“I don’t necessarily go out there and tell everyone that I’m a feminist, but I won’t go out there and tell everyone that I’m a musician either.”

Dis/identifications and Dis/articulations: Young Women and Feminism in Aotearoa/New Zealand

By Laura Ashton

A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Social Practice UNITEC New Zealand, 2014
Declaration

Name of Candidate: Laura Ashton

This thesis entitled:

I don’t necessarily go out there and tell everyone that I’m a feminist, but I won’t go out there and tell everyone that I’m a musician either”

Dis/identifications and Dis/articulations: Young Women and Feminism in Aotearoa/New Zealand

Is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of:

Master of Social Practice

Candidate’s declaration

I confirm that:

- This Thesis Project represents my own work;
- The contribution of supervisors and others to this work was consistent with the Unitec Regulations and Policies.
- Research for this work has been conducted in accordance with the Unitec Research Ethics Committee Policy and Procedures, and has fulfilled any requirements set for this project by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee.

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Student number: 1297475
Abstract

This thesis explores young women’s dis/identifications with feminism, and dis/articulations of feminism, within Aotearoa/NZ today. Grounded within a feminist poststructuralist approach, I carried out 14 semi-structured interviews with young women about their lives, feminism and postfeminism. The women were aged between 18 and 30 and came from diverse backgrounds in terms of ethnicity, sexuality and class. I then employed a discursive psychological analysis of the transcripts of the interviews.

Although the majority of participants identified with feminism, feminist ideas, or explicitly as feminist on at least one occasion, for all participants these identifications were rarely straightforward. Participants drew on two key interpretive repertoires in their negotiation of feminism and the identity of feminist; firstly, an extreme-radical feminism interpretive repertoire, which was viewed negatively, and secondly, a liberal-equality feminism interpretive repertoire, which was viewed positively but simultaneously relegated feminism to history. Participants’ identifications with feminism were also mediated by their positioning on axes of privilege such as class and ethnicity, but not necessarily in straightforward ways.

Furthermore, feminism was also regularly disarticulated by many of the participants through neoliberal discourses of individualism, through discourses constructing feminism as more relevant to “other”, generally Muslim, women in the world, and through a desire to distance themselves from constructions of feminism as anti-men. For the young women I interviewed, “feminism constitutes a contested and fraught territory” (Scharff, 2010, p. 831), crisscrossed with neoliberal, heteronormative and postfeminist discourses that mediate their dis/identifications with feminism and dis/articulations of feminism.

Finally, I highlight how the two identified interpretive repertoires on feminism work in concert to maintain gendered power relations, before discussing some implications of the disarticulations of feminism that occurred in the present research, identifying how we might critically engage with the discourses prevalent in the disarticulations.
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One of the first entries I made in my research journal was the following quote from Seyla Benhabib (as cited in Court & Court, 1998) writing about feminist poststructuralist research: “we tell of who we are by a narrative…and vis-a-vis our own stories, we are in the position of author and character at once” (p. 127), followed by my own wondering “in how much of my research will I be writing my own story?”

Thinking about the genesis of this project has led me back through my life, wondering where do I start? I can construct a narrative that begins around age six when I asked my parents to buy me a transformer toy purely because I was aware that at school only the boys had them and I did not think that was fair. Or I could go back further than that, to before my parents met each other, to my maternal grandmother who was an unmarried nurse during the second world war; who then emigrated to New Zealand alone, leaving her parents and sisters in Britain; who didn’t get married until she was in her late thirties; who didn’t have a child until her forties; who rode a motorcycle around Auckland: all of this fairly unusual for a woman in the 1940s and 1950s. Having said that, she was also the person who, upon seeing a sticker reading “Girls can do anything!” proudly displayed on my school binder, retorted sharply, “no they can’t and don’t you forget it!” I am not certain, but I think it unlikely that she would have adopted the label of feminist for herself.

So, settling on my late childhood as the beginning of this particular story... For as long as I can remember I have had a strong (overly developed) sense of what is right and wrong, what I perceive to be ethical and just. A significant part of this sensibility has been an attention to the way in which power operates in society and a strong leaning towards social justice. Much of this leaning was influenced by my parents’ interest in “social issues” – I remember as a child wearing t-shirts that protested the deforestation of the Amazon, my mother shopping for clothes at a fair trade shop that partnered with producers in India, and attending rallies in aid of freeing Nelson Mandela. But in addition to my parents’ influence, I think I have always also had a strong internal sense of justice. This internal sense of justice sometimes led me into rather unusual situations as a child – approaching the parents of kids who were bullies...
to ask them to stop their children harassing others – and at other times manifested fairly mundanely: being an overprotective big sister when hearing about my brother being teased about his name.

