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EMERALD  
STUDIES IN  
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CHANGE



**ONLINE ANTI-RAPE  
ACTIVISM**

EXPLORING THE POLITICS OF  
THE PERSONAL IN THE AGE  
OF DIGITAL MEDIA



**RACHEL LONEY-HOWES**

# **Online Anti-Rape Activism**

# EMERALD STUDIES IN CRIMINOLOGY, FEMINISM AND SOCIAL CHANGE

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# Online Anti-Rape Activism: Exploring the Politics of the Personal in the Age of Digital Media

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Praise for *Online Anti-Rape Activism: Exploring the Politics of the Personal in the Age of Digital Media*

“Dr Loney-Howes’ thoughtful and thought-provoking work on digital feminist activism around sexual violence is sorely needed. Where most accounts focus on prominent moments and famous hashtags, this book offers the voices and perspectives of activists who working far from the spotlight to support survivors, raise consciousness and change minds. Based on careful and extensive empirical work, it offers reflections on the strengths and limitations of this activism that will be useful for anyone interested in contemporary feminism, sexual violence or digital organizing. The book is impressive in its scope, placing contemporary activism in a historical context of feminist organizing on sexual violence, and offering unique insights into the extraordinary work that goes into trying to change sexual cultures and achieve justice for survivors of sexual violence.”

—*Tanya Serisier, Senior Lecturer, Department of Criminology,  
Birkbeck College, University of London, UK*

“In the wake of mainstream movements such as #MeToo, this timely book showcases the important contribution of anti-rape activist initiatives which came before, paving its way. Drawing from eight case studies and 10 years’ research of digital anti-rape activism from around the world, this rigorously researched book highlights the importance of listening and recognition when it comes to rape testimonies, and the power that speaking and listening hold for finding healing, solace and the search for justice. For anyone interested in the role that digital technologies can and have played in online anti-rape activism, this book is a must-read. Highlighting the important work activists and survivors have done to bring (and keep) sexual violence at the forefront of public and political agendas, Loney-Howes leaves readers in no doubt about the usefulness of online spaces and tools for furthering anti-rape politics.”

—*Kaitlynn Mendes, University of Leicester, UK*

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## About the Author

**Dr Rachel Loney-Howes** is a Lecturer in Criminology in the School of Health and Society at the University of Wollongong, Australia. Her work explores the use of digital media for anti-sexual violence activism, including mapping the digital footprint of the #MeToo movement in collaboration with other leading international scholars. Alongside Dr Bianca Fileborn, she is the co-editor of the collected edition *#MeToo and the Politics of Social Change* (2019).

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# Acknowledgements

This book began its life as a PhD thesis on Wurrundjeri land and was completed on Dharawal Country. As part of my commitment to social justice, I would first like to acknowledge the traditional sovereign owners on whose land I was able to carry out and complete this project, as well as remind readers of the tireless work carried out by Aboriginal, Indigenous and First Nations women around the world to keep their communities free from violence. We must not lose sight of the enduring impact of colonisation in relation to women's experiences of sexual violence and need to find better ways to create space for their voices to be incorporated into prevention strategies.

In the months that followed the completion of my PhD, the #MeToo movement happened, and suddenly, everyone was talking about the power and potential of digital media for feminist activism. This presented a great challenge for me. I was unsure if publishing the PhD in the form of a book was a good idea – there seemed to be so much chatter in the wake of #MeToo that I thought my contributions would get lost in the frenzy. However, what the data I had collected revealed to me was importance of listening to and honouring the voices of those who were doing this work long before #MeToo emerged; to focus on the voices and efforts of activists and survivors who were, and will continue to remain, in the trenches long after sexual violence is off the public agenda. I am, therefore, deeply indebted to those activists who gave up their time to speak about their work and to complete surveys. Without you not only would this book not be possible but indeed the #MeToo movement itself.

This book is the product of nearly a decade of researching and critically thinking about the nature and use of digital media for anti-rape activism. As such, numerous people must be thanked for their support, generosity and intellectual stimulation. First, I would like to thank my family, friends and partner for their endless encouragement and stability. Second, a very warm and gracious thank you goes to Associate Professor Nicola Henry and Dr Tarryn Phillips, who continue to nurture my academic growth and whose friendship remains very important to me. Dr Bianca Fileborn, with whom I have collaborated on numerous projects, continues to be a source of inspiration. Thank you to Dr Kirsty Duncanson for introducing us, and thank you to Bianca for your investment in my intellectual capacities and friendship. A special thank you goes to Dr Liz Chapman, Dr Maria Davidenko, Elizabeth Knowles, Natasha Graham, Dr Anastasia Kanjere, Dr Kirsty Duncanson, Dr Rachel Killean, Dr Amanda Kramer and Amy Boyle, for your continuing friendship and support. I would also like to extend a

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When I wrote my PhD thesis, I dedicated it to the memory of my grandmother who passed away shortly before it was completed. I decided to do that based on a conversation we had had before she died: one day during lunch, she asked what my PhD was about. I said in very simple terms that it's about how people use the internet to talk about rape. Her response was to suggest that anyone who has been raped should be ashamed of what happened and to therefore never speak of it. In the intermediary years, I have thought a lot about the power of listening – and how powerful simply listening to survivors and activists without judgement can be. One of the outcomes from the #MeToo movement was the validation that (some) survivors received when they spoke out, many doing so for the first time, about their experiences of rape and sexual assault. People listened (again, I say this not uncritically) to and believed them. Therefore, I want to dedicate this book to those who listen to and believe survivors. In particular, I want to thank those who believed me without questioning what I had to say – my mum, my sister and my best friend. Thank you.

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