, we can do that, and we should do that.'

However, there was some conflict within the group about both the approach and the name. Constance, a long-time admin, said (in interview):

The idea was pretty well received although there were some doubts about it from one admin [who is] no longer with us, but I also think I had my doubts . . . I was happy to defer, but to be perfectly honest, I had my doubts about it, the whole Counting Dead

Women concept and name, and everything about it sounded quite confronting. I now see that's the point, and I think I was really ... how can you say your gut is wrong, but I can now see that I was wrong.

Emmeline, another long-time admin, was very conflicted about whether all fatal violence against women should be counted or whether it should only be fatal violence perpetrated by men:

We discussed it behind the scenes and thought it would be a great thing to do but to do it our way . . . I had problems with the idea of making it all violence against women because people keep asking us how many men, how many men, how many partners, etcetera. But the fact that we count all women in the tally just points to the vast majority being male violence [against women] by partners or ex-partners.

The very first Counting Dead Women post combined the general and broad campaign to stop violence against women by consciousness-raising (more fully explored in chapter six, in the section on information activism) and using information activism. That post contained two actions or campaigns: the first launched Counting Dead Women Australia, the second mounted an attack on the federal government for its cuts to community legal centres. This post linked to a story I wrote for the Canberra Times which was published on all its metropolitan Fairfax websites where I made a connection between the cuts to community legal centres and a higher risk of fatal family violence. The Counting Dead Women posts began using the strategy of storytelling (Davis, 2002; Polletta 2009; 2016; Vromen, 2013), defining the narrative of these cuts to community legal centres with a key villain, the federal government (Price, 2014)

The post announced our intentions for the Counting Dead Women campaign at the time, which included the establishment of a separate internet entity, a [destroythejoint.org](http://destroythejoint.org) page. Repeated hacks of the separate page meant DTJ was forced to rely on Facebook to host Counting Dead Women. The launch on May 20, 2014, marked the beginning of our recording of this national toll of fatal violence against women, and (as stated earlier) also appealed to the federal government to reinstate funding to community legal centres.



## Destroy the Joint

Published by Jenna Price [?] · May 20, 2014 ·



Dear Destroyers,

Counting Dead Women.

Australians are furious, furious and hurt. The Abbott government has wrecked and damaged so many parts of our community - but now we have news that cuts announced in the Budget will directly affect women who are trying to escape domestic violence.

Slashed funding to Community Legal Centres will make it harder for women to get legal support to escape violent partners and may also decrease the number of women who report sexual assault and violence, say the experts.

<http://www.canberratimes.com.au/.../community-legal-cuts-will...>

So it's come to this. We must focus on those who ultimately pay the price for government policies, the women who die as a result of violence.

Today we launch Counting Dead Women, a campaign to honour those who have lost their lives as a result of violence. With the support of our British sisters, who began their campaign in 2012, we too will count the dead.

<http://kareningalasmith.com/counting-dead-women/>

Australian governments acted on the road toll - now is the time for them to act on behalf of all women. We applaud the Victorian ALP's move to investigate domestic violence through a Royal Commission - but we think all governments must act.

So, we need your help. We will post regularly here on Destroy The Joint but we will also have a separate site where the community can post their memories of those who died.

<http://destroythejoint.org/counting-dead-women-launch/>

Please let us know by private message here on the Destroy the Joint page or by emailing [CountingDeadWomen@gmail.com](mailto:CountingDeadWomen@gmail.com)

Help us honour these lost lives.

Count Our Dead Women.

Figure 12: Destroy the Joint post on the Counting Dead Women campaign

There was also some criticism of the approach taken because the campaign, using outside lobbying techniques including eliciting a feeling of solidarity among those who clicked like on the page, sought a response and action from the federal government. The initial post for this campaign included the call to the federal government to reinstate funding for community legal centres. Some feminists argue that feminist activism should be highly theorised and should be about changing the structures, or as Valentine and Breckenridge (2016, pp. 31-2) argue:

Whereas earlier feminist approaches called for broad social reforms to disrupt male power and built alternatives to state institutions via networks of women's services, this current framing of [domestic and family violence] necessarily calls on the assistance of state institutions. As such, it represents a significant departure from the theorised, political accounts of gender and violence that have mobilised scholarship and advocacy for decades.

Meanwhile, Marilyn Lake (1999) in her history of Australian feminism, reminds us that Australian feminists have always “looked to the state” for physical and economic security and protection, which has meant that when governments have a purely fiscal approach, that can have a direct impact on policies and programs. As Carol Johnson (2019, p. 208) highlights, “the focus on budgetary restraint and cultural change also had ongoing implications for areas such as domestic violence policy” during successive Coalition governments (2013 ongoing). DTJ admins concluded that funding domestic violence programs was a key issue therefore the issue of funding for community legal centres continued to be a theme for DTJ posts. We posted on a number of occasions, usually including links to stories I had written. Finally, on March 26, 2015, the federal government relented and restored the funding which had been initially cut. In April 2015, the Executive Officer of the Federation of Community Legal Centres (Vic) Inc. wrote to the Vice Chancellor of the University of Technology, Sydney [where I work] acknowledging the role the work of Destroy the Joint had played but there was still some distance to go before the government funded the centres to their full need.

There are many people who “like” the DTJ page, at time of writing, 98,000. That does not mean that those people who “like” the page will see any given post. There are a number of

decisions that a Facebook user must make in order to regularly see posts, including ticking the option of seeing posts from a particular page first. While social media is often touted as a way of disseminating ideas for free, for purposeful and intentional distribution of a post with a specific audience, posts must be boosted (also called sponsored), which is a way to ensure that a particular post will appear in a number of feeds. Boosts are paid posts which ensure that more people will see the post. These boosted Facebook posts, in effect, are advertisements, in order to get the best possible reach to a range of Facebook newsfeeds beyond those who like or follow the page. Therefore, the DTJ admins made a decision to pay Facebook to promote the Counting Dead Women posts, and a few other selected campaigns, such as strangulation which began in 2018, where and when financially possible, in order to maximise reach. For Counting Dead Women posts, we boost our posts to the specific audience of “People who like your page and their friends”. Kelsey (2017) outlines the process - “pay Facebook to get a better chance of being noticed”.

Each post is sponsored for somewhere from \$50 upwards (and more if we have to have a post where the post commemorates two women). This paid content sends the post into the feeds of those who fit certain criteria, including being over 18 and have indicated on Facebook settings that they live in Australia. It is difficult to make comparisons between the reach of Counting Dead Women posts because there are so many factors which affect reach, including time of day and whether the post is sponsored or not. Below is a graph which shows the difference in reach over the course of a day, with peak reach at 4pm and another lower peak at 7pm. Days of the week do not show much variation.



Figure 13: Graph showing temporal dynamics of Destroy the Joint posts

In the period between the inception of DTJ and the end of 2016, CrowdTangle data showed that Counting Dead Women posts had scores at the very top of a range that CrowdTangle describes as ‘overperforming’. They occupied 11 of the top overperforming posts in that

period of time. An overperforming score is one which, when compared against benchmarks generated by CrowdTangle, performs better than the average of the previous 100 posts of a particular page. CrowdTangle calculates the average number of interactions each post type (link, image etc) has at a particular time in its ‘life’, say after 15 minutes or an hour or a day and then weights each of these measures.

Created	Type	Content	Type	Score	cost	women %	men %
2016-04-02 15:14:12 PHT	native_video	Buzzfeed video on sexism at work	native_video	549673.414	Not boosted		
2016-12-10 17:16:05 PHT	native_video	Call to Action for for paid domestic and family violence lea	native_video	1215.02439	Not boosted		
2016-05-10 08:50:54 PHT	link	Call to Action to reopen the Lynette Daley case	link	45.327044	Boosted	\$100	88.4 11.6
2016-03-08 10:00:00 PHT	link	Penny Wong on QandA	link	37.35625	Not boosted		
2015-02-17 16:59:34 PHT	photo	CDW14/2015	photo	27.835689	Not boosted		
2014-10-02 09:08:08 PHT	photo	Comparison between domestic violence and terrorism	photo	26.3939394	Not boosted		
2015-10-30 07:10:25 PHT	link	Cartoon consent video	link	24.6734694	Not boosted		
2013-09-09 18:43:59 PHT	photo	Hawke on Plibersek's unsuitability to lead	photo	22.9357602	Not boosted		
2015-09-10 10:26:38 PHT	photo	CDW62/2015	photo	19.5737179	Boosted	\$70	85.6 14.4
2013-06-19 12:35:16 PHT	photo	Comparing treatment of Gillard and Morrison	photo	19.5695931	Not boosted		
2016-06-25 06:23:40 PHT	photo	CDW34/2016	photo	18.7232704	Boosted	\$168	84.6 15.4
2016-03-07 17:00:01 PHT	photo	International Women's Day 2016	photo	18.3113772	Not boosted		
2012-10-19 10:26:24 PHT	photo	Alan Jones complaining of cyberterrorism	photo	17.8869732	Not boosted		
2016-08-07 16:31:27 PHT	photo	CDW41/2016	photo	17.5105263	Boosted	\$68	84.5 15.5
2016-06-18 09:18:34 PHT	photo	CDW33/2016	photo	17.2916667	Boosted	\$150	84.4 15.6
2016-11-06 18:06:33 PHT	photo	CDW65/2016	photo	17.0590717	Boosted	\$88	72.9 27.1
2016-09-29 15:49:25 PHT	photo	CDW50/2016	photo	16.7536946	Boosted	\$50	88.1 11.9
2016-10-19 08:05:43 PHT	photo	CDW59/2016	photo	16.6621005	Boosted	\$260	77.6 22.4
2016-02-02 06:07:36 PHT	photo	CDW4/2016	photo	16.4417178	Boosted	\$50	85.9 14.1
2013-07-23 16:46:31 PHT	status	Death of a sex worker in St Kilda	status	16.027972	Not boosted		
2016-04-24 16:49:24 PHT	photo	CDW26/2016	photo	15.9632653	Boosted	\$75	87.2 12.8
2016-07-05 08:44:03 PHT	photo	CDW36/2016	photo	15.7631579	Boosted	\$50	84.3 15.7

Figure 14: Table of posts by CrowdTangle sentiment score

From the table above, it is clear Counting Dead Women posts are ranked highly in terms of CrowdTangle sentiment, even when the posts are not sponsored. Of the 22 posts in that table, 16 deal specifically with violence against women, which is a key information message of DTJ but the vast majority of these most shared posts include the striking image of the funerary statues.

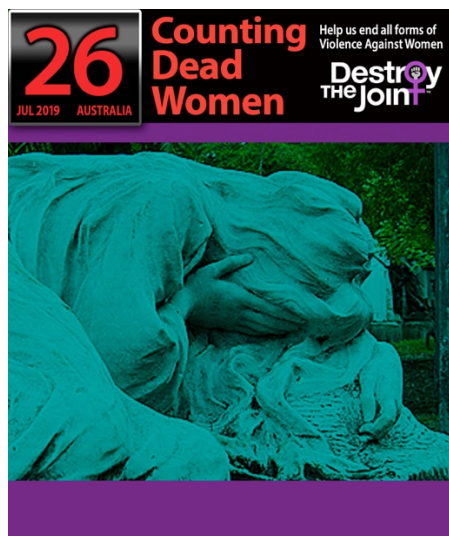
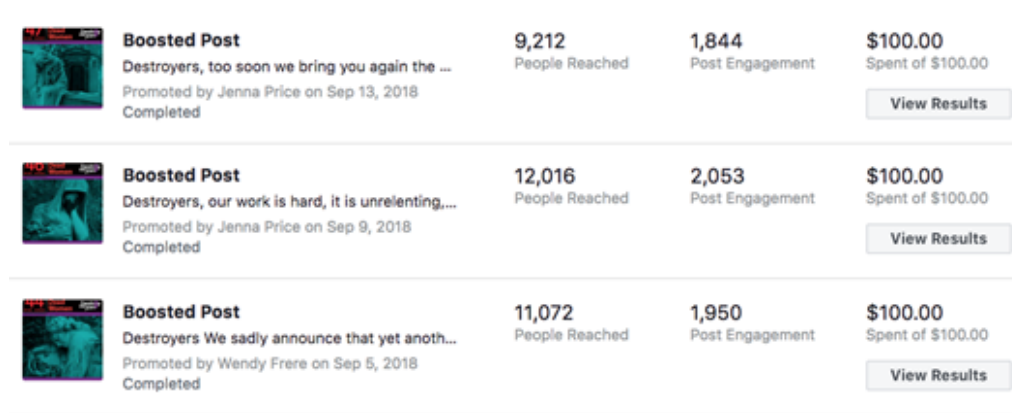


Figure 15: Example of Counting Dead Women post

## Counting Dead Women posts

The outcome of boosting the Counting Dead Women posts is variable.



Boosted Post	9,212	1,844	\$100.00
Destroyers, too soon we bring you again the ... Promoted by Jenna Price on Sep 13, 2018 Completed	People Reached	Post Engagement	Spent of \$100.00
<a href="#">View Results</a>			
Boosted Post	12,016	2,053	\$100.00
Destroyers, our work is hard, it is unrelenting, ... Promoted by Jenna Price on Sep 9, 2018 Completed	People Reached	Post Engagement	Spent of \$100.00
<a href="#">View Results</a>			
Boosted Post	11,072	1,950	\$100.00
Destroyers We sadly announce that yet anothe... Promoted by Wendy Frere on Sep 5, 2018 Completed	People Reached	Post Engagement	Spent of \$100.00
<a href="#">View Results</a>			

Figure 15: Impact of boosting Counting Dead Women posts

As is visible in this image, it is not possible to expect any particular numbers of engagements from boosted posts. As well, it is more difficult to reach a male audience through this method, as the DTJ ‘membership’ is, at September 2018, 82 per cent women and 15 per cent men, with three per cent not identifying a gender. The cost to DTJ per click is around four or five cents for men but three or four cents for women. Far fewer men click on the posts, no matter what time of day the boost is approved, nor what variable is chosen, such as friends of the page or friends of friends of the page (these are all variables which can be chosen when deciding how to tailor and target the sponsored posts). Later sponsored posts ran two sponsorship of posts at the same time, one directed only at men and one directed only at women. These reached around the same number of people for each sponsored post.

In Figure 16, the words reach and engagement are used. Facebook reach is described by the Facebook help site as “the number of people who had any content from your Page or about your Page enter their screen” (Facebook, 2019, para. 2). Facebook engagement is the number of people who have interacted with the post, such as liked, shared or commented on the post. As can be seen in these figures, the cause of trying to prevent violence against women is a hard one to ‘sell’ or ‘promote’, particularly to the group which needs to engage most with the issue. It is political but also confronting and it is difficult to get people to align themselves with the cause. There has been increased reporting on domestic violence. A Factiva search using the term “domestic violence” and restricted to the Australia/Oceania region revealed only four stories published in 1988, compared to 15314 stories in 2018.



Similarly, using the search term “violence against women”, there was a marked increase from 1988 (two appearances) to 2018 (2923 appearances). The phrase “family violence” was not recorded in 1988 but appeared 7713 times in 2018. On average, over the course of the Counting Dead Women deaths about 75 per cent of the deaths are as a result of partner, former partner, or family member violence.