Flash forward to the year 2000 and *Sex and The City* is on TV. Whilst I have no particular recollection of feminism being a strong thread through my high school years, a range of then-recent experiences – among them living in Italy, a country with strong gender roles and rife with sexism, and taking a couple of papers in women’s studies at university – meant that my awareness around gendered power relations had significantly increased. I recall people calling *Sex and The City* a feminist show and being baffled by this statement: I enjoyed the show immensely but in no way did I consider it to be feminist. If anything, the constant pursuit of a boyfriend (or, better yet, a fiancée or husband), which required the characters to engage in the busy work of being feminine – generally focused on the body (waxing, plucking, colouring, dressing, hobbling, etc.) – was to me, the opposite of feminist. It troubled me that this show was being touted as feminist. My own enjoyment of it troubled me as well, combined as it was with a strong critique of the show; I found it difficult to reconcile the two aspects of my experience and it was not until years later that I came across Gill’s (2007a) assertion that “it is perfectly possible to derive significant pleasure from representations (and, I would argue, acts, gifts, fantasies, etc.) that politically one may wish to critique!” (p. 16) (emphasis in the original). By the time *Sex and The City* finished in 2004, I had stopped watching television altogether and so the show was no longer a part of my life. I had continued with the gender studies courses at university, completing my BA with a double major in Psychology and Women’s Studies and had a strong desire to train as a clinical psychologist so that I could work with women struggling with eating disorders.

Flashing forward again, now to 2010 to a time when I was on an extended break from work and feeling unhappy, exhausted and somewhat disillusioned with my work life, but unsure about how to remedy the situation. I was sitting in the park one day with a friend, throwing around thesis topic ideas and I said “well, what has always interested me is why young women today don’t identify as feminists. I think that’s insane. I mean *why*?!” and suddenly, for the first time in months, I felt a sense of interest, some energy, some engagement. And that was it – I quit my job as a therapist in the field of
eating difficulties, reduced my other job as a manager in a mental health service to part-time, and went back to university so that I could interview young women about their relationship with feminism.

During the course of my work on this thesis, feminism has appeared in the media and in popular culture numerous times. Sometimes the references have been positive, sometimes negative. In February 2012, a New Zealand brewing company, Tui, posted a new billboard in their “Yeah right” series after Auckland Feminist Action complained to Tui that their advertising was sexist and demeaning to women. The billboard was posted around the country alongside sections of motorway and read “Having a beer with the Auckland Feminist Group would be fun. Yeah right.” The brewery initially agreed to meet with Auckland Feminist Action and then changed their minds, instead directing the Action group to the Advertising Standards Authority and saying that the company received “overwhelming support from the NZ public” (Harper, February 29, 2012) about the billboard. The implications in the advert and in much of the discussion surrounding it were that feminism and feminists are missing a sense of humour and are no longer relevant.

Notwithstanding examples such as the Tui billboard, feminism appears to have had somewhat of a resurgence over the last few years, or at least references to it have. Debates about feminism’s current relevance, particularly amongst “young” women, are not new, and yet the flavour of these debates seems to have been more positive over the last few years. I have noticed a proliferation of references to feminism in both traditional media (for example, in the New Zealand Herald, the national newspaper), and non-traditional media (for example, internet blogs). On the 7th of June 2013, Rebecca Kamm, a writer for the New Zealand Herald whose by-line reads “poking a stick at ladies’ issues, pop culture and other cutting edge curiosities” (Kamm), wrote the first in a series of opinion pieces centred on male feminism. The pieces covered whether it is possible for a man to be a feminist, what makes a man a feminist, feminist men throughout history, and finished with short interviews with five well-known kiwi men about whether they considered themselves to be feminist. Whilst it could be argued that the focus of the pieces being men limits their feminist impact somewhat, it is encouraging that these pieces about feminism were published
in a fairly conservative and mainstream newspaper; this would have been unusual even five years ago.