Newsrooms may be reluctant to cover these issues and, as Jenny Morgan and Margaret Simons (2018) argue, much coverage is about individual cases and it is the work of particular journalists in newsrooms which can make a difference. In particular, when it comes to reporting on fatal violence against women, journalism’s focus on daily events rather than larger/longer contexts leads to journalistic narratives only concentrating on individual events of fatal violence against women (Greer, 2003). Jane Monckton-Smith (2010, p. 15) argues individualisation is used to “rationalise and explain the murder and/or rape of women” rather than challenging societal frameworks in which that violence exists. Lane Kirkland Gillespie and her co-authors (2013, p. 240) argue media miss opportunities to influence the portrayal of “femicide as an issue deserving of public outrage and intensified policy development”. Camelia Bouzerdan and Jenifer Whitten-Woodring (2018) explain violence against women is rarely covered as a hate crime or as a violation of human rights, so these deaths remain as individual events, untheorised, with no conceptualisation of deep structural and cultural problems that cause violence against women (Hudson & Den Boer, 2012), and with little policy response. They “propose that media failure to cover violence against women—especially non-intimate femicides—as hate crimes is part of the reason why there are not better policies in place to prevent femicide” (Bouzerdan & Whitten-Woodring, 2018, p. 226).

In my experience, it has been difficult to engage editors on the topic of family violence. This difficulty to engage editors in violence against women, except in unusual and sensational cases, makes it difficult to present this issue in a way which engages the wider community. The DTJ activists wanted to include the women who had been killed, to make them more than a number, in a way which did not sensationalise their deaths. The next Counting Dead Women post appeared on June 4, 2014. By that time, the CDW team had compiled a list of women who had been killed but the processes to collect this information were still developing. The Counting Dead Women campaign got underway but the failed

website caused some delay. The image we used on June 4, 2014, was a collage of those who had sent images to DTJ for an early community building post and it was similar to ones which had also appeared with other posts.

Any campaign to stop violence against women, which is often marginalised as being about the personal or the domestic, is also very aligned to the key beliefs of feminism, a political group which has also experienced backlash (Faludi, 2006; Scharff, 2016; Yeung, Kay & Peach, 2013). As Bennett and Segerberg (2012; 2013) argue, in the place of political group membership is a series of individual alignments and orientations which “result in engagement with politics as an expression of personal hopes, lifestyles, and grievances” (2012, p. 743). Those individual engagements are operationalised through digital communication technologies such as social media platforms where “the ideas and mechanisms for organizing action become more personalized than in cases where action is organized on the basis of social group identity, membership, or ideology” (Bennett and Segerberg, 2015, p. 174). Counting Dead Women centralises the campaign to stop fatal violence against women by giving it a personal expression but not a personalised expression because it allows people to share the CDW posts as utterances, as ways to demonstrate solidarity, without having to personalise it to themselves as individuals. This will be explored more fully later in this chapter.

More importantly, Counting Dead Women overcomes a key challenge for disseminating violence against women which is frequently portrayed by news media as singular (Genovese, 1997). This is not just reporting on one dead woman at a time, it is Counting Dead Women, a never-ending narrative.

I have been writing about family violence since 1979 when, as a mature age student, I wrote a story about the case of Violet and Bruce Roberts. It became that social issues journalism, and reporting on family violence in particular, needed a three-fold approach to its coverage of social issues: accurate news reporting, analysis and opinion. As Pallavi Guha (2015) puts it, hashtagging becomes effective when it is combined with mainstream news media. I have always been an advocate journalist in some respects because I have tried to concentrate on the social issues which affect women but this work allowed me to be an advocate journalist at a time that the field of advocacy journalism was developing. Advocacy journalism was first articulated by Deitch (1969) and then expanded by Janowitz (1975) who posited that

journalists who operated as advocates became active interpreters and could therefore “speak on behalf” of powerless groups. For me that seemed a clear and useful way to approach journalism. The concept of advocacy journalism was most recently modernised by Waisbord (2009) who recognised that despite the challenges of advocacy journalism, particularly in the global context, there is what he calls a “growing homogeneity” about newsworthiness which include using a common set of “source strategies” including the reliance on advocacy groups such as Greenpeace for the purposes of persuasion. DTJ did not have the same reputation or advocacy tradition such as Greenpeace or GetUp. However it was able to use the work of journalists working in the field and leveraged those through social media, in much the same way as Pallavi Guha (2015) described. These pieces went beyond the usual parameters of commentary by seeking the views of key players in, for instance, the debate on community legal centres. The vast majority of these stories were written to pressure governments to make change, particularly on the issue of the funding of community legal centres.

Yet there was so much more to this campaign than the stories which were linked in the posts. Emmeline, for example, had more experience than anyone else on the team when it came to working within Facebook guidelines and brought that to bear on the posts and how they were designed, keeping in her mind that consumers of Facebook sought short posts with visibility. She said that “[t]hey might not read detail, they just want to get an instant impression of what's being said”. To that end, she decided to make the imagery simple and select colours her experience told her would have impact:

People have even less time to absorb the message that you're trying to give them. So, there's a premise in art direction and graphic design, that if you don't hold someone's interest with visual communications within about four seconds, you've possible lost them.

So, within that four seconds, you really need to get the idea of your message across, and get people interested enough to keep reading. I had on-the-job training in my early years, with an advertising agency, which basically teaches you how to sell. (Emmeline, in interview)

To underscore the themes of the earlier chapter on habitus and capital, these comments from Emmeline illustrate the way in which individuals assisted with the work of DTJ because of the cultural capital they brought with them:

So, that's where these premises come from. Now, even though DTJ isn't exactly selling a product, we are selling an idea, and it's all part of marketing. So, anything that I've picked up over the years, and anything that I've actually instigated myself, through experience and observation, is put to use for DTJ, yes. (Emmeline, in interview)

### **What of the images themselves?**

Emmeline's experience of activism was limited to donating to climate change charities before her involvement with DTJ. She describes herself as "leaning to the left" but says she had no involvement with any other political causes. This makes her unusual among the administrators and moderators of DTJ, the vast majority of whom were activists across a range of causes (feminism, refugees, environment, unions etc). In her work as a visual communications and marketing consultant, her clients were always commercial.

Her reason for her commitment to DTJ was that she felt that gender equality was within reach. She also recognised that she could make a unique contribution to the group because of her ability to create images of a professional standard. She set herself the task of manufacturing an image which would be easily identified. The first iteration of the image was not successful, in terms of sharing. The image (multiple small images) was too reminiscent of earlier images which DTJ had used to signify its growth. The change to use the powerful images of funerary statues occurred in February 2015.

As Avigail McClelland-Cohen (2016) argues, "production style contributed significantly to higher popularity, with formally produced videos being far more popular than entrepreneurially produced videos". The Counting Dead Women memes were produced formally by a professional graphic designer, the only member of the admin team with both qualifications and professional experience in this area.

Emmeline sought an image which had an unbreakable connection with memorialising death but which would not cause Facebook users to switch off immediately from images of violence. In addition, Emmeline had to ensure that the image was not one which would cause users to report the image or Facebook's moderators to ban, limit or otherwise inhibit the use of the image, a frequent trap for those unused to Facebook's arbitrary rules.

Emmeline said:

I wanted to find an image that immediately conjured up a feeling of sadness and was evocative for anyone who looked at it to really think about what the image was meaning. I came up with the idea of funerary sculpture, specifically of women.

She fixed upon the idea and then sought ways to give the image the most impact, which in turn would make it more shareable, using the purple, teal and white she had originally chosen as the colour of DTJ.

They're quite tightly cropped to make sure that it's all about the emotions that are conjured by the sculptures rather than just the landscape setting . . . I stagger them so they're not using the same images too frequently. So there's several dozen that I choose from and I just alternate between instances.

She looked for an image which would have an immediate impact.

So the basic principle is to keep it simple and to have a reaction basically in the first few seconds that someone looks at something ... there's a little bit of a rule of thumb where in any kind of visual communications if the viewer or reader doesn't get some sort of an idea of the image you're trying to communicate within about four seconds, you've kind of lost them. They will just flip the page or look elsewhere.

Emmeline considered herself to be very familiar with the requirements for sharing on the Facebook platform. She also became familiar with the rules and regulations around Facebook sponsored posts, which includes not permitting more than 20 per cent text.

Facebook uses some sort of a bot, which casts its steely eye over every ad and advertised comments that we do for Counting Dead Women . . . so I've learned how to work the system so [Facebook doesn't] reject the ad, and we won't be able to sponsor it.

Towards the end of 2014, we had tried various approaches and the reach of Counting Dead Women Australia surprised most of the moderators and administrators of DTJ. Almost immediately the toll we used - the number of women who had been killed violently - began to be quoted in all kinds of media: mainstream, niche, blogs, social. It includes mentions on all the major television networks and some radio mentions. In 2015, the campaign won the Our Watch Award, for best use of social media in reporting domestic violence. It has been cited in federal parliament, in New South Wales parliament, has made its way into curricula at universities, been quoted in myriad reports (Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety, 2018; Central Australia Women's Legal Service, 2015; Victorian Multicultural Commission, 2016), been part of many submissions on violence against women. It has appeared in academic texts as an example of social media campaigning (Pilcher & Whelehan, 2017), cited in the Australian Women's History Network (Simic, 2016) as leading to an "unprecedented public awareness about the prevalence of domestic violence in Australia, particularly against women, thanks to the activism of those involved", cited by the outgoing Sex Discrimination Commissioner (Broderick, 2015).

The early campaign developed good traction but Emmeline, the admin with a long-term experience in design, had strong views about the image we were using. She sought an image which would illustrate the humanity of the woman who had been killed but without using a photo of the deceased. She sourced some images online which had no copyright attached and took some photos herself and then set about refining the image to be used for the campaign. Her primary directive was not just to make what she described as a "pretty picture". She said:

The basic principle is to keep it simple and to have a reaction basically in the first few seconds that someone looks at something ... there's a little bit of a rule of thumb where in any kind of visual communications if the viewer or reader doesn't get some sort of an idea of the image you're trying to communicate within about four seconds,

you've kind of lost them. They will just flip the page or look elsewhere (Emmeline, in interview).

Emmeline chose purple, white and green for DTJ early on because of their relationship with historical feminism. For these images, she also used red to provide contrast and highlight. It has a distinctive image attached, in shades of purple and green, which are the colours associated with feminism since the emergence of the suffragettes (Caine, 2001).

Every time a woman is killed, the Facebook cover image of the DTJ Facebook page is changed. That cover image uses funeral statues, cites the number of women killed to that date in any year and also cites the number of women killed in the preceding year. The Counting Dead Women image which accompanies the Facebook post is not the image of the woman killed. It also shows an image of the statues commonly found in cemeteries, also called funerary statuary and cites the number of women killed in the year to date. The image of the statue changes as does the number of women killed in the year, increasing over the time period.

The key part of this image is the rising number of deaths. It makes this image shareable and quotable, and the number is quoted widely because, as Porter (1996, p. 49) puts it, “[q]uantification is a social technology”. He argues that public numbers are anything but neutral. They have weight and impact and are often contested. He uses, as an example, the struggle to count those in the United States who are homeless, and explains that the number can only be “made objective by specifying in detail what efforts will be made to locate and tally people”. This was precisely the challenge presented by attempting to calculate the number of women who had been killed violently in order to present a public number.

As Porter argues, statistics have a “creative power” and each category provides a “potential to become a new thing” (1996, p. 37). For Counting Dead Women, the ‘new thing’ was a reliable, current tally of women who were the victim of fatal violence. Where before the only possible number to be used was the information provided by the Australian Institute of Criminology (Crime Statistics Australia, n.d.) at least a year later after official murder and manslaughter figures were published, now these ever-mounting figures were in more or less real time and could be used to quantify an epidemic or, as Porter (1996, p. 46) puts it,

“[s]ickness, in short, could not be reliably quantified until it was mapped out and subdivided . . . it reflected, rather, the weakness of institutions promoting public knowledge”.

The Counting Dead Women tally provided both a clear quantification of the scale of the problem in Australia and a degree of rigour. The numbers speak both for themselves and for the dead women – and they appear to be fair and accurate which then provided media outlets with an opportunity to quote those numbers because of the alignment with contemporary news values. Helen Caple and Monica Bednarek’s news values (2017, p. 53) are: “Negativity (and conflict), Impact (consequence, significance, relevance), Superlativeness (size, scale, scope), Proximity (geographical, cultural nearness), Timeliness (recency, currency), Eliteness (prominence, elite status), Personalization, Consonance (expectedness, typicality), Unexpectedness (and unusuality), and Aesthetics (visuals only)”. Counting Dead Women aligns with nearly every news value on this list; and on some occasions, with every news value except aesthetics and either consonance or unexpectedness. The alignment with a number of these news values works to support the continued usage of Counting Dead Women in news media.

These numbers – the rising number of women – have become shareable information and are widely used in media and in calls to action. At any time, the current number is used on the front page of a newspaper or the home page of a news site across all ownership entities such as Nine and News Corporation, in current affairs programs, in parliaments, both state and national, in cartoons, in calls to action, in vigils to commemorate particular dead women, during International Women’s Day or Reclaim the Night marches. It is broad and deep because the Counting Dead Women researchers ‘were able to quantify the problem in a way which recognised that what counts is what matters.

Porter (1996) also explores the idea that such a public number of any contested group may exclude minorities. This has occasionally been a criticism of the Counting Dead Women count tally which has been contested with claims of deliberate exclusion of minority groups women such as women of colour, women with a disability or trans women, because an example of such a person was not on the list. Porter is explicit about the need for strict rules for numbers to be “made valid” but even with those rules, numbers are contested. For example, when Counting Dead Women chose not to count Courtney Topic, the accusation



was made that Counting Dead Women did not count women with a disability. The guidelines the admins and moderators devised have a focus on “violent deaths [which are] targeted against women”. Courtney Topic, who had autism, was killed by police when she lunged at them with a knife. After lengthy internal discussion, the decision was made that Topic would not be included because a man lunging at police with a knife would be similarly shot and killed.

In addition, women on the list are not labelled unless a relevant police or news report provides such information, which means their minority status is not made visible. Complaints about the information provided for the women on the list are directed towards the researchers of Counting Dead Women. As Porter writes: “Official statistical categories occupy contested terrain. The numbers they contain are threatened by misunderstanding as well as self-interest” (1996, p. 41).

The Facebook post accompanying the image varies only in that it names a different person and links to the most up-to-date news article published. There are usually one or two sentences which describe the manner of the death and in each case, the post links to the page’s own notes, so those reading can link with a separate site which lists the manner and date of each death. If someone has been arrested in relation to the charge and the police are able to confirm the relationship of that person to the deceased, the post will also include those details.

There are set guidelines developed by the administrators and the research team before the decision to post. These are different to the model developed by Karen Ingala Smith (n.d.) in that this list includes any woman who has been identified as having died as a result of violence, even if a woman has been arrested as the alleged perpetrator.

From February 2015, the approach was the same. Each time we posted, we had a process. First, the cover photo for the Facebook page was changed to include the updated toll and then the Notes with links to each case were also updated. Then these posts are hidden from the timeline. The post itself memorialises each reported death of a woman as a result of violence. Each post has very similar text, which includes a link to the report of the death, usually from a news source; and a link to the notes, where the entire list for the year resides.

## Where has Counting Dead Women been cited?

Between May 1 2014 and December 31 2016, Counting Dead Women was cited 99 times, according to information available on the news data base Factiva. Only 12 of those were duplicates. The stories appeared in Australian Associated Press on 14 occasions but do not appear to have been reproduced in those exact forms elsewhere. Other major news producers to cite the count include the Canberra Times (8), the Sydney Morning Herald (7), the ABC, The Guardian, the Daily Mail (five each) and the Conversation (3). The top 30 results from Factiva also showed a breadth of location: from Western Australia to Launceston in Tasmania to Cairns in north Queensland. These mentions do not indicate the sharing of this content across commercially-connected sites online. Instead, these stories were entirely original to those publications, including Australian independent news sites Crikey and The Conversation. The publications were also across different ownerships, namely Fairfax Media (as it was then known), News Ltd, The Conversation Media Group Limited, McPherson Media Group, West Australian Newspapers Limited.

### Counting Dead Women: The project keeping toll of Australia's ... - SBS

<https://www.sbs.com.au/.../counting-dead-women-the-project-keeping-toll-of-australia...> ▼

Nov 21, 2018 - Since 2012, a group called Destroy the Joint has run **Counting Dead Women** Australia, which it describes as a "national toll" of women killed by ...

### 'Enough is enough': Courtney Herron is the 20th woman to be ... - SBS

<https://www.sbs.com.au/.../enough-is-enough-courtney-herron-is-the-20th-woman-to-...> ▼

May 27, 2019 - Since 2012, the **Counting Dead Women** project has researched and collated every "femicide" nationally. Ms Herron is the 20th woman on their ...

### Preethi Reddy: Violence against women an 'epidemic in Australia' - SBS

<https://www.sbs.com.au/.../preethi-reddy-violence-against-women-an-epidemic-in-aust...> ▼

Mar 6, 2019 - That is a very common way for women to be killed," co-founder of **Counting Dead Women** Australia Jenna Price told **SBS** News. Since 2012 ...

### than half of women killed in 2017 died at hands of partner or ... - SBS

<https://www.sbs.com.au/.../more-than-half-of-women-killed-in-2017-died-at-hands-of-...> ▼

Nov 26, 2018 - **Counting Dead Women**: The project keeping toll of Australia's hidden 'epidemic'. UNODC executive director Yury Fedotov said the focus on ...

Figure 17: Results of Google search for "Counting Dead Women" and SBS

This screenshot shows the results for search for the phrase “Counting Dead Women” and SBS in Google, using the ‘verbatim’ search limiting tool.

### [Counting Dead Women Australia | The Saturday Paper](#)

<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/tag/counting-dead-women-australia> ▼

Jun 23, 2018 - Eurydice Dixon (22), Qi Yu (28), Unnamed Woman (69), Caroline Willis (69), Unnamed Woman (46), Unnamed Woman (37), Karen Ashcroft ...

### [Counting the dead | The Saturday Paper](#)

<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/2018/06/23/counting-the.../15296760006439> ▼

Jun 23, 2018 - Margaret Indich (38) Antonia Tatchell (43) Amelia Blake (22) Nancy Barclay (83) Nowra Khatib (61) Unnamed Woman (41) Radmila Stevanovic ...

### [Lateral damage counting domestic deaths | The Saturday Paper](#)

<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/law-crime/2016/.../14534676002798> ▼

Jan 23, 2016 - As the deaths of women such as Deanne Bridgland go uncounted, the true toll of domestic violence remains hidden. ... Deanne Bridgland greeted the appointment of Rosie Batty as 2015 Australian of the Year with muted delight. ... While Deanne empathised with Rosie’s suffering and agreed ...

### [The homelessness crisis | The Saturday Paper](#)

<https://www.thesaturdaypaper.com.au/news/politics/2019/06/01/.../15593112008238> ▼

Jun 1, 2019 - Discussions about housing affordability have frequently omitted those who are most severely affected by the crisis: people experiencing ...

Figure 18: Search on Saturday Paper and Counting Dead Women

The same process undertaken using “Saturday Paper”.

Beyond media mention, Counting Dead Women made its way into the annals of government, both by citing relevant news articles but also mentioned by politicians during the course of parliament.

The results from a search of the Parliament of Australia website shows 11 results in the Senate for the search for the phrase Counting Dead Women, 3 for the House of Representatives and 1 for Committees (Parliament of Australia, n.d.). It also includes 34 media mentions and 4 results for the library. A similar search of the NSW Parliament website shows hundreds of results most of which are in publications but eight mentions in the Legislative Assembly and four mentions in the Legislative Council (Parliament of New South Wales, n.d.).

### **Next steps**

The process of negotiating campaigns is long and arduous. On February 15, 2016, the administrators of DTJ embarked upon a campaign to make non-fatal strangulation an offence in states and territories across Australia. It built upon the work of the Red Rose Foundation which is situated in Queensland. This took the form of posts which explained why non-fatal strangulation acted as a red flag –"the odds of becoming a homicide victim as a result of further domestic violence were increased by 800 per cent for women who had previously experienced strangulation by their partners" (Destroy the Joint, 2016b)

On April 20, 2016, the Queensland government passed the anti-strangulation laws. While it would be naive to imagine that this happened because of DTJ's campaign alone, the campaign post encouraged a national overview and explained why it was important in the context of domestic violence. Once again, it also served to put the term on the national media agenda. In the three years before DTJ launched its campaign, Factiva found 760 mentions of strangulation in Australian publications. In the three years since the launch of the campaign, 1436 mentions were found. Again, this is not direct causation. In 2018, from April to August, DTJ engaged in direct lobbying of the NSW Opposition on the issue of strangulation (Price, 2018). It published a post on August 13, explaining the campaign. Four weeks after the publication of the campaign, linked to the story (Price, 2018) on why strangulation was an

offence, the NSW Government announced it would introduce a new strangulation offence to bolster NSW domestic violence laws (Visentin, 2018).

These campaigning posts were all accompanied by an image of a hand squeezing a bunch of roses. They were all identified with the line, Eight times, in order to represent the increase of the risk of fatal violence for those who experienced non-fatal strangulation. This campaign was supported by the existence of the Counting Dead Women campaign.

### **Personal action frames and social media networks**

Bennett and Segerberg (2012; 2013) identified two elements of personalised political communication important to connective action which I will connect to DtJ. Firstly, that political content is expressed in easily personalised ideas such as those used by Put People First and Occupy Wall Street, and that personal communication technologies then facilitate the sharing of those artefacts or it becomes a meme (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, p. 745): “a symbolic packet that travels easily across large and diverse populations because it is easy to imitate, adapt personally, and share broadly with others.”

Counting Dead Women might, in some respects, be categorised as an example of a personal action frame (Bennett & Segerberg 2013, p. 37) because an image, shared many times is like a meme. Bennett and Segerberg argue that “[t]hese frames require little in the way of persuasion, reason, or reframing to bridge differences in others’ feelings about a common problem”. The personal action frame represents an action - or a representation of an action - taken on a platform and that platform operates as the organising agent. Those who share it may or may not align themselves with DTJ or with feminism but instead, align themselves with the specific concept of Counting Dead Women. As Bennett and Segerberg (2012, p. 744) explain:

People may still join actions in large numbers, but the identity reference is more derived through inclusive and diverse large-scale personal expression rather than through common group or ideological identification.

However, the concept of personalised action frames more properly operates in the way the meme “We are the 99%” operated during and after the US Occupy protests on Tumblr, Twitter and Facebook (Bennett, 2012). Those posting on social media used the phrase “We

are the 99%” but inserted themselves as an image or a handwritten story into the frame. Nurses, farmers, teachers, those with a disability, shared their stories and joined with others as part of the 99 per cent.

As Tetyana Lokot (2018) has analysed the #IAmNotAfraidToSayIt campaign, a hashtag used by Ukrainian and Russian women on tweets disclosing sexual abuse, workplace sexual harassment and street harassment. Lokot demonstrated that the Facebook posts from that impromptu campaign were activist work which functioned as “personalised political acts of feminist resistance as they create a mediated feeling of solidarity” (p. 804) and afforded a “networked public space for impactful everyday political speech and a platform for pushing less popular narratives into the limelight” (p. 804). In this case, the hashtag worked to build solidarity around the public discussion of acts of gendered violence. The tweets really placed women ‘shoulder to shoulder’ or tweet-to-tweet in order to make a coherent voice from many.

But these utterances, as with many other such actions, offered participants a way to personalise these artefacts. Counting Dead Women and its artefacts did not do that. DTJ did indeed begin as a grassroots campaign, both mobilising and organising on social media and could therefore be associated with the personal action frame. The personal action frame is particular to connective action and always includes both the framing of a political particular situation that those who share believe should be changed and a personal response or reason to show the need for change (Bennett, 2012). Personal action frames are used across a number of grassroots, technologically-enabled connective action groups, such as Occupy Wall Street, los indignados, Send Your Own Message to the G20, #sistabriefen and #metoo (Andersson, 2018). In addition, personal action frames are transmitted through modelling - one person who shares the post shows others how to personalise and then share the post.

Instead, the Counting Dead Women image operates as a digital solidarity frame which is different to the personal action frame because in most instances, sharers cannot personalise this frame - and if it relied upon personalisation, it would limit those who share it to those who have experienced fatal violence among their connections. Personal action frames and digital solidarity frames have in common a recognition that an aspect of society must change

but are different because, in the case of the digital solidarity frame, there is not always the ability to personalise.

Solidarity framing, in the case of Counting Dead Women, demonstrates support for the recognition of fatal violence against women as a continuing narrative. The contents of the Counting Dead Women posts on DTJ are nearly identical. In September 2018, the 47th death for the year is marked with a cinerary image, the words Counting Dead Women and the familiar words of the post which nearly always begin the same way:

Destroyers, too soon we bring you again the news of a woman's violent death. With great sadness we add another victim of violence against women to our ever-growing register for 2018. (Destroy the Joint, 2018)

That post was shared 540 times, which means that quite aside from the boost, it appeared on the timelines of [at least] 540 other Facebook profiles and pages. Facebook privacy rules mean not even an admin of the page from which that post comes can see where the shares are occurring. But in the case of this post from September 18, 2018, I can see only about 130 of the shares because of privacy settings. Of those, not one puts themselves in the frame. At the very most, shares might add a comment such as “too soon” or “Akal Julie, may your soul find peace 🙏 May we as human beings work together to end this violence”. Of the posts visible to me, none who shared the post put themselves in the frame. Instead, they expressed their solidarity through a) sharing the post and b) emphasising through an extra comment or an emoji of some kind.

These interactions reveal an engagement with the Counting Dead Women images which is different to engagement with the personal action frame. There are, of course, a multitude of frames from which to choose. Lindenberg (2003), describes three: hedonic, gain and solidarity. The solidarity frame has, for this research, the key characteristic of displaying alignment with another's concerns without self-interest. The solidarity frame, where the user acts appropriately and shows non-instrumental concerns, is the case for those sharing the Counting Dead Women posts. People are identifying the Counting Dead Women posts as something worthy of sharing but do not want to claim it or personalise it. They are showing solidarity for the twin causes of supporting the victims and highlighting violence against

women as a form of consciousness-raising. In addition, Jill Hopke (2015) argues that in the case of Global Frackdown, tweeters engage “in framing practices of: movement convergence and solidarity, declarative and targeted engagement, prefabricated messaging [...integrating] personal action frames with collective action frames” (p. 29) engaging with hybrid framing practices she calls “*transnational frame jumping*”. Jill Hopke sees the key features of frame jumping as being episodic and loosely coordinated and she uses transnational to distinguish the Global Frackdown as a movement which emphasises “communication processes that transcend nation-states” (p. 1) but are not in every region. Just as in the example of the Global Frackdown, Counting Dead Women transcends nation-states (see below).

Both the planning and dissemination of the Counting Dead Women campaign is highly controlled (as opposed to loosely coordinated) by a small group of people: the Counting Dead Women researchers, in particular Helen, Sheila (also both administrators) and Anne (moderator) and it is not episodic but a continuing narrative. However, Counting Dead Women emerged as a by-product of a grassroots movement which existed only briefly through crowd-enablement and soon used hybrid tactics to achieve its goals. It is consistent, non-personalised, tightly-controlled in its production yet highly-shared.

There have been more than 300 posts over the course of the campaign and each post, accompanied by a discrete image which Facebook categorises as a photo, was shared on average 400 times. I argue that while the frame itself is not personalisable in the way that the “we are the 99 per cent” frame is personalisable - and is not personalised to the individual sharer, nevertheless individuals sharing the memorialised post of the dead woman do so as a way of contributing to a “mutually valued project in order to produce a public good”. (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 34). While some of those sharers may be survivors of family violence, there are rarely instances where sharers express their own experience. In this way, it is not a personal action frame exactly in the way described by Bennett and Segerberg but the goal of the sharers is the same, to be seen to be contributing to change. The sharers are showing solidarity with Counting Dead Women.

While Wright (2015, p.424) argues that “connective actions are premised on easily transferable and customizable memes or action frames in which the message is sufficiently open to interpretation that a wide group of people can support it, albeit often for very



different reasons”, the message of Counting Dead Women is not open to interpretation. It is distinctly a memorial to women who have died violently. The sharing of these Counting Dead Women images illustrates both the sharers’ commitment to the cause of stopping violence against women and to signalling their commitment to that cause - the sharing binds the sharer to the performed political stance and to others with that same stance, in a form of group identification with those seeking to stop violence against women (Gerbaudo, 2015).

While Paolo Gerbaudo (2015, p. 1) argues for the memetic significance of avatars as “durable foundational elements of contemporary social movements” because of their “vagueness and inclusivity”, this underestimates those with serious political commitment to a cause or purpose for whom sharing an image may be the only available form of participation. An image, meme, avatar or ‘personal action frame’ doesn’t diminish the significance of the shareable or viral artefact, nor should virality be seen as a disqualification of the potency of its politics despite Morozov’s (2011) rejection of the internet as a platform for increased participation and César Rendueles and Heather Cleary’s (2013) trivialisation of actions on social media as an example of cyberfetishism. César Rendueles and Heather Cleary argue that “Facebook users unite . . . in being Facebook users” (p.73) rather than participating in anything approaching social change. That trivialisation ignores social media’s role in sharing information through information activism (as discussed in an earlier chapter). Actively disseminating information about a shared commitment to a reduction in fatal violence against women is no less potent because it’s represented by an image. Instead, it is building a collective identity borne of connective action but without using the vectors of personalised action frames.

These threads come together: the inability to personalise the shared artefact, the recognition that fatal violence against women is a longstanding narrative; and the sharing, the solidarity against fatal violence. These elements make Counting Dead Women posts digital solidarity frames, however, more specifically, they are transnational digital solidarity frames as they are affiliated with the original Counting Dead Women in the United Kingdom. The frame is transnational because Counting Dead Women began in the UK, then in Australia. It now has groups across a dozen countries, some of which began because their representatives asked DTJ if they could start their own group. We put them in touch with Karen Ingala Smith. The use of the phrase Counting Dead Women frames solidarity with its originator, Counting Dead

Women and, using Westby's (2002) alignments, Counting Dead Women in Australia has also been able to access Ingala Smith as a consultant who was able to share information about the processes and guidelines she applies in Counting Dead Women. The Counting Dead Women posts express a solidarity with meaning and intent but are not personalisable in the way in which campaigns such as "We are the 99 percent" are able to be personalised. The work of Stier, Schünemann & Steiger (2017, p. 1923) shows that advocacy groups (of which DTJ is an example) are much more likely to use connective action frames and framing in order to influence agendas and that, in contrast, "traditional political actors mostly refer to established actors, institutions and processes of policy making, followed suit by traditional media and online media". A move away from a personalisable action frame framed a steady message to draw attention to fatal violence against women, more aligned with messages from traditional political actors and was able to influence traditional political actors.

This digital solidarity frame - and clearly digital because of its organising platform - focussing on fatal violence against women, works to engage the viewer in thinking about an issue which is notoriously hard to attract attention. It is, as Lisa Miller (2013, p. 285) argues, difficult to turn fatal violence against women into a first-order problem because it is continual, unrelenting or, as Howe puts it, "its very constancy renders it commonplace" (Howe, 2014, p. 277). In Howe's analysis of Karen Ingala Smith's work, he describes it as relentless with a "shock value destined to have an impact far greater than that of the endless recitation of the two-women-a week statistic" (p. 288). He also argues that she has challenged "academic feminist definitions of femicide that failed to name men as the perpetrators" (Howe, 2014, p. 288)., which, as earlier described by Kylie Valentine and Jan Breckenridge (2016), tends to focus on disruption of male power. The ambition to disrupt male power and control is laudable but, in the meantime, a symbolic approach, such as the symbolism of Counting Dead Women, may provide an alternative short-term route to change.