In addition to the increase in references to feminism in the media, during the course of this research, the academic publication Feminism & Psychology (SAGE) put out a call for submissions to a special feature entitled “Young Feminists” (R. Liebert, personal communication, October 13, 2012). The special feature was generated out of a concern with the “prodding and poking” of feminism within contemporary media and the academy, searching for signs of life, as well as an apparent (re)engagement with feminism by young women. The special feature aims to “build a transnational collection of reflexive pieces that documents how diverse feminisms are being – and could be – done by young people across the globe given contemporary conditions of or repression and resistance” (R. Liebert, personal communication, October 13, 2012). Rather than getting involved in the debate about whether feminism is relevant to young women, they are interested in documenting what is being done and what could be being done.

Finally, over the period of time that I have been writing this introduction, there have been two significant events here in Aotearoa/New Zealand that have generated discussion about feminism. The first was a series of marches across the country protesting rape culture in the wake of revelations about a group of boys in Auckland who call themselves “roast busters”; the boys, now aged 17 and 18, have allegedly engaged in sexual activities, often multiple boys with one girl, with girls who were often too drunk to consent and girls under the age of consent – some as young as 13. The boys also posted comments about their activities online, on websites such as Facebook, making comments that identified the girls, joking about being rapists and about rape. On the whole, there has been a vociferous public condemnation of the boys and their activities, as well as of the police and their lack of action: the police have been aware of the boys’ activities since 2011 and more than one girl has made a complaint. As well as a petition to the prime minister, calling for (among other things) more funding for rape prevention education and sexual assault services, there were protest marches in all of the main centres across the country, and there has been widespread discussion online about rape culture, sexual consent, the rights of women and girls, misogyny and gendered violence.
The other “event” was an email discussion about a proposal to disestablish the Women’s Studies Association of New Zealand, due to dwindling active memberships and the voluntary organisers “struggling against age and burnout” (M. Mowbray, personal communication, November 13, 2012). Apparently at the Association’s conference earlier in the year, older members of the Association had invited younger women to hijack the Association, install new ways of operating and take the Association in new directions, but no action had been forthcoming. As such, 20 members called a special meeting to discuss the proposal to wind up the Association, which has been operating since 1979. However, there emerged a counter-proposal suggesting that the work of the Association be down-sized but continue. Of particular relevance to the current research were two comments made during the discussion on the proposal to disestablish the Association. The two comments were made by women working at two different universities in the North Island and they both stated that feminism is currently experiencing a revival; there is increased interest in feminism and gender-related material in the university classroom. In addition to this, one member of the Association circulated a recent blog post by Sara Ahmed, an academic and director of the Centre for Feminist Research at Goldsmith’s University. In it, Ahmed (October 3, 2013) clearly states that her “own impression is that there is a burgeoning interest in feminism”, including in some “older” feminist ideas, “ones that might have been assumed to have become less relevant, even dated” (Ahmed, October 3, 2013).

So it would seem that feminism is a topic that is being discussed, debated, referenced, drawn upon and analysed. I am heartened by this anecdotal evidence that feminism is being seen as increasingly relevant, whilst simultaneously saddened by the conditions that make it so. In many ways this thesis has been a labour of love and simultaneously a labour of frustration, anger, and sadness. This is an area of abiding passion and motivation for me, but equally there have been moments when it has all been too much; when one individual’s painful story has cut me to the core, or my critical analysis of gendered power relations “out there” has for one reason or another connected starkly with my own lived experience “in here”. There have been long dark days and tears shed, but there has also been laughter, joy and fellowship on this journey. I believe that women the world over continue to be disempowered,
disenfranchised, and oppressed by virtue of their sex and gender in myriad ways, both subtle and highly apparent. I believe that feminism – in its wonderful and varied multiplicities – must continue in order to change this state of affairs. This thesis is one way in which I hope to contribute to the continuation of feminism – particularly within Aotearoa/New Zealand – but I believe it also has implications for feminism in other countries, particularly Western ones.
Chapter One – Contextualizing the Research