This chapter has outlined what administrators and moderators agree are the key campaigns of DTJ through an exploration of individual campaigns, attributing specific campaigning techniques to each campaign. It expands on the construction of the key image in the Counting Dead Women campaign, including both the pictorial and numeric elements, and it argues for a new category of image artefact in connective action: a transnational digital solidarity frame, which resists personalisation. This is a tool of connective action which includes elements of

connective action, withstands individualisation and promotes a feminist collective identity while standing opposed to violence against women.

## **Chapter 8: Taking its toll: the bad news and the good on emotional labour in feminist activism**

This chapter explores emotional labour and emotional capital and how those concepts sit in the broader study of the politics of emotion and the results of this study. I analyse what research participants said about three distinct but intertwined themes: the **emotional labour of activism in the feminist sphere**; the **emotional labour of dealing with other activists** and, more briefly, the **emotional labour of dealing with attacks on the page**.

Social scientists have for some time recognised the importance of emotions in the social and the impact of emotions on the practice of activism (Aminzade & McAdam, 2002; Gould, 2002; Kim, 2002; Taylor & Rupp, 2002; Stets & Turner, 2006). One early focus was that of the role of managing emotion in the workplace. I demonstrate that working as a feminist activist in this Australian setting requires emotional labour, the emotional work of being an activist, the need to manage emotions in order to continue to be activist. The emotion work of being an activist can lead to burnout and this is therefore construed as negative (Chen & Gorski, 2015; Gorski, 2015). I also outline what my participants said about what can be construed as emotional labour and emotional capital (Nowotny, 1981; Reay, 2004). I argue that these activists acquire emotional capital through participation in DTJ and Counting Dead Women, and may also acquire it through the attendant emotional labour they expend while being activists. Emotional capital, a form of social capital (Nowotny, 1981), was once identified as being acquired solely in the private sphere but as women have inhabited the public sphere, they bring with them emotional capital and its benefits which they have acquired in the private sphere. Those benefits include “knowledge, contacts and relations as well as access to emotionally valued skills and assets which hold within any social network characterised at least partly by affective ties.” (Nowotny, 1981, p. 148). Emotional labour was always identified as being in the public sphere.

Emotional labour, as argued by Arlie Hochschild (1983), is the management of emotions for the benefit of paid employment, where managing those emotions is the labour of managing feelings in order to be commodifiable for the benefit of the employer. Hochschild (1979) identified emotion as both a quantifiable and commodifiable resource and explored what it meant to manage emotion. She argued that emotion worked privately, that is, in the private sphere, to sustain relationships; and she used the phrase ‘emotion work’ for what is

performed in a domestic setting, recognising that women developed their capacity for warmth and empathy in that private or domestic setting. In some ways, this bears some similarity to the origins of emotional capital (Nowotny, 1981).

However, activists also must both experience and manage emotions in the spaces where they volunteer. Just as paid employment is in the public sphere, volunteer work as an activist is in the public sphere. However, I contend that because of personal commitment to a cause, activism is a site for emotional labour comparable to paid employment.

The activists I interviewed consistently revealed their reactions to their involvement and the way in which those reactions impacted their experience of activism. Eileen, in interview, said her experience led her to step away from feminist activism.

I suppose, to a smaller extent, I started to get a little bit gun-shy on certain issues that I had to deal with. I suppose eventually all the things that triggered me and upset me had a little bit of a cumulative effect. I got to the point sometimes where I'd go, "Oh, no, I've got to do a [moderating session]. What's going to happen? What am I going to have to deal with?" As I said, all of those things added together led to me stepping down.

Faith (in interview) acknowledged both the difficulty of the experience and the way in which she had to manage her emotions:

Sometimes I think that when things have been very trying, when we've had a full pile-on of whatever sort, it's very hard not to take that pile-on personally . . . [she was] playing me these voice mail messages that people had left basically threatening to kill her and then rape her and then kill her a few more times.

Faith's story is one of emotional labour, the story of the management of feelings. It tends not to be recognised (Hochschild, 1979; 2003) or is undervalued (Green, 2018). Likewise, on DTJ, emotional labour is not recognised or is undervalued because, as Green (2018, p. 98) argues, "it is hard to measure; it does not yield to the format of a spreadsheet . . . and it is

something that women are perceived to ‘do naturally’.” However, I contend it is identified and recognised as a form of exchange within the volunteer digital activist workplace.

While I have already discussed the ‘dailiness’ of the tasks required for activism, that constant doing is also accompanied by constant feeling. As Bessie said, in interview: “I was just exhausted from trying to throw all those balls up in the air.” Emma, also in interview, said she felt very “tired and downtrodden”. Despite the juggling and the exhaustion, they both managed those feelings and kept up their activism.

Constance, in interview, provided a specific example:

Obviously the biggest problems, since I've been there, was a certain admin who was always . . . spending a lot of time and emotional labour ‘fixing’ the problems that kept happening in the moderators and at time to time in the administrators. That was all quite exhausting, and, of course, when that admin went, the problems went too. That was one person I had quite a big issue with, because when she wanted to come back she wasn't welcome. That obviously caused a bit of nastiness.

Hochschild (1983) repeatedly talks about managing feelings in order to continue to work, about the requirement to ‘carry on’. When Jocelyne (in interview) described her feelings after conflict with another DTJ admin, she said:

Well, I mean this is obviously a very biased perspective but I think that I was exceedingly generous and it's my inclination always to seek reconciliation I suppose and we had a job to do I just let it slide. She apologized, I let it slide but I can't say I ever trusted her again.

“We had a job to do.” These feelings that my interviewees expressed about their activist experience align with my own. It has a strong hold over me and impacts other parts of my life. As Hochschild says, it’s about applying “a sense of ‘should’ to the situated feelings that emerge in the course of a week” (1979, p.572), it’s about having a job to do and putting aside the hurt sense of self.

Emotions are part of activism – activists are propelled by urgency, purpose and passion and, as Gould (2002) puts it, “Movement participants, animated by a tangled mixture of feelings and calculations, are much more than rational actors.”

Much of what women do at home and in the workplace requires the performance of positive emotion in order to make the machinery of family operate smoothly. However, Arlie Hochschild (1983) wished to separate the domestic space from the workplace, the private sphere from the public sphere. As she put it:

I use the term *emotional labour* to mean the management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display; emotional labour is sold for a wage and therefore has *exchange value*. I use the synonymous terms *emotion work* or *emotion management* to refer to these same acts done in a private context where they have *use value*. (Hochschild, 2003, p.7)

It was purely in a commercial setting, the public sphere, where emotion functioned as a commodity, where it could be bought and sold as a function of labour power, argued Hochschild (1983). She gave the example of flight attendants who must not only do the physical toil of their work - pushing trolleys, cleaning and serving - they must also be charming and forever smiling. Hochschild defined this as a labour which required one “to induce or suppress feeling in order to sustain the outward countenance that produces the proper state of mind in others” (1983, p. 7). By others, she means the consumers of the product and in the case of flight attendants, the passengers who are comforted by the ceaseless cheer of the flight attendant. As she points out in her work, those industries where emotional labour can be identified are likely to be female-dominated industries. For the workers, feelings are managed while doing paid work, in order to do that paid work to meet the expectations of employers or as Hochschild (2003, p.5) puts it, “the emotional style of offering the service is part of the service itself”.

The list of jobs and industries which require emotional labour for success is documented by a number of researchers: television (Hesmondhalgh & Baker, 2008); tour guiding (Van Dijk, Smith & Cooper, 2011); hospitality (Seymour, 2000); and call centre operations (Mulholland, 2002). Or, as Hochschild puts it: “funeral parlour director, the doctor, the complaints clerk,

the day-care worker all apply a sense of "should" to the situated feelings that emerge in the course of a week" (1979, p.572). Therefore, emotional labour is that labour of managing feelings in the course of one's work for the benefit of one's work.

Specifically, I argue that as activists work on campaigns, they also work with other activists and come face-to-face with the perpetually participatory nature of online activism. In other words, they emotionally labour. It is a requirement to manage the feelings in this setting in much the same way as it is a requirement in paid work – activists must manage their own feelings, their feelings about each other, and about the impact of both campaigning and campaigns in order to achieve their end goals. Activism is outward-facing, in the public sphere, and the emotion work of families is in the private sphere, inward-facing. Both of these are unpaid work but it is important to note that in activism, there is the outward-facing emotional labour in response to both the way in which the activism is communicated or in response to the subject of the activism, and the inward facing emotional labour which deals with the way activists deal with each other and their own feelings about both the focus of the activism and each other.

Emotional labour in activism is well theorised however but it is mainly seen as a volunteer act and its work as 'pleasure' (Jarrett, 2015, p. 2), as an act of discretion. Instead, these activists consider this to be 'work' and manage their emotions and behaviour.

They behave in a particular way for the cause, because they believe in the cause; and they also produce for the cause, or as Bruns (2008) argues, they are producers for their particular cause and produce artefacts for that cause, as well as of course, being both the audience and cheerleader/advocates for that cause. Although they are unpaid, neither selling their work nor having their work sold for them, what they produce has a use-value for a campaign. Fuchs (2014, p.303) argues digital labour creates value but "digital labour power is not a commodity. It is unpaid and not sold as a commodity". Yet making communication is the result of work, and activist digital labour creates, delivers and executes. Its actors mobilise and organise, in order to achieve a goal. The emotional labour of activists is conducted in order to achieve change. This intersection of what Lazzarato (1996) calls immaterial labour and production is, I would argue, at a higher level of intensity than it is in paid work. As Lazzarato (1996, p.137) posits:



The particularity of the commodity produced through immaterial labor (its essential use value being given by its value as informational and cultural content) consists in the fact that it is not destroyed in the act of consumption, but rather it enlarges, transforms, and creates the "ideological" and cultural environment of the consumer.

This is precisely the impact that feminist activists work towards. In addition, this 'work' place, like much volunteer work, is more similar to paid work than it is similar to a domestic setting. Activists work with a range of people – while they may work along people with whom they had a prior relationship, it is unlikely that covers everyone. Activists must accommodate those who are strangers, a more challenging process than accommodating those with whom we are familiar.

In the case of DTJ, only a couple of people knew each other to any extent before the page began and this digital activism provided an opportunity for strangers to work together for a common cause, for strangers to become sisters.

In the interviews, there were specific mentions of the structures in place in DTJ: the Facebook page itself, group private messages on Facebook, a number of groups which had different sets of people in them who were undertaking different tasks. These were used to organise the work of this iteration of activism. Helen, for example, said: "This particular [online] way of going about things was so new to me that I was constantly learning new ways of interacting". While Helen was not a person who expressed much discomfort or disagreement with other participants, Julia was up front about feelings of conflict:

I think the group dynamics can be interesting, sometimes they can be a little edgy, I think and I think that's because it's a group of people, mainly women, who are going to have lots of different opinions. I've had my arguments with people. (Julia, in interview)

She said that while everyone had a core belief of feminism, there were:

[A] whole lot of different belief structures as well. They're not necessarily then people who would be your close friends in real life either . . . women who you don't know for real, I guess within there, there's a few people who might know each other in real life but lots of people wouldn't, I don't. That's quite interesting and I think it's quite interesting negotiating your way through relationships which are online in that kind of way. (Julia, in interview)

When Hochschild, as quoted earlier, says workers “apply a sense of ‘should’ to the situated feelings that emerge in the course of a week” (1979, p. 572) feminist activists must also do this. They feel they should work to produce a harmonious activist environment in order to create and deliver a successful campaign, to mobilise and to organise, to make meaning and to sustain meaning, to produce change. Part of the production of change is emotionally labouring, as explored by Mackay (2015), in her research on the British Women’s Liberation Movement from the Second Wave. She reveals the expenditure required by activists involved in feminist activism. She lists both financial and physical outlays but also highlights the emotional labour. In addition, she details some of what that emotional labour entails, including the experience of being “ridiculed and stereotyped” (Mackay, 2015b, p. 33). Mackay gives as an example such abuse as extremist or man-hating, very familiar to any activist involved in online feminist activism. She quotes one of her interview participants, Lucy, 24, a white, heterosexual feminist, as saying: “There are horrible stereotypes, about feminists, you know; hairy, man-hating lesbians. Yeah, just that sort of thing is really frustrating, the associations of feminism.”

Yet in order to continue to function as an activist, these emotionally difficult experiences must be managed and overcome. It is how these experiences are managed and overcome that become, in summary, emotional labour, in order to continue activism. There is extensive research around the responses to feminists online and feminist activism online (Beard, 2017; Jane, 2016, 2017; Poland, 2016; Lewis, Rowe, & Wiper 2016; 2018) – but emotional labour entails more than enduring the ridicule and stereotyping which comes with public feminist activism. As explored earlier, Hochschild says it is the management of feelings for the purpose of paid work. Mulholland (2002, p. 285), also exploring the commercial aspects of emotional labour, says the “product of emotional labour is the state of mind and the feelings of the customer”. She makes the observation that the employee, the producer of emotional

labour, must persuade the customer of the virtue of the product. Most importantly for the case of DTJ, Mulholland, (2002, p. 285) identifies:

[Another] aspect of emotional labour [which] entails the management of employees' own feelings as defined by enterprise needs, when they become the business ambassadors of their companies, magnifying the importance of performance during the employee/customer interaction.

Mulholland's work examined emotional labour in the commercial setting of a call centre dealing with inquiries about a broadcast organisation. She explored the conflict between knowledge-sharing and productivity which is also a tension in non-commercial settings (such as activism), where the 'cost' is disposable time. In particular, she reveals the inner workings of the night shift in the call centre, where call-centre operators have more time to share knowledge with each other but, in this research, also extend their emotional labour, as is demonstrated by the activists of DTJ. Mulholland (2002, p. 296) writes that the call centre operators were sometimes "required to demonstrate empathy and sensitivity with callers".

### **Dealing with key feminist concerns such as family violence**

The way in which the activists dealt with family violence and other key feminist concerns on a daily basis had daily impacts on the activists themselves. During the interviews, a number of activists talked about the struggle to maintain composure when dealing with confronting posts on the page or conversations with each other.

Inez, a moderator, was exhausted both by the content of the page and by the constant trolling:

I was a single mother at the time and it was emotionally draining. Theoretically we were just moderating the page and getting rid of comments but you can't help but be affected by the stories that have been posted that day or being impacted by the kind of negative comments that were being made. They were really either homophobic, or extremely sexist or extremely racist and it takes its toll. Also, when you're doing that kind of work, you're putting your heart and soul into the process and so therefore that takes a lot of commitment and a lot of emotional commitment as well. (Inez, in interview)

Mulholland's interview with Agent Eva is particularly appropriate for DTJ where the discussion of fatal violence against women is a daily event. "It was very upsetting for me listening to her. I felt like crying. But you have to listen and be sympathetic. You let them talk and say you understand" (Agent Eva, 1999 in Mulholland 2002, p. 296).

This instance is replicated behind the scenes of DTJ as admins and moderators deal with each other about these incidents but also deal with those who post on the page and those who send private messages about their grief. I too found dealing with disclosures about family violence exhausting. However, it was particularly difficult for admins and moderators who had themselves experienced family violence. As the page began to develop a focus on violence against women, some admins and moderators found themselves needing to step away.

Faith, a moderator who was an admin briefly, said:

I think that one consequence of that is that the people who are in there doing it they get, a), very emotionally invested, and b), very upset. We had people like [one admin] who had to dial out [leave], because she was so triggered by it all. (Faith, in interview)

This replicates Mulholland's description of what happens to those who have to 'listen', that it is an emotional load which is hard to manage.

Helen, in interview, also took the trolling to heart:

Sometimes I think that when things have been very trying, when we've had a full pile-on of whatever sort, it's very hard not to take that pile-on personally.

Or as Eileen, another moderator, said, in interview:

There were other nights when modding was absolutely difficult because you were dealing with either some really hard issues that you had to read through, and I get really triggered by the violence and the sexual assault and, like I said, the transgender stuff. I'm a really over-sensitive person, so that was really hard for me sometimes. I

really just wanted to walk away from modding sessions some nights, because it was just really psychologically terrible, but I knew that I had a job to do, so I just, as Shakespeare said, ‘screwed my courage to the sticking place’ and just stayed where I was.

That ‘screwing the courage to the sticking place’ to which Eileen refers explains what Bolton (2000a) means when she provides a typology of four categories of emotional labour or what she calls “emotion management”, the forced labour of constraining emotions in paid employment. The first is “presentational”, by which she means managing emotions by accepted social rules. This could include celebrating birthdays of those with whom we work, cake at morning tea. This presentational aspect is one which occurred in the operational pages of DTJ, virtual cakes appear every time it is someone’s birthday.

The second category in Bolton’s typology is “philanthropic” emotion management, which she represents as giving the gift of caring in the process of work - and that is something which occurred regularly in quite a performative way, the added love emojis or heart emojis at the end of messages among and between administrators and moderators were a sign of caring either in private messages to one another or in the groups where organisation of the page took place. In addition, there was and is a sense of playfulness and support. Eva, a moderator, described (in interview) the characteristics of those involved in the page:

Sense of humour, look, you have to be fairly resilient, I guess. You have to have a fairly strong sense of who you are, flexible, patient sometimes, bloody minded possibly, sensible and a good team player. You know really, puns are good. If there's a difficult situation going, a good pun can really dissipate all that anger and hostility.

Bolton’s typology provides two more categories: “prescriptive” emotion management and “pecuniary” emotion management. “Prescriptive” emotion management includes abiding by a code of conduct. In the case of DTJ, there are moderating guidelines for administrators and moderators and the Facebook page itself has Commenting Guidelines for those who comment on the page. Both these sets of guidelines are an attempt to make sure that the Facebook page (Destroy The Joint 2012g) remains a secure space for discussion of feminist issues.

Finally, Bolton explores “pecuniary” management of emotions, related most directly to commercial outcomes. While there is no overt commercial outcome for DTJ, it utilises the emotional investment in feminism by administrators, moderators and those who post on the page to raise funds for the promotion of Facebook posts.

Of all Bolton’s categories, it is important to acknowledge the work of some of the long-time moderators and admins in trying to make this kind of activism more sustainable, using “philanthropic” emotion management category (Bolton, 2000a). These activists created posts which would encourage personal reflection and discussions about how we were all going, who was experiencing stress outside DTJ, how our lives were in general. I recognised that was useful although I was less comfortable disclosing my own personal circumstances. The usefulness of those reflective spaces to ensure activism stays sustainable is clear in the literature (Brown & Pickerell, 2009, p.11), but they also express a clear challenge, at least for someone like me: “How do we create spaces for these difficult emotional responses to be expressed freely, opened up, discussed, and then processed, challenged and potentially re-formed? How do we include those who are resistan[t] to such processes?”

I did not seek permission to share from the private Facebook groups but I will make a generic comment about them. The majority of admins and moderators were happy to share their feelings and experiences on these threads, even if it was just the day-to-day events of our lives. One of the moderators said of these kinds of conversations: “It's quite interesting negotiating your way through relationships which are online in that kind of way.” As Rosa said, in interview:

I think the people, yes, because you're not seeing people and you don't see their, all their non-verbal clues. People can be harsher and make ... It's easier to misinterpret people. Also when people are online they could be drunk or affected by drugs and you wouldn't know.

Jocelyne too found decoding purely online communication a challenge:

Always difficult. We were established along the lines of a consensus decision making model and that's always hard work, always hard work. Particularly online when you are missing a lot of the non-verbal, well you're missing all of the non-verbal

cues which make up probably more than 60 per cent of communication face to face.  
(Jocelyne, in interview)

These responses show how we developed various ways of dealing with others, both negative (as described by Rosa above) and positive.

I was personally resistant to sharing my emotions with a broad group of colleague activists, in the same way I would not consider sharing my feelings in my paid job, except as they relate to my conditions of employment, there was no way I wanted to be part of disclosing my private emotions with people I did not know well. I wanted to stay 'professional'. That was part of my emotional labour - trying to keep some personal distance from all these people who I suddenly found myself dealing with on a daily basis.

Those emotions and their performance – the manufacture of niceness, politeness and empathy - are the actual emotions performed as emotional labour (Taylor and Tyler, 2000). Other iterations include enthusiasm, positivity and suppressing negative emotions (Cossette & Hess, 2015). However, some of the emotional labour in activism is also the labour of dealing with anger and grief (Gould, 2002). Taylor and Tyler (2000), in their work on the emotional labour of flight attendants, outlined "building rapport" or "empathising" (Taylor & Tyler, 2000, p. 86). As one of their subjects said: "You can't let yourself be impolite with a customer or be angry with them". Cossette (2015) also explored the use of emotional labour in customer service agents, where enthusiasm and positivity are used in order to suppress negativity. Agents were instructed to deliver service with a smile. This instruction is interpreted as external motivation by employers and in Cossette's study, was linked to suppression of negative emotions.

Jocelyne, in interview, described some of the internal workings in DTJ and makes the need to 'carry on' explicit:

When you're dealing with people who are squabbling, when people are making unhelpful contributions. When people are just being frankly, barking mad and you've got to deal with them and be sensible as you're dealing with them . . . and try and put your own baggage aside, that's hard work.

Gould (2002), for example, illustrates the way in which AIDS activists marshalled their grief into anger which in turn fed what she describes as militant activism. She argues that AIDS activists in ACT UP were able to do emotion work which transformed grief into action. She gives the example of the display of the Names Project Quilt, a quilt which had the names of those who had died of AIDS-related complications, exhibited in Washington and was a central focus for grief. However ACT UP activists went to the exhibition and handed out pamphlets which on one side said: “SHOW YOUR ANGER TO THE PEOPLE WHO HELPED MAKE THE QUILT POSSIBLE: OUR GOVERNMENT”.

The reverse side of the pamphlet said:

The Quilt helps us remember our lovers, relatives, and friends who have died during the past eight years. These people have died from a virus. But they have been killed by our government's neglect and inaction . . . More than 40,000 people have died from AIDS . . . Before this Quilt grows any larger, turn your grief into anger. Turn anger into action. TURN THE POWER OF THE QUILT INTO ACTION. (ACT UP/NY 1988, capital letter emphasis theirs). (Gould, 2002, p. 7))

In summary, emotional labour is the expression of socially desired emotions during service interactions (Ashforth & Humphrey, 1993) and includes the management of a whole range of emotions for many purposes (Mulholland 2002; Mackay, 2011a, 2011b; Bolton, 2000a, 2000b). I argue that activism is a form of service interaction both within the activist group and with external participants in the activism of DTJ, service interactions in service to the cause. There is also emotional labour within activist groups to keep those groups together, to build solidarity within the group. Emotions build commitment, argues Edward Lawler, Jeongkoo Yoon and Shane Thye (Lawler & Yoon, 1998; Lawler, Thye, & Yoon, 2000) or as Kim (2002, p. 161) puts it, “Emotions provide effective motivational forces”.

### **The aspects of activism**

Activism includes labour and effort - physical, financial, intellectual - and all this is documented. However, it also includes emotional labour which is often construed as negative, as if the expenditure of emotion, or the use of emotion in work, is just another way for women to be exploited (Hochschild, 1983). However, as women are generally constructed



as more emotional, even though they may not in reality be more emotional (Barrett, Feldman, Petromonaco, & Eysell, 1998), I claim that for women and, in particular for feminist activists, emotional labour which then accrues as emotional capital, is positive. Emotions and feelings practised as part of emotional labour are accrued as emotional capital through the practice of activism. These ongoing emotions which are experienced during the labour of doing activism build emotional capital and they manifest as an activist's habitus, the durable dispositions of activism. Social movements tap into shared emotions (Jasper, 1998; Bosco, 2007; Collins, 2001) and Bosco (2007, p. 558) says emotional bonds "permit the generation and sustainability of collective action under difficult conditions". I believe the experience of those emotions builds solidarity with each other, commitment to the cause and capability through embedded responses. This, in some way, goes towards answering Bosco's questions of "how the emergence, continuity and/or dissolution of various geographies of resistance can be explained in part by analysing the multiple relations between the emotional underpinnings of activism and the diverse organisational forms of social movements" (Bosco, 2007, p. 559). To put it more plainly, feminist activism is underpinned by more than ideology. It is also underpinned by the collective identity of the feminist activists and by their relationship to each other. The ideology, the collective identity and the relationships of activists to each other exist in context and that context shifts, thereby applying pressures on social movements.

One of the mods, Anne, who also is integral to the Counting Dead Women project, talks about what she sees as the 'emotional underpinnings of activism', 'the diverse organisational forms'. When asked whether this form of activism can be sustainable, she said:

I can't see why not. I see it a bit like the Dread Pirate Roberts [the famed character in *The Princess Bride*]. The Dread Pirate Roberts can carry on. The actual person who is the Dread Pirate Roberts doesn't have to be the same all the time. I think it's perfectly possible. If I get hit by a bus tomorrow, DtJ isn't going to fall in a heap. Possibly if all of us got hit by a bus, it might, but I feel certain that there would be friends of friends or people who knew people or whatever who would be willingly dragged in to do exactly the same things, possibly in different ways. It may evolve and change according to the personalities who are involved in it at any time, but I think it's a bit like that. That's one of the good things about us having D numbers and

things [D numbers are used in place of names as a way to keep the identities of moderators and administrators reasonably private on the site]. Even though initially there was a bit of a media [attention, some of it very critical], and I know you get copped with it because your name is known, and other people who were initially involved and whose name is known probably still have to wear it a bit, but because the majority of us are completely anonymous, there isn't an overt personality. Yeah, I don't see any reason why it wouldn't be sustainable in the long term. (Anne, in interview)

As Anne points out, the construct of sustainability is more than the existence of one activist. She argues that DTJ is a community where people work together to build a bigger identity than any one individual activist. Yet, there is a need to think about what sustains activists, since activists are at the very foundation of movements. The emotional connection both with the cause and among the activists who support the cause make a movement sustainable.

### **The emotional labour of doing feminist activism**

Interviews with the activists involved in DTJ highlighted the profound emotional labour of working as an activist. Each interview revealed an activist who described feelings and emotions attached to the various activities of DtJ. This section will explore the emotions experienced and managed by activists during the ongoing campaigning, organising and mobilising required to maintain an online feminist presence on social media, emotions experienced and managed in order to continue working on DTJ.

These emotions described by the subjects are many and varied. Hochschild (1979, p.551) summarises emotion as a bodily response linked to an “image, a thought, a memory” and she uses the terms emotions and feelings interchangeably although she concedes that emotion conveys a “state of being overcome that ‘feeling’ does not”. It is the management of these emotions within and among the admins and moderators of DTJ, and bounding the experience of those emotions as central to participation in DTJ which equates to emotional labour. It is also the management of feelings about the central concerns of the page as well as those experiences of the page being under attack.

The activists speak about the emotions involved with dealing with campaigns and posts on the public Facebook page, the subjects of which are often about harms to women, such as fatal violence, and the way these activists manage those emotions, including taking time out from the page, leaving the page altogether or sharing with other activists in the group. They also talk about the emotions of dealing with other activists in the group. It is the entirety of the management of these emotions, as well as the experience of these emotions, which amounts to emotional labour. In some cases, it is also about dealing with the emotions surrounding conflict resolution, so it is both emotional and relational, the emotions activists themselves experienced and the emotional labour required to resolve those conflicts.

Helen, a psychiatric nurse and academic researcher with strong organisational skills, was recruited to DtJ through a private Facebook message. She, along with two others, is mainly responsible for the management of the Counting Dead Women campaign. Around half of those interviewed explicitly discussed conflict within the group. Helen discusses the cycle of emotions around conflict and its resolution, the emotional labour of resolving disagreements, and her comments highlight how activists experience their own emotions around this:

Really, I'm amazed at how well it works, quite honestly. After all my years of running wards and especially wards in mental institutions, I'm just amazed at how able people are to open up, to be angry without being destructive at times, to ask for help when they need help, and to get support from the group, and to discuss things that we may want to address in different ways. We finally come to an agreement. It doesn't always please everybody, but that's the nature of a group, isn't it? We're able to do that without falling out. (Helen, in interview)

Feminist solidarity, as Dean (1997) points out, is often constructed in opposition to those who seek to deny women equal rights - but the us/them duality in some respects, forces the 'us' to be more homogenous and more exclusionary. As she argues, once we move away from that, it "makes possible an *inward* opening up of the criteria for membership and accepts differences among members . . . recognising another as a member despite her difference means that we must remain attuned to the possibility of omission" (Dean, 1997, p. 32).

Helen's experience of DTJ is one where she says, in interview, that the activists involved are able to express their feelings but without destruction of what exists - without "burning everything down". Her view is that the internal structures encourage the emotional labour of emotion sharing which allows activists to get the support they need and gives an indication of this being a process of repetition. As she puts it: "We finally come to an agreement. It doesn't always please everybody, but that's the nature of a group, isn't it? We're able to do that without falling out."

However, others had experiences that showed this was not always true. There was quite a bit of "falling out" as has been described in Gunilla's response to DTJ's sex work policy. That disagreement was about serious policy issues. Gunilla was very upset about the issue of sex work and felt there had not been enough or appropriate consultation about the decision to support the agency of sex workers, despite this decision being formed from the consensus of the whole group.

But there was also a lot of infighting that had more to do with personalities than with political priorities. One moderator, Bell (in interview), described this as the big challenge for the sustainability of any feminist group: "The personalities not getting in the way of each other, being able to resolve that conflict in a way that's productive."

Bell makes it clear that the continued existence of the group relies on administrators and moderators being able to "resolve that conflict" in order to keep working towards the goal of highlighting and eradicating sexism and misogyny but at no point does she talk about how she would resolve her feelings about those conflicts herself, in contrast to Jocelyne, who was with DTJ as an admin for about two years. Jocelyne spoke very openly about intra-admin conflicts. As she says, DtJ was originally established with a "consensus decision making model" (again fitting with the prefigurative politics of the people involved), a style of open organising which requires constant communication, emotional labour in itself; and she speaks about the workload of dealing with the process of open organising in an online setting:

That's always hard work, always hard work. Particularly online when you are missing a lot of the non-verbal, well you're missing all of the non-verbal cues which make up probably more than 60% of communication face to face. (Jocelynn, in interview)

Jocelynn addressed one of the difficulties of online organising – the challenge of understanding someone else without either seeing that person's response face-to-face or hearing the tone of voice. This is the “hard work” and I argue that this part of the emotional labour of online organising is under-recognised. Misunderstanding among and between activists is a real challenge for those of us working as activists online – there is no ‘tone-of-voice’, no expression to be detected either visually or aurally. Time pressures also mean you can't just phone someone up to check that you understand what they mean.