In September 2013, an online project to “re-brand feminism” was launched by three US media organisations whose work is focused on women (VITAMIN W Media, the 3% Conference and Miss Representation.org). The aim of the project was not to generate a new name or term to replace feminism; rather, they were seeking to “give feminism some love. Make it relevant and meaningful to everyone” (VitaminW, September 13, 2013). The impetus for the project appears to have been a poll of Americans that demonstrated that while many support the concept of equality, few like the label “feminism”. This dislike is far from new; in fact, for as long as the term feminism has been around, it has garnered negative attention for one reason or another from both men and women. As Caryl Rivers (as cited by Vavrus in Squires et al., 2010) has noted, “feminism is the only major human rights movement that is consistently not endorsed by many it has benefited” (p. 223). When I was studying gender and feminism at university, the strong criticism of so-called second wave feminism for its implicit assumption that all “women” are alike was very prevalent; it was intersectionality that was “hot”. Whilst I agree with many of the critiques of mainstream, white, middle class feminism, and believe that gender intersects with other axes of privilege in complex and multifaceted ways, which must always be explored alongside gender, I quickly became wary of the way in which these concerns seemed to be stopping young women, my peers, from calling themselves feminist. People talked about agreeing with feminism but not calling themselves feminist; drawing on feminist principles, but not calling themselves feminist; interested in the analysis of gendered power relations, but not calling themselves feminist. I was concerned for a number of reasons but chiefly that we would reach a point where no one called themselves feminist anymore – and this seemed to support an anti-feminism position. This possibility seemed highly problematic; if we lost the label of feminist, with all its multiple meanings and messy variations, it seemed to me there was a big risk that we would lose the battle altogether. I recall speaking with a friend one day and stating that I claimed the identity of feminist as a political act. This was the first time I had articulated this rationale, but as I said it, it seemed clear that this was what I had been thinking for a while. I had a strong sense that there weren’t enough of “us” young women doing this, we were all too busy critiquing feminism.
1.1 Introduction
As highlighted by Jacques and Radtke (2012), whilst many young women “do not discount the value of gender equality and individual freedom for themselves and other women, only a small number position themselves as feminists” (p. 444). Indeed, research with young women in the UK (Budgeon, 2001; Dahl Crossley, 2010; E. Rich, 2005; Scharff, 2009), the US (Aronson, 2003; Olson et al., 2008), Germany (Scharff, 2009) and Canada (Quinn & Radtke, 2006) indicates that while tenants of feminism, such as gender equality, are generally supported by young women, identifying with the label or position of feminist is less straightforward. Comparative research on young women’s identifications with feminism in Aotearoa/New Zealand (NZ) has not been carried out; this research addresses this gap. In order to situate the current research, I will briefly define feminism as it is used in the current research, and provide an overview of feminism in Aotearoa/NZ, before going on to outline the relevant research that has been completed elsewhere in the world on young women’s feminist dis/identifications. Finally, I discuss postfeminism, heteronormativity, and neoliberalism: all formations that intersect with young women’s feminist dis/identifications.

1.2 Feminism
In a 2009 article entitled “What’s political about the new feminisms?” Showden asked “who is to say (definitively) what feminism is?” (p. 167). McRobbie (2009) has also highlighted how the term feminism is highly contested, with no single static definition, arguing that “what feminism actually means varies, literally, from one self-declared feminist to the next” (p. 2). However, she goes on to say, “this does not reduce its field of potential influence” (p. 2). Despite this apparent difficulty in establishing what feminism might mean, it is important to consider a definition of feminism in order to contextualise the current research which asked participants for their thoughts on feminism. Peplau and Conrad (as cited in Striegel-Moore, 1994) defined feminism in the following fashion:

As an ideology, feminism emphasises the goal of gender equality, recognises the traditional oppression of women and their historical exclusion from public life, and values the experiences of women as important and appropriate topics for scholarly enquiry. As a political movement, feminism strives for social changes… to bring about gender equality in all facets of society (p. 439).
This definition is a useful starting place because it is multi-faceted, comprehensive and does not rely upon a static notion of patriarchy. However, it contains no reference to ethnicity, class, or any of the other axes of privilege commonly in operation in people’s lives. Indeed, for many young women today, feminism is seen as a movement for predominantly “white, middle-class, middle-aged, non-disabled heterosexuals” (Aapola, Gonick, & Harris, 2005, p. 197). However, these axes of privilege intersect each other and at these intersections oppressive power relations operate on more than one axis simultaneously, such that one cannot separate one from the other; the axes are all “linked in a matrix of domination in which there are few pure oppressors and few pure victims” (Collins, as cited in Gill, 2007a, p. 29). As Moralga and Anzaldua (as cited in Carby, 1982) wrote, it is “difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously” (p. 63).