Riordan (2017, p.85) argues: “Emojis serve to reduce ambiguity in messages, a role that is especially important considering the communication context”. However, emojis are often used to be ironic, sarcastic, misleading, aggressive, some or all of those things at once or not used at all. One of our administrators decided to make sure people understood her real feelings by writing “irony font” or “sarcasm font” on every post which she felt might be misunderstood by others.

Jocelynn spoke about the stresses of dealing with conflicts within the admin team. DTJ has always had two groups which run the page, the admin group (the people who were administrators of the page but also had financial and governance responsibilities) and the moderators' group. The size of each group has varied over time. The admin group has varied in size from four to seven. The moderators' group has varied in size from 15 to 40 (at the peak of the Alan Jones campaign).

There has always been intense discussion within the moderators' group about the direction of DTJ. The admin group is normally quite close-knit with similar values and approaches, however, there has been one notable issue in the period under review:

We [the admins] had our own space, our own Facebook space and it was a bit of a refuge sometimes. When that became conflictual it was incredibly difficult to do the role . . . another admin [...] wrote a letter to the admin team and put it out on the

Facebook page [a Facebook private group] that we occupied accusing me of being dictatorial and, I can't remember now actually what the criticism was but it was pretty damning stuff that she'd said. It was completely untrue . . . she said I'd failed to respond to communication from her, which was untrue . . . We didn't have any policies around behaviour [among] the group. (Jocelynn, in interview)

Jocelynn went on to explain the emotional burden that placed on her, and that this conflict affected the admin group for about two weeks. Jocelynn left not long after this. The admin who had accused Jocelynn eventually left of her own accord but wanted to return. This incident prompted the remaining admins to exclude her from returning to DTJ. The emotional labour, the management of emotions during the organising of activism, was a constant task and quite draining. As Jessie said, in interview: "It could be a rough ride sometimes, and it can be hard work."

Both Jocelynn and others spoke of the way this incident occupied the consciousness of those involved - the burden of trying to negotiate how decisions were made and how conflict should be resolved. Beyond what happens in the admins group, the disagreements participants experienced were many and varied. Based on the interview data, they include the trivial and the serious, from the timing and length of Facebook posts to the page to whether a woman counted in Counting Dead Women should be counted as a fatality as a result of violence against women. A young woman with autism, Courtney Topic,<sup>7</sup> was killed by police because she approached them with a knife. Was this death the result of violence against women? Or was her death similar to other deaths of those who threatened police? (Zhou, 2018)

There have been a number of internal arguments about whether women murdered by other women should be counted or whether DtJ should write posts in support of sex workers and their own bodily autonomy. One former moderator explicitly said she left moderation of the Facebook page because the policy of the administrators is to support sex workers and sex workers' agency to choose sex work as work. In addition to these explicitly negative emotions and conflict, there are also the concerns of time pressure and of stress, around the demands of internet activism. Online activists labour in the field of activism for long periods at a time. Separately, eight of the people I interviewed, spoke of the constancy of the

notifications: Patrick said his tabs were “open all the time, notifications rolling in”; Rosa described it as “getting notifications the whole time”; Millicent said “I was checking Facebook for notifications possibly even 10 or 20 times a day, depending on what was going on at that time”.

Though this emotional labour, they build emotional capital. They perform constant digital work and connect through that work. Terranova (2012) has written extensively over the intensification of digital labour as a form of further exploitation of workers and of the way in which audiences are generated in the digital sphere. I argue that these two ideas work in concert in online feminist activism - digital activists are on all the time and that is partly in an attempt to produce an ‘audience’ of the like-minded. Terranova says, “Only some companies are picked up by corporate distribution chains in the case of fashion and music; only a few sites are invested in by venture capital” (2012, p. 41). In some respects, it’s the same for activism - only some causes are picked up, only some succeed in sharing a message. It’s the collective - and in the case of activists, unpaid - labour that makes this possible, makes this necessary. Digital work for the purposes of social change (Jarrett, 2015; Dean, 2012) requires the same intense efforts as that required by digital work for the purposes of capital as outlined by Terranova (2012, p. 47):

[C]ontinuous, updateable work, and it is extremely labour-intensive. It is not enough to produce a good website; you need to update it continuously to maintain interest in it and fight off obsolescence.

In the case of DTJ, traffic slows the fewer times we post each day; traffic grows when we post on the topical. But keeping it relevant and engaging is a huge amount of work. This work is continuous and must be constantly updated. One male moderator, Patrick, who volunteered during the Alan Jones campaign said it was just open tabs with notifications rolling in all the time:

Constantly on. First thing in the morning, last at night, always helping with the moderation job. I thought we were doing super significant, interesting stuff. (Patrick, in interview)

During the interviews, every administrator and moderator said they looked at the page and/or at the private Facebook groups which support the page every day. This is, as I have explained, daily activism. There are costs and benefits to this daily activism. The time allocated to this varied widely - from moderators who said that the time they spent on the page or its support mechanisms totalled about four hours a week to those who said they felt as if it was a constant presence in daily life. For example, I always have a tab open on my laptop to see how the page is going, always have the Facebook Page app open on my phone. One moderator who has subsequently left because of work pressures said that even while she was at work, she would look at the page once an hour to check in to see if those posting on the page were adhering to the posting guidelines, in other words to moderate the page in order for conversation to be civil.

Despite the expenditure of emotional capital, we are at work on the project of dismantling patriarchy and throughout this load, borne by hundreds of thousands of feminists the world over, we have the companionship of working together and chatting together. Richardson (2016) in her feminist analysis of digital work says digital technologies both “extend and intensify” work. It makes it hard to switch off. As Jessie (in interview) said when I asked her how much time she spent looking at the page when she was an administrator and a moderator, “probably at least hundreds of times a day”. Rosa said she felt as if she had a double life, her full-time job during the day and her social media obligations straight after work:

I think I basically just lived two lives. What was happening during the day at work. Then I'd go home and all I would do was the page. Living by yourself and not having all of those other obligations made that easier but it meant I pretty much had no social life for a long period of time because that's what I was doing. (Rosa, in interview)

For me, I too had all the tabs open all the time, checking and re-checking. During our interview for this research, I asked Jocelyne, who was also an admin and a moderator at the beginning of DTJ. She too estimated that she checked the Facebook page 100 times a day. This was a really different experience to offline organising and mobilising – when I first started going to rallies to support the right-to-choose and becoming involved with feminism as a young woman, the pro-choice leaflets couldn't follow me home. They remained in my



consciousness but required no action until the next time an action was planned. Digital organising, on the other hand, is always on and so are the activists.

Rosa, a long-time campaigner, had good insights about the difference between online and offline activism:

When you think about it ... lots of people will talk about this, like various feminists organisations over a long period of time . . . [but] I think that in social media, it's more of a hothouse and it's happening quicker. You're all in there all the time. It's not like you're having one meeting as a collective and it goes for an hour. [in DTJ at the beginning] I was hardly getting any sleep. I'm sure you weren't either. (Rosa, in interview)

### **Does this iteration of digital activism also provide its own style of sisterhood/space?**

Fotopoulou (2014) argues that Web 2.0 platforms still complement existing activist practices and that this means there is no extant 'digital sisterhood', that the current practice of digital activism must sit alongside existing activist practice. Even since Fotopoulou's (201) research, we see that some digital practices, including hashtags such as #metoo, have wrought change without a single rally, leaflet or committee meeting.

People feel highly connected as administrators and moderators in this group. My immediately prior experience of a feminist collective was in 2010 as a member of the F collective which ran Sydney's first feminist conference in 20 years (Sydney is Australia's largest capital city). We used Facebook but not in an instrumental way. It was still fun and casual, without purpose. We had regular face-to-face meetings in the run up to the conference and used email and phone to organise. Even with the impending F conference, we were not highly socially mediated and not having a relationship with everyone at once. We still had those very linear relationships - in terms of time spent, I was more likely to have conversations with individuals and spent more time having conversations with individuals than in groups. The only real time spent in a group setting was during collective meetings. In the case of DTJ, the mechanism for its operation also includes four separate Facebook groups: one for the administrators, one for the administrators and the moderators; one for those who assist with the Counting Dead Women project; and one for putting ideas in, interesting links, material

which could do with more research, possible material for posts. In almost every instance of relating to others, it is in a group setting. Even on the odd occasion where we have Facebook messages, it is likely to be also with a bigger number than just one-to-one. This provides a structured framework for moderation which, according to the moderators, allows connections among moderators.

Sheila (in interview) discussed the support from the network of moderators:

Because it is a voluntary thing anyone can say I can't manage this today and I can't think of any time someone hasn't said I can't manage this and someone else hasn't said I'll do it for you, so it is very supportive in that way.

Another moderator, Phyllis (in interview), described the community of the group as:

[F]abulous. Lots of humour, which is really important, very supportive of each other . . . it's a really, really lovely group to be part of and, yes, it's good fun, even though it's at times very sad topics that you're dealing with.

Eileen (in interview), who volunteered for three years on one particular day and for one particular shift, said:

I think the crew that I worked with was so supportive and just really backed us all up. That was the good part, and that's the thing that made the task easy, was the fact that there's already a good crew.

These activists were brought together by a collective commitment to feminist activism and to feminist ideals. They were not necessarily friends in the traditional sense of the word but were collegial and supportive of each other, brought together by an instrumental purpose not through friendship. I would also suggest that adding the layer of friendship across the group would add more of a time burden to the work of activism and these women are already short of time. As Julia (in interview) put it, “[t]hey're not necessarily people who would be your close friends in real life either but I think that's a really good thing”.

The emotional labour required to ensure harmony among the group is mentioned by a number of the interview subjects. Emma (in interview), the youngest of all the moderators, brought up the sustainability of DTJ. She described the effort as ‘constant’ and ‘wearing’. Another, Gunilla, the moderator who decided to leave the group after the rejection of her views on sex work, resented the leadership group:

There needs to be change within leadership because I think when you have three or four women who start something and are seen as leaders . . . sometimes they need to move on (Gunilla, in interview)

She said that she:

perceived prostitution as being a form of violence against women . . . I know that there were people in Destroy the Joint who didn't feel that way . . . my view would be that prostitution [is] a form of violence against women, and the community is not empowering at all, and it's not about choice. (Gunilla, in interview)

When Gunilla left the DTJ community, she said the time commitment (four hours a week) was the significant factor, but in her interview for this thesis a year after her departure, she said she could not reconcile her views on sex work with the decision by the community to support sex workers.

This theme of conflict and resolution emerged in interviews with other moderators and it is therefore useful to draw upon what Freeman (1972) calls the “tyranny of structurelessness” which she identified as a challenge to the style of open organising to which DTJ admin and moderators aspired at its inception. The concept of the tyranny of structurelessness is that when there is no structure, those with the loudest voices impose structure. As Trott (2017) highlights, the connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012) of digital organising, where the platform is the organiser, should be immune to the tyranny of structurelessness, because the organising platform provides the structure. Yet my data shows that individuals involved in DTJ imposed a structure of their own.

The tension around the aspirations of open organising, as explored in the discussion around Jocelyne's interview, and the reality of daily campaigning caused conflict. From the point of view of the administrators, some of the conflict was also about some moderators wanting to have more say but not more responsibility. Joan was very unhappy with the delineation:

A lot of the control of that information and that process was held with the administrators . . . there was a very high segregation between administrators and moderators. I found it quite difficult when the segregation between the administrators and the moderators was very, very clear and very separate. Moderators shouldn't challenge and shouldn't question and shouldn't, necessarily, take action to hide or ban someone without an administrator giving it the go ahead. (Joan, in interview)

Every single moderator who is not an administrator acknowledged the admin group as having separate responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, while a number of those moderators felt they were excluded from key decision making, while not wishing to have any of the bigger responsibilities.

### **What were the main areas of conflict?**

The process of how decisions were made looked different to everyone involved. The aim of keeping it open and consensus-based struggled at times of high external engagement, i.e. when a lot of people came to like, share, or post. There was no question then that there was a small group, the admins, who were in charge.

One moderator described the structure this way:

Well, if I'm going to draw it, it's going to look like a doughnut on the bottom level where all the moderators sit. Then on top of that, there's a smaller doughnut where the admin group sits. It's kind of like ... The admins make all the big decisions and write the posts and talk about the big picture stuff, and you tell the moderators what's going on and ask us to comment and be part of the final decision making, but really you've already decided (Bell, in interview).

That structure also led to some conflict which could be divided into these areas: conflict around beliefs, such as Gunilla's beliefs on sex work, as has been explored elsewhere and conflicts around process, such as decision-making and structures.

Joan grew increasingly hostile to the way in which decisions were made:

Yeah. Yeah, there's been questions. That, again, comes back to, and with, particularly at the time where it was much more structured, there were partly personality clashes, but also clashes in perception of the role. It's quite difficult when, I found it quite difficult when the segregation between the administrators and the moderators was very, very clear and very separate. Moderators shouldn't challenge and shouldn't question and shouldn't, necessarily, take action to hide or ban someone without an administrator giving it the go ahead. There was, previously, lots of interactions I had that weren't particularly pleasant, but they were resolved. I think it's because it can be a highly emotive group because of what we do and the topics that we cover, that clashes are expected to happen, because people are passionate about it. (Joan, in interview)

Gunilla too found the structures restrictive:

The type of leadership is that I think you need is ones who are not going to dictate to the group, that you have that open communication between people and the ability to take on criticisms and critiques of how an organization is being run. (Gunilla, in interview)

Both Gunilla and Joan were moderators and keenly felt a lack of distributed leadership. Millicent, one of the longest serving admins, was concerned about the recruitment process in general. She was concerned that the way in which people were recruited (a Facebook 'friends of friends' process, which later evolved to asking potential recruits to send a description of other activism with which they had been involved) exposed DTJ to a series of risks:

You really can't recruit people [who] nobody knows who they are. On the Internet, somebody can be anybody, and there could be a lot of damage done to the

organisation by recruiting people who are disruptive within it or who are not able to fit within the frameworks that are necessary for an online [group]. (Millicent, in interview)

There was also some reluctance - not conflict exactly but perhaps resistance - when the decision was made to ask for time commitment, in order to be able to provide coverage through a roster system. Gunilla said she found a regular commitment too much to ask from a volunteer:

In terms of a regular, half-a-day commitment per week, I found a bit . . . it was a bit too much for me. The other is, my guess would be, that there, I guess, are broader issues that I wanted to focus on for myself, rather the issues that Destroy the Joint's were focussing on. (Gunilla, in interview)

Gunilla again found the clash in process between her previous offline activism, where she knew everyone involved, to online activism, where she knew no-one, very difficult.

I didn't know who these people were, what their backgrounds were, or what their history was. I couldn't get a good sense of who they were as people," she said. She could not align herself to the decision-making process. (Gunilla, in interview)

Despite the perceived aim of open organising, in DTJ, the decision-making group formed fairly early. This delivers leadership into the hands of the most invested – but the leadership group may appear to have no transparent process or accountability. The aspirations of leaderlessness succumbed to a phenomenon already observed by feminist scholars. Polletta (2002) detailed the tyranny of emotions where activists with the most investment in the cause and perhaps who have the most to lose, who feel most passionate and engaged, take charge because there are no formal power structures. Milan (2012, p. 9) calls this the “‘dictatorship of action’ by which the urgency of taking action may result in decision-making cliques”. There is a clear conflict between taking action in a timely fashion and having consensus.