Thus, I argue that any notion of feminism must also incorporate a theorisation and an analysis of how gendered power relations intersect with other axes of privilege. This argument raises the issue of how feminism deals with the notion of ‘difference’: an issue that feminists have wrestled with for decades. As Budgeon (2001) noted, “challenging the unity of the category ‘woman’ for[ed] a critical reappraisal of assumptions underlying feminism as a form of identity politics” (p. 11). In addition, the current research sits within a feminist poststructuralist framework (Gavey, 2011), particularly informed by discursive psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987), and therefore does not view feminism as one single, static, or authentic notion. Rather, within a poststructuralist framework, subjectivity is seen as fluid and partial. As such, feminism is viewed as a “socially constructed category...[that] will always have multiple meanings constructed in particular ways in particular contexts to serve particular purposes” (Quinn & Radtke, 2006, p. 188). Therefore, it is useful to follow Butler’s (1992) notion of feminism as contingent because it avoids exclusionary and normative definitions of the term and emancipates it as “a site where unanticipated meanings might come to bear” (Butler, 1992, p. 16). This means that feminism as a concept can be approached flexibly, which is particularly useful in cross-cultural contexts, such as the present research, because different understandings can occur across different cultural contexts (Scharff, 2012). As such, the definition of feminism
used in the present research is a contingent, multi-faceted one that constructs gender as one axis of many upon which power relations are mobilised.

1.2.1 Waves of Feminism

In considering how feminism might be defined for this research, it is also important to review the wave metaphor of feminism, largely because it is so prevalent within Western narratives of feminism. The wave metaphor refers to different eras of feminism, sometimes corresponding to different generations of women, but not always. Generally, within a mainstream Western history of feminism, the “first wave” of feminism is considered to have been the suffragette movement that resulted in women in Aotearoa/NZ, Britain, the United States (US), Canada and Australia variously gaining the right to vote between 1893 and 1928 (“Suffragette”, n.d.). Following this, the “second wave” of feminism is generally considered to have occurred, largely, but by no means solely, in the US and Britain, in the 1960s and 1970s (Budgeon, 2001). The narrative that has been – and continues to be – constructed about this second wave of feminism is that it was concerned with an essentialised notion of woman (Hemmings, 2005). That is, the dominant discourse is that the second wave feminist debates, consciousness-raising, and activism on issues such as marital rape laws; whether or not full-time mothers and others caring for dependents should be paid a wage; whether pornography objectified women or was free speech; “whether or not heterosexual feminists were ‘sleeping with the enemy’” (Bulbeck, 2010, p. 494); and whether or not women should have access to abortion as a legal right, were predicated on a series of implicit assumptions that the category of “woman” was a unitary category (Budgeon, 2001). According to Delmar (1994), from the beginning, “the modern women’s movement pitched its appeal at a very high level of generality, to all women” (p. 7), assuming a shared identity among women based “on the idea that women share the same experiences” (p. 7). Whilst many writers have critiqued this singular narrative (see Hemmings, 2005) for obscuring the variation, difference, and multiplicity in feminisms of the 1960s and 1970s, it is nevertheless the dominant narrative of Western second wave feminism. It is also a narrative that heavily informs third wave feminism, which “begins from the position that any understanding of the relationship between feminism and women’s lives must work consciously with women’s wide-ranging differences” (Heywood & Drake, as cited in Budgeon, 2011, p. 281). The third wave of feminism is typically understood to have
begun gathering momentum in the early 1990s with “an emphasis…on organizing young feminists (Orr, 1997) (emphasis original). Third wave feminism sees “itself as building on and expanding previous waves of feminism for contemporary times” (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 205), which includes a focus on difference and intersectionality, where intersectional analysis involves the concurrent analyses of multiple, intersecting sources of subordination/oppression, and is based on the premise that the impact of a particular source of subordination may vary, depending on its combination with other potential sources of subordination (or of relative privilege) (Denis, 2008, p. 677).

Another aspect of third wave feminism has been the “feminism is in the water” (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, p. 80) thesis; that is the argument that, for young Western women of the third wave, feminism has been such an accepted part of the environment in which they have grown up that they take it for granted – and it therefore acts as “a kind of ‘political fluoride’ that protects against the ‘decay’ of earlier sexism and gender discrimination” (Banet-Weiser, 2007, p. 208).

This latter aspect of third wave feminism shares a similarity with one of the ways in which the term postfeminism is used; namely, the idea that it is after feminism and it is a feminism concerned with different issues from those of second wave feminism, precisely because young women have been brought up with (second wave) feminism as a commonplace. Before getting into the different usages of the term postfeminism, however, I will provide a brief overview of feminism within Aotearoa/NZ and the international literature on feminist dis/identification.

1.2.2 Feminism in Aotearoa/NZ
As is well known, Aotearoa/NZ was the first nation to grant the right to vote to all adult women in 1893. Following on from this, the country has had a rich history of feminist activity resulting in material political change, particularly throughout the 1970s and 1980s; for example, we were the first country to have an autonomous, stand-alone Ministry of Women’s Affairs (O’Regan & Varnham, 1992). Indeed, according to Grey (2008), the “women’s liberation movement of the 1970s changed forever the landscape of New Zealand society and politics” (p. 76). However, despite this history, Middleton (1992) argues that Aotearoa/NZ feminists of the 1970s and
1980s tended to use feminist theory imported from other contexts, such as liberal feminist, radical feminist and Marxist feminist theories. This is of particular significance in Aotearoa/NZ, where the indigenous people – the Māori – were colonized by British and European settlers through the 1800s, for “like other Western social theories, feminist theories may render invisible or marginal the lives of women from other than the dominant group” (Middleton, 1992, p. 35). Indeed, part of the work of Māori feminism has been to challenge tauiwi, particularly Pākehā, analyses of the role and status of Māori women prior to colonisation (Irwin, 1992). Furthermore, Māori women activists and theorists have argued that “Pākehā women are as much the beneficiaries of colonisation as Pākehā men” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1993, p. 61) and there are “tensions between the ways in which Māori women view their realities and their struggles and the ways in which Pākehā feminists have defined feminist projects” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1993, p. 61). These arguments are relevant to the current research, firstly, because I interviewed young women from a range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, including two women who identified as Māori; it is quite likely that our conceptualisations of feminism were different in part because we occupy differing cultural positions. Secondly, as acknowledged above, gender intersects with other axes of privilege, such as ethnicity or culture, and therefore must be considered in combination when analysing young women’s dis/identifications with feminism. Lastly, it may well be that, for Māori participants of the current research, discourses of decolonisation are more significant or pertinent to their lives than feminist discourses. As Connor (2006) has argued, it is “discourses of decolonization [that] have actively promoted the resurgence of mana wāhine Māori and have challenged the ways in which Māori women are positioned in relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi” (p. 55).

As with other predominantly Western countries, within Aotearoa/NZ over the last ten to fifteen years the notion that young women are not particularly interested in feminism as a label or a movement (Aapola et al., 2005) has gained currency. In order to examine the state of feminism in Aotearoa/NZ post 1995, Grey (2008) analysed feminist protest event coverage in three mainstream print media outlets and the publications of feminist organisations after 1995. She then compared these results with historical accounts of feminist activities during the 1970s, to assess whether feminism in Aotearoa/NZ is in “abeyance”, has become institutionalised, or has
finished. She concluded that “there is no evidence that New Zealand after 1995 had a core group of grassroots activists from which another wave of feminist activism might draw strength” (p. 75). However, she also argued that a new type of feminist movement may be needed given the shifts that have occurred in the political landscape since the 1970s. This stance was supported by one of the young women she quoted:

young women today are thankful for the efforts earlier feminists have made and benefits won . . . [however] we will not be “owned” by you. Your version of feminism may not be ours. Societies evolve, feminism must be allowed to evolve with it (Grey, 2008, p. 77).

These findings are supported by more recent research into the feminist movement in Aotearoa/NZ by Schuster (2013). Through a series of 40 interviews with women ranging in age from 20 to 70, about the women’s movement in Aotearoa/NZ, Schuster (2013) found that younger women – those aged 20 to 31 – tended to be more involved in feminist activities online which were less visible to older women – those aged 32 and older – because the latter participated less in these online activities. This lack of visibility of young women’s online feminist activities led older women to bemoan the lack of interest in feminism by young New Zealand women and this in turn led younger women to feel alienated and discouraged (Schuster, 2013). I also found in the current research that young women were more involved in feminist activities online than in feminist activities out in the “real” world.