The interviews with admins and moderators showed a clear pattern - from quite early, this was a large project and a few people took charge. It is one thing to mobilise and get everyone

informed, excited and agitated about a project - it's another to organise effective campaigns which deliver change. Decision-making processes derived this way deliver "miniconsensus" (Milan, 2018, p. 334), where small powerful groups deliver decisions because there are no clear lines of communication within the group or where time demands outrun the aspiration of getting the consensus. Even time demands - deadlines - eat away at consensus. Small groups within the groups form and reform, formed and reformed, depending on the issue. As Gastil (1993) argued, talking outside meetings is the most common way for a miniconsensus to emerge but may also be a way in which consensus is disrupted and no consensus of any kind can ever emerge. Alliances come and go - and this is speeded up in an online setting, where it's possible to have a (more-or-less) public meeting and within minutes also have a back-channel chat, for example, using Facebook chat, as a disruption mechanism. This is particularly frequent in groups where people share more than just activism and these back-channel chats can also be used as a disruption mechanism, shoring up alliances, beginning new ones, disrupting transparency.

The examination of feeling and emotion in feminist activism is key in order to reclaim emotional labour as a feminist act. Emotional labour can be seen in an entirely negative light, as draining, but surviving that negativity may also propel activism, it unites us. The emotional work undertaken as part of activism is how we express solidarity with each other and therefore build our feminist organisations more sustainably. All activism needs an activist workforce and the biggest risk to that activism workforce is burnout. However, the negative experiences of emotional labour also propel solidarity.

As Seb said, in interview, of the experience of DTJ being attacked by trolls:

It's about turning something that was stigmatizing and shameful into an act of power and solidarity.

Salovaara (2014) argues: "Concurrently, the humanities have witnessed a surge of interest in questions of affect, leading to efforts to address the psychosocial dimensions surrounding activism in urban and digital spaces." However, the study of affect may be broadened to include the effect of those embodied feelings or emotions and the labour, the emotional

labour, required to undertake activism. There has already been considerable work in this field (Kennelly, 2014; Gleeson, 2016), but there is further scope for this investigation.

Bosanquet in Thwaites and Pressland's (2017) significant work on what it means to be a early career feminist academic applies the lens of emotional labour only to that conducted within a family while Gleeson (2017) mainly focusses on the burnout of dealing with feminist activism, an entirely negative take on the emotions experienced in activism. What we feel and the impact that has on us - our internal contexts, the politics of emotion - are also important. It is not exactly an exploration of the private/public divide because of the use of social media to share emotions. Social media organises us to share our emotions, as argued by Salovaara (2014), so research should also recognise the importance of emotion and feeling, which is why this research explores the feelings of the activists involved in DTJ and the way in which it impacts their activism.

Eileen, a DTJ moderator nearly from the page's inception, identified her experience of community-building as a page moderator:

Every modding session had lots of challenges . . . I think the crew that I worked with was so supportive and just really backed us all up. That was the good part, and that's the thing that made the task easy, was the fact that there's already a good crew.

(Eileen, in interview)

Her response explained why she was able to continue for a long period of time as a regular moderator, despite recognising that each session of moderation could involve both positive and negative aspects of the interaction on the page. It was the network of the other moderators which made the task easy, the connectedness of the team - in the face of the challenges of moderation.

Dora (in interview) also made a point of talking about the moderating community. She said she found moderating boring unless there was a very active post but "it's worth it to be involved in the rest of the group", once again underscoring the value of the network.



In particular, as Fuchs argues, “Facebook is also a community, which means that repeated communication between users results in or maintains friendships and personal relations that involve feelings of belonging together”.

Anita (in interview):

I’ve actually got from Destroy the Joint I feel a lot safer and more comfortable online. Within the Destroy the Joint in the background moderating the admins page. It just feels like your lounge room. It feels like you’re just hanging out, having a chat with people. Yeah, I’d say I’m heavily emotionally invested. When I had to leave Destroy the Joint for a few days because my work place demanded it of me. I was distraught, just distraught.

Elizabeth, the moderator who decided to provide admin support for the group through keeping a roster of when people were available to write posts or to actively moderate, lives in rural Victoria and says that it was hard for her to develop friendships in that area. Her work had mainly been temporary admin work. DTJ provided an opportunity for her to be connected to other women in her first activist experience and to engage with activist work that she felt mattered. She also used the connections she made through DTJ as references when she began to apply for permanent jobs. She said her experiences volunteering at DTJ made her more confident, as she explains here:

I feel an amount of pride in the work that I do. I am happy to be involved in something that is important and impactful as well. (Elizabeth, in interview)

This was the feeling expressed by Emmeline, who at first was disinclined to make public her involvement with DTJ:

Now I guess that sort of proprietorial feeling has been constant the whole time and I am proud to be associated with it. I went through a stage where I didn’t want it to be known that I was associated with the page mostly because I was aware I may have had some clients who may have been a little less progressive but that is not the case anymore. I do tell appropriate (in inverted commas) people and I use that as a

platform to try and gather names of prospective mods for the page. (Emmeline, in interview)

And the experience of involvement in DTJ also supported a sustained commitment to feminism, according to Helen:

I feel that it has renewed me as a feminist. There was a point where I was just toddling along doing not an awful lot of anything in terms of real activism. I think this has brought new life into my feminism, and it certainly ... It's great to be part of a small online company and a larger online community that's made up of women of all ages, backgrounds, opinions, insights. For the most part, we are able to discuss all that and support each other and do all the rest of it without falling out and with the end game in view. That's been wonderful for me. It does feel like a surrogate family at times. (Helen, in interview)

Bell, a single parent caring for two teenagers, said that the online activism of DTJ was the only kind of activism she could do while caring for her children and working full-time:

I've been an activist my whole life. The way that things are for me at the moment, the only activism that I can do is Destroy the Joint. It fills a really big hole in me. I have this need to change the world, and so being involved with Destroy the Joint makes me really happy. Whenever I talk about it to anyone, or rant as I usually do, I feel really happy and really proud of being involved with such a great group of people and the stuff that we do. Yeah, I feel happy and proud. (Bell, in interview)

For Bessie, working, because it is working, on DTJ gave her both the cultural capital (the knowledge) and the emotional capital (the confidence), to take her newfound skills into other feminist activities. Her labour became her capital. She was in her seventies and did not feel at all confident about social media or the internet:

It made me feel quite confident that I could do things like that, it gave me more internet savvy. [It] probably has helped me participate more in online forums where I stick my neck out sometimes and .... personal strength and the skills. I haven't done anything else exactly like that but I now administer two little online forums. I know what I'm doing because DTJ came first. (Bessie, in interview)

Affect is complex and contested, but Margaret Wetherell (2012, p. 2) deftly explains why it has become important, despite the variation in conceptualisation. She argues it is a way of expanding what is studied in the social sciences:

It leads to a focus on embodiment, to attempts to understand how people are moved, and what attracts them, to an emphasis on repetitions, pains and pleasures, feelings and memories . . . the advantage of affect is that it brings the dramatic and the everyday back into social analysis.

As the participants in my research say, what they do feels like work (and the word work itself either on its own or as a root appears more than 600 times in the interviews). Like workers in paid employment, they must collaborate and cooperate and do it without losing their tempers. They manage their feelings for the greater good, if the “greater good” is what feminist organising and campaigning can be called. These are the emotions of building solidarity, which I argue is emotional capital.

One of the younger moderators, Alice, who became an activist in her early 20s, made it clear that she valued that feeling of working together:

I think activism often requires taking a lot of time out of your free time, so balancing that with other parts of your life that are also important is important. **I think activism can also see you engage a lot ... feel really supported by people who feel the same way as you about a particular issue, and can make you feel like you have power in a particular situation, where if you're just by yourself, you can feel isolated or a bit helpless.** I think often when you're participating in activism, you open yourself up to criticism and that ... that requires solidarity amongst people, because you have to decide how to deal with that criticism and cop that criticism, or not cop it, or you know. That can be quite difficult, as well. (Alice, in interview)

Another moderator, Bessie, says she appreciates the camaraderie: “I guess I enjoy being a part of that, the solidarity that comes along with that . . . there is such a diverse membership and activists in other areas.”<sup>8</sup>

### **Emotional labour accrues as emotional capital in feminism**

This chapter has argued that emotional labour and emotional capital are connected, in particular in the field of feminist online activism. Emotional labour is the hard work of

making online feminist organising work, the hard work of organising despite the conflicts and the contested ideas - but it builds solidarity and that is a direct benefit. As knowledge builds cultural capital, so do the feelings around emotional labour build emotional capital, particularly the emotional capital of resilience.

Bourdieu touched on emotional capital when he outlined the work which falls mainly to women within a family. He described the family as an institution built on “countless acts of reaffirmation and reinforcement” and outlined the “constant maintenance work” on feelings, the “practical and symbolic work” of training those in the family to have what he describes as “loving dispositions” in order to maintain relationships (Bourdieu, 1996, p. 22). Nowotny (1981) was the first to identify emotional capital as an addition to the capitals for which Bourdieu is best known: social, cultural and economic. She argued then that women could demonstrate power in a domestic setting, or private sphere, but not in the public sphere; and that the work in the private sphere propped up the public sphere. Nowotny (1981) further developed emotional capital as a gendered variant of social capital. She argued men had access to social capital in a way that women did not because, at the time of her writing, women were still unlikely to be in positions of public power. Social capital was “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.119). In other words, social capital is contacts, access, social skills, or what helps us connect with others. It refers to the ‘who we know’ rather than the ‘what we know’. Nowotny postulated social capital as “a necessary ingredient in the continuous struggle for success, rewards, recognition, and power that categorises a field” and categorised as structurally male (1981, p. 148); and emotional capital as structurally gendered female, situated in social networks, with a power of its own, wielded by women and characteristic of the private sphere, of family and friends, and accumulated in adverse circumstances, or as Reay (2004, p. 60) puts it “affective relationships of family and friends and encompasses the emotional resources you hand on to those you care about”. In this context, Zembylas’s (2007) argument for a deeper conceptualisation of emotional capital and its conversion to other forms of capital shows the need to scrutinise the ways in which emotional capital builds social capital. In the case of feminist activists, emotional labour around that activism builds emotional capital. Emotional labour is what we experience and emotional capital is what we accrue. It extends our social capital.

Online, emotional capital is valuable as a way of building relationships or as Rodriguez-Hidalgo, Tan and Verlegh (2015) says “cooperation, support and community building”, the prosocial factor where “online social sharing can contribute to individuals’ overall well-being and life satisfaction by promoting emotion regulation and/or capitalization through social sharing in online social networks”. I contend emotional labour contributes to the accrual of emotional capital through what research participants identified as a process of building community and solidarity.

Online feminist activists do not undertake their work in a vacuum - no activist does; and the consideration of activist context regularly examines the social, the economic, the political, contexts of activism (Altbach, 1990). However, I argue that the personal, the emotional, the feelings, also provide context. Emotions and the emotional labour of activists can be characterised as individual. This may be because emotions are individual to the subject, rather than to the collective group. This individualism may make it more difficult to analyse and generalise but I argue that there is some emotional labour which is collective, or experienced in a collective way or experienced by many in a collective.

Emotions and emotional work have not been valued in comparison to reason and logic; and this argument has been built along gender lines (Goodwin, Jasper & Polletta 2009). The experience of the activists of DTJ show that working as a feminist activist in this Australian setting requires a great deal of labour, in particular, the emotion work of being an activist. This is often construed as negative and often is negative; is a part of the emotional labour of being an activist and is emotional labour because the management of these negative feelings is required to continue to campaign. Participants discussed issues of burnout and, for activists working in the family violence space, the issue of being triggered.

Yet some of what these online activists do is positive, joyful and provides impetus in other areas of their lives. It provides the confidence and the capital to continue with activism. While victories in campaigns are always energising, the nurturing within activist communities and the support while doing stressful work, provide participants with emotional capital. For some women, it also gives them skills to allow them to do further activist work.

## **Chapter Nine: Conclusion (but the feminist struggle never ends)**

### **Waving goodbye**

Activist feminists know there are no waves (Stevenson, Everingham & Robinson, 2011). They know this because in between those hypothetical waves (Nicholson, 2010; Munro, 2013; Taylor, 1989; Dahlerup, 2013; Donovan, 2012), activists keep working. What appear as the gaps between waves and generations to scholars are just tiny lacunae for activists, where the activism still exists yet is less visible. Crossley (2017) says feminism has myriad currents, some stronger than others. The strength varies but not the presence.

One example is in the battle for reproductive rights. After what is termed the second wave (Thornham, 2004), women continued to struggle for bodily autonomy. They still struggled after the third wave (Walker, 2001) and now, at the fourth wave (Cochrane, 2013; Darmon, 2014; Munro, 2013; Martin & Valenti, 2012), are still struggling. In Australia in June 2019 online advertisements for abortion clinics mysteriously disappeared from the results of Google searches. The number of appointments at abortion clinics halved (Davis, 2019) yet no useful explanation from Google was forthcoming. There is, however, no evidence to show women worked any less hard for reproductive rights in between waves, which is why the scholarly fascination with the wave metaphor may not be all that useful to anyone wanting to understand successful feminist activism.

### **Connective continuity**

DTJ is an example of successful digital feminist activism in Australia using connective action (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, 2013). There is no similar group in Australia with such longevity. While there have been many instances of successful episodic connective activism (Trott, 2019), DTJ has sustained its work over seven years and has remained a volunteer organisation, unlike other digital groups such as GetUp and Fair Agenda. Those organisations quickly transformed into organisations with paid staff. In the case of GetUp, it has also expanded from its original digital roots to offline organising and has an annual budget of around \$10 million. Both these organisations have boards, managers and traditional operating structures. In the case of Fair Agenda, it fits in with the Australian feminist movement neatly, which is largely both institutional and institutionally-focused. The major

feminist organisations in Australia, the National Foundation for Australian Women, the Women's Electoral Lobby and, increasingly, the Country Women's Association, are also traditional organisations with registered premises, bank balances; and a strong focus on building relationships with governments and other non-government organisations. However, DTJ is recognised as part of feminist activism in Australia (McLean, Maalsen, & Grech; Gleeson, 2016, 2017; Trott, 2019) and operates within feminism as a social movement, with its organisational continuity, shared identity and core ideological purpose (Dahlerup, 2013), despite its basis in connective action which more usually relies on personalised sharing across networks, floating populations of activists and contributors, with opt-in loyalties in the moment.

Connective action protest movements tend to be short-term. There have been many examples of connective action in Australia, including #ShutDownRSD, #takedownJulienBlanc, #EndViolenceAgainstWomen (Trott, 2019); but each of these has, in typical connective action form, been episodic. They included the creation of hashtags and of petitions, they sparked rallies and protests. In terms of feminist actions, #ShutDownRSD, #takedownJulienBlanc and #EndViolenceAgainstWomen were more about treating the symptoms of inequality rather than the cause. These actions existed within feminism but in those forms have not continued their activism.

To a great extent, DTJ has resisted both the episodic nature of connective action and the more institutionalised form of feminism as a social movement. It exists online. Its fundraising is sporadic and small in scope. It remains an iteration of connective action in its approach. By way of contrast, there are a number of examples of contemporary Australian digital activism which do not operate connectively; in particular, in the environmental movement. Lock the Gate, for example, has a strong digital presence but operates in a more traditional collective action framework; as do Greenpeace and Friends of the Earth. In other words, they are more likely to be identified as having organisational continuity, shared identity and core ideological purpose. In addition, they are also identified, as is much environmental action in Australia, with more radical activism, including protest events such as activists chaining themselves to trees and obstruction of logging roads. They enter, obstruct and occupy (O'Brien, 2019). Connective action enters the digital space, obstructs inboxes and occupies consciousness. It's a different way of protesting.

Yet the distinctive features of connective action, including its flexibility, lack of organisational structures, lack of financial costs, speed of mobilisation and range of reach, make it an important subject of research (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, 2013). An analysis of the sustained success of DTJ over seven years as an example of sustained connective action utilising both the crowd-enabled and the organisationally-brokered models in Bennett and Segerberg's typology is crucial to understanding contemporary social movements in the digital environment. A systematic social science analysis reveals the complexity of DTJ's achievements.

I was fortunate to be part of DTJ at its spontaneous and angry inception but far luckier to have worked with these activists since 2012. It made it possible for me to write my thesis as an insider. While there are some disadvantages to being an insider (which I refer to in chapter three), the benefits are many and include the accessibility of the activists and the familiarity with the processes. There were only two former administrators I did not approach because of extremely difficult relationships either with myself or with other administrators. There was, however, no shortage of critique on the operations of DTJ among those I did interview.

There is still some reluctance to accept that connective action works; that anything built on a hashtag lasts, that anything resembling clicktivism has an impact (Morozov, 2009; Gladwell, 2010). But these movements are not just built on hashtags, they emerge because of context. The #destroythejoint hashtag aggregated a movement because of Julia Gillard and the way she was treated. The context, the highly visible and relentless bullying of a woman politician, attracted increased interest by media (Johnson, 2015; Trimble, 2016) and women felt more politically engaged (Sawer, 2012; Denmark, Ward and Bean (2012)). They wanted to do something about it, a direct effect of the symbolic power of women in elected office on women's engagement (Karp & Banducci, 2008).

### **The members of the connective**

This research examined the social and cultural capitals (Bourdieu, 1986) of those who came to DTJ as administrators and moderators, what impact that had on the nature of DTJ and the way in which those capitals impacted both the activists and the activism. Of the activists interviewed for this project, 80 per cent had some kind of experience which they counted as activism – way beyond the normal population. They had developed stickability (and how they developed that over time is something worth studying in the future). In particular, the



previous activist experience for the majority was activism in the union movement. These were the women who built this digital feminist community. And the tiny handful of those who had no prior activist experience learned as they went along. Prior activism of any kind was a key attribute of these activists. This group was also highly educated compared to the population – which isn't surprising since the radicalism of the middle-class is well-documented (Bonnett, 2013; Cleveland, 2003; Cotgrove & Duff, 1980; Nicholls, 1985; Parkin, 1968; Quinn, 2017); they mostly lived in cities rather than regional, rural or remote areas of Australia and were in paid full-time employment.

The original #destroythejoint tweet capitalised both on women's readiness to engage politically in that environment and in response to the backlash. In what is now understood as an iteration of crowd-enabled connective action, DTJ built a community from a hashtag and has turned into that community into one which shows up every day on Facebook. In 2019, it has more than 99,000 'likes' and daily, its administrators post on the page, usually twice. On International Women's Day each year, there are always 16 posts, one every hour until bedtime, which together have a page reach of one million. It is hard to tell whether "reach" measures success but it does measure who is seeing consistent information such as this; and one million reach for a volunteer group with an anti-misogyny mission is significant.

These activists who started the group wanted it to be leaderless and structureless and embraced connective action as a form but the experience they brought with them from other campaigns prefigured their behaviours in, and to, this new political entity. The introduction of Counting Dead Women Australia to the campaign repertoire initiated a change to DTJ, a move from crowd-organised to organisationally-enabled (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012, 2013); and with it more structure and connections to other groups working to end violence against women.

### **The emotional labours of research and activism**

To analyse feminist digital activism, it was important to use feminist research methods, particularly feminist interviewing methods (Reinharz & Davidman, 1992; Ackerly & True, 2010). Those methods encouraged real and intensive listening to those who give up their time. A number of the women interviewed for this thesis either already had postgraduate qualifications or were embarking on them. They were just as interested in how I was conducting the research (what questions? What themes? Have you thought of this?) as they

were in the subject of feminism and feminist activism. The number of times Jo Freeman's (1972) name came up, out of the blue, was quite funny. Through these conversations, the themes finally emerged, some prompted specifically by the participants themselves.

This new understanding of the way social movements operate in the digital environment not only includes the way these movements are formed connectively, that is, through connective action (Bennett and Segerberg, 2012; 2013). In addition, this new understanding of connective action also highlights the difference in actions: what works well on social media and what works less well. It's crucial to recognise that DTJ operated beyond connective action in a number of its campaigns. It used connective action in concert with direct lobbying, indirect lobbying, outside lobbying, conflict expansion and public opinion appeal in order to make change across a number of campaigns.

Furthermore, there were other new aspects highlighted by this research. First, that the digital environment which brings with it "perpetual participation" (DeLuca, Lawson & Sun, 2012) encourages daily activism (Schubert 1996); and second that dealing with violence against women on a daily basis requires emotional labour, different from the emotional labour first defined by Arlie Hochschild (1983). This is management of emotions not for commercial purposes but for public benefit. The work of this community can be very intense and the focus on family violence can be exhausting. But behind the relentless, perpetual participation are women who support each other in little groups. They share memes and goat jokes, share skills, take breaks. They keep going.

Emotions and emotional work are rarely seen as more valuable than reason and logic, an extension of what the patriarchy considers important. However, feminist activism in general and more particularly, the experience of the activists of DTJ illustrates that working as a feminist activist in this Australian setting requires a great deal of labour, in particular, the emotion work of being an activist. Emotional work is largely construed as negative (and it can be both negative and draining). However it forms part of the emotional labour of being an activist because it requires management of feelings, such as those sparked by constantly dealing with violence against women, exhaustion, burnout, in order to continue campaigning. Yet there was also positive and joyful space, sometimes gleaned from success in campaigns, sometimes from emotional support in the groups, and that provided momentum in other areas

of these feminist lives; leading to a development in confidence and the emotional capital to continue with activism.

It's emotional labour, just as Hochschild explains it. Yet through this experience of emotional labour, through the management of the dark and disturbing, through the need to keep going, the positive emerges, affirming, something to share with other activism or tasks now or in the future. It accrues as emotional capital. Emotional labour plays a significant role in the formation and retention of social movements because of its capacity to reinforce ties beyond political ties.

The activists of DTJ brought their habitus and various capitals to bear on this connective action project. Their embedded values, skills, beliefs, experience and knowledge, the sum of their habitus and various capitals, prefigured their ideals, their aims, their goals and their ways of working. As a connective, they shared their skills, knowledge and attributes, always in the context of their habitus, the dispositions and traits shaped by their experiences of activism but also, in many cases, of their previous work. Through this, **they connected their accumulated experience of collective action to connective action** through their accumulated habitus, which in turn, structured and shaped their interaction with connective action. It is also important to acknowledge Jen Schradie's (2018, p. 71) reservations about connective action, which she argues may impact the collective action of those with fewer resources, or, as Bourdieu would put it, economic capital. There is urgent need for research around such challenges around time, income, resources, power.

Connective action also organises the sharing of cultural capital, which both binds and defines groups. The concept of shared cultural capital is underscored by the DTJ activists themselves in interview. A basic and shared understanding of feminism mattered, particularly as it fed both the knowledge-production and the knowledge-dissemination of DTJ activists. As Rosa said in interview (and quoted earlier in this thesis), "If you're adding to people's knowledge or understanding or their education, of course you're laying the groundwork for people to make decisions later on." The shared cultural capital supercharged the activism. It laid the "groundwork for people to make decisions".

It's also important to recognise the role of emotional labour in activism and its contribution to the acquisition of emotional capital. Elsewhere in this thesis, I have argued that it is identical to the emotional labour performed in paid work because it is a requirement as activists work

on campaigns. Activists work together and must manage their own feelings, their feelings about each other, and about the impact of both campaigning and campaigns in order to achieve their end goals as activists. In DTJ, there were some long-time admins and moderators who worked to make this activism more sustainable by using what Bolton (2000a) called “philanthropic” emotion management. They created posts to encourage personal reflection, to encourage the sharing of feelings, both negative and positive. Emotional labour is always considered negative but I argue, in what I hope is a novel contribution, that emotional labour can also be positive and produces what Helga Nowotny called emotional capital in a way which parallels the way in which intellectual labour produces cultural capital. Though emotional labour, the activists build and accumulate emotional capital. The labour required for digital activism is constant and builds on intense connectivity, the “perpetual participation” required among the activists in a group. Despite the efforts, it also provides rewards, the companionship of working together and chatting together to continue the activism. Yes, there is emotional labour in feminist activism and it can be exhausting and draining but it is also how we express solidarity with each other and build our feminist organisations more sustainably. As I discuss earlier, there was and is much positive experience of such emotion work, both in developing hard skills and in feelings. The feelings required for emotional labour build emotional capital, particularly the emotional capital of resilience. Emotional labour, experienced through building community and solidarity, is what we experience and emotional capital is what we accrue. In addition, emotional capital extends our social capital.

### **Feminists in formation**

This thesis argues that campaigns to stop violence against women and to raise consciousness about its existence are the product of information activism (Halupka, 2014), itself a by-product of the cultural capital brought by activists to DTJ. These activists communicate their key concerns, an outcome of their core ideological purpose, through a complex process, the goal of which is to use the communicative turn in a feminist setting, to encourage low-stakes participation, such as sharing on social media with the intent to inform and to mobilise. It is that set of actions which constitutes information activism (Halupka, 2014) in connective action in an Australian digital feminist activist setting.

This thesis also expands on the use of images in the Counting Dead Women campaign and argues for a new category of image artefact in connective action, a transnational digital solidarity frame, which resists the motivation to personalise all aspects of campaigning. It is an example of a campaign which pushes back against the neoliberal aspects of the personal action frame (Bennett & Segerberg, 2013, p. 6), and signifies a return to solidarity framing in its place while still using social sharing technologies. Counting Dead Women has both contributed to and transformed the public sphere. It became highly shareable on social technologies and remains highly shareable. It has become a national toll able to be used by national publishers. It has imitators. Finally, this iteration of feminist activism has manifestations which resist the personalisation of politics. The personal action frame, as theorised by Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg (2012, 2013), identifies a tendency for activists to fracture the collective experience towards the individual. Not only is activism episodic but the episodes are limited to the individual. DTJ acted collectively in its organising groups. The exploration of what administrators and moderators agreed are the key campaigns of DTJ through an examination of individual campaigns, attributes specific campaigning techniques to each campaign, including direct lobbying, indirect lobby and public pressure.

This thesis found that the intersection of this social movement with the communicative turn afforded by social media and journalism, combined with the characteristics and attributes of this particular activist campaign force, provided a supercharged form of activism, well-suited to digital information activism. From a personal perspective, this activism influenced my own work as a journalist. I would argue that I've always been an advocate journalist in my column writing but there is a higher level of change possible when you combine hashtags with journalism (Guha, 2015) and more agency when you can create the journalism to leverage social media.

This experience of activism has been largely positive and, in some aspects, joyful. The group of activists has, in the majority, stayed together for seven years but it could be argued that there are some disadvantages from the stability, which became more marked after the introduction of Counting Dead Women. In some ways, it has become more exclusive, particularly among the administrators, and somewhat distanced from its connective roots. It is difficult to imagine recruiting someone now just because you all retweeted the same tweet or shared the same Facebook post. It would be unthinkable to recruit someone now without having knowledge of their prior activist background. It would be useful to research other

iterations of connective action to explore whether this shift in the practice of DTJ is a unique example of the lived experience of connective action and whether it reflects, across iterations, the evolution of connective action of this kind and whether it is sustainable as connective action.

As mentioned earlier, this kind of activism is largely middle-class and largely white (although, in the case of DTJ, not exclusively so). It is a challenge for DTJ to be more inclusive and it is also a challenge for activism more generally. Can it only ever be a largely middle-class pursuit because the middle-class is more likely to have discretionary time?

It is interesting to note that most of the administrators of DTJ are in jobs where there is some discretionary time. No-one works on an assembly line and any shift work by either administrators or moderators is in the health sector. It would be difficult for working-class feminists in jobs with little autonomy to be part of the decision-making or process, particularly in the moment. There is also a lack of young women. Holding on to young women in this iteration of feminist activism is difficult. There are lots of choices on how to spend discretionary activist time in feminist groups and moderating Facebook pages may not seem like the most rewarding feminist task ever. While there is some literature which addresses the involvement of young women in digital feminist activism (Jouet, 2018; Mendes, Ringrose & Keller, 2019), future research could examine ways in which to engage young feminists over time.

## **Limitations**

There are many limitations in this thesis. This has been an inquiry into which activists operate DTJ but the other side of the activist process are people recruited as participants, those who like the page, comment on the page, share Counting Dead Women posts. I don't know who they are. I tried to get some small input from those people by private messaging them – I ended up with only three responses. Knowing who those people are and the impact DTJ has on them would be a useful area for further research because we need to know what makes people act, share, change their minds.

What we do know is this, based on Facebook insights (based entirely on what Facebook users say about themselves). Nearly all of our fans are women – 83 per cent to 14 per cent; and 70 per cent fall between the ages of 25 and 54. Mostly they are Australian, with more users in

Melbourne than in Sydney. Their language of choice is English (either UK or US). We know nothing about class, race or differing abilities (even for the analysis in this thesis, the administrators and moderators rarely disclosed race, ethnicity or differing abilities). However the most important answer missing from this thesis is how to stop violence against women; and in related areas, how to achieve equality. It's one thing to operate as activists, to be sharing information in the community, it's quite another to change process and practice effectively to make sure Australian women achieve equality, respect and safety.

### **What's next?**

The social movement is on a continuum, connecting old and new modes (or styles/performances/repertoires of activism) with old and new nodes, including all those impacts of how we relate to each other online and the concurrent impact of doing it all the time, non-stop. Longstanding effective change requires longstanding and effective activism, some of which entails crushingly dull and repetitive work. This thesis found a social movement where activists were happy to do that dull, repetitive, continuous and continual; sometimes stressful work in order to make change. If my thesis develops a persuasive and nuanced understanding of what makes 21st century feminist online activism successful, then my life's work will be done.

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## Appendix 1

### Questions Asked in Interviews

Participants were asked for their name, their age, if they were in paid work, where they lived, whether they were union members (I asked this as part of the question on previous activist experience)

1. Major question:

How did you become involved in Destroy The Joint?

Sub-questions: how did you actually become involved; what happened next; what date was that?

2. Major questions: so this is going to be a long question: from the beginning to now how would you describe your contribution and involvement with Destroy the Joint?

Sub-questions: Over the life of your involvement, can you describe the actual things that you do, did at the beginning and do now?

3. Major question: Do you think about the page every day?

Sub questions: what do you do on a daily basis for the page? How many times a day would you say you look at the page? How does Destroy the Joint work on a daily basis? How do feel about the group dynamics? Are there things which concern you?

Have you, had any difficulty with any of the other admins or moderators yourself?

4. Major question: Are there things you would secretly like to do in DTJ that you don't do?

5. Major question: Is this kind of feminist organising sustainable?

Subquestion: Is DTJ sustainable?

6. Major question: With which campaigns on Destroy the Joint do you feel particularly involved or connected to?

Subquestions: Can you explain why that is? Do you recall how Destroy The Joint decided to mount the Counting Dead Women campaign? Do you think that the campaign has been successful? Are there any other campaigns that you see that have had an impact?

7. Major question: What does Destroy the Joint do?

Subquestions: How does it work? Can you describe that more fully?

8. Major questions: I'd like to talk about your feelings about Destroy the Joint. Can you tell me how you feel about your involvement?



Subquestion: Have you ever heard of the concept of emotional labour?

9. Major question: How much time does Destroy the Joint take up in your life?
10. Major question: have you ever been involved in any activism/political campaigning before Destroy the Joint?
11. Major question: Are online activism and offline activism the same?
12. Major question: Contemporary feminism – where it's heading, core issues, major debates etc.
13. Major question Is there anything I haven't covered or anything I haven't asked you, anything at all?