In terms of research within Aotearoa/NZ on women’s identifications with feminism, in 1990-1991, Curtin and Devere (1993) carried out research with 52 women in Aotearoa/NZ which explored “how women view feminism and whether they are prepared to identify with feminism themselves” (p. 10). Their research was conducted with women ranging in age from 18 to over 60 and utilised unstructured focus group discussions. They found that, when asked whether they considered themselves to be a feminist, the participants fell into one of three groups: firstly, women who did not identify as feminists; secondly, women who did identify as feminists; and thirdly, women who had leanings towards feminism but also had reservations about calling themselves feminist (Curtin & Devere, 1993). They also found that participants’ level of education, ethnicity, religious identification, and age mediated their identifications with feminism, as “there was a tendency for older women, religious women, women
without tertiary education, Māori women and working class women not to want to be identified with feminism” (Curtin & Devere, 1993, p. 12). However, with regards to young women and feminism within Aotearoa/NZ, to date, there has been no research, utilizing a discursive approach, which focuses specifically on young women’s dis/identifications with feminism; the current research addresses this gap.

I will now outline some of the “empirical” markers of gendered inequality in Aotearoa/NZ today as a means of situating the current research and justifying a need for feminism in Aotearoa/NZ today, before reviewing the international literature on young women’s dis/identifications with feminism.

1.2.2.1 Gender Inequality in Aotearoa/NZ Today

According to the Ministry of Women’s Affairs [MWA] (n.d.), Aotearoa/NZ was “ranked seventh out of 136 countries in the Global Gender Gap report for 2013 and fifth out of 187 countries in the Human Development Index” (para. 5). However, despite these high rankings, structural markers of gendered inequality continue to exist in the areas of safety from violence, participation in leadership, and economic independence.

In terms of safety from violence, according to Woolson Neville (2013), a population based study completed in Aotearoa/NZ in 2004 found that “for women who had ever had an intimate partner, between 33-39% had experienced physical violence at least once” (p. 4). Furthermore, when these data were re-examined in 2011, it was found that “when psychological abuse was considered, 55% of women reported experiencing at least one incident of abuse in their lifetimes” (Woolson Neville, 2013, p. 4). These findings indicate that intimate partner violence against women remains a significant problem within Aotearoa/NZ today. Whilst violence against intimate partners occurs within many types of intimate relationships, overwhelmingly, it is violence by male partners against female partners (Woolson Neville, 2013). These statistics are supported by protection order data from the Family Court which show that in 2011 91% of applicants for protection orders were female and 83% of respondents to protection orders were male (New Zealand Family Violence Clearing House, 2013). When considering sexual violence specifically, the data shows that approximately 29% of New Zealand women experience sexual violence once or more
in their lifetime (Ministry of Women's Affairs [MWA], 2012); this figure is in line with similar statistics from Canada, Britain and Australia (Families Commission, as cited in MWA, 2012). Thus, sexual violence against women is also a significant problem within Aotearoa/NZ today.

Moving away from the area of violence against women and looking at markers of economic independence, we can see that women in Aotearoa/NZ lag behind men in a variety of ways. Firstly, women’s rate of participation in the labour force is 62%, while men’s is almost 75% (MWA, n.d.). Secondly, women’s rate of unemployment is 7.1%, compared with 6.3% for men, and approximately 63% of women’s work is unpaid, compared with 35% of men’s work (MWA, n.d.). There is also a significant difference in the salaries and wages earned by women from those earned by men. Research carried out by the MWA in 2007 showed that for graduate starting salaries there was a 6% gender gap, which then increased to 17% after five years (Wade, 2013). The Annual Income Survey carried out by Statistics New Zealand found that in 2013, based on average hourly earnings, there was a 13% gap between what women and men earn (Pay Equity Challenge Coalition, 2013). The median figure of the same data shows a 10.1% difference (MWA, n.d.). Whilst this is the lowest equal gender salary gap in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development¹, it is still a significant gap, particularly when viewed in light of the fact that New Zealand “women of all ages and ethnicities are now more qualified than men and young women are obtaining qualifications at a higher rate than men” (MWA, 2013b, p. i). Not only does the gender salary gap have a significant detrimental impact on individual’s and family lives, it contributes to an inequitable society, as well as being detrimental to Aotearoa/NZ at the macroeconomic level (Cassells, Vidyattama, Miranti & McNamara, 2009).

Another impact of the gender salary gap is that it makes leadership roles less appealing to women when they know that they are likely to earn less than their male counterparts for the same roles. Since 2004, the MWA has carried out an annual stock-take of the gender composition of state sector boards and committees to track and report on women’s participation in these positions of leadership. In 2012, the

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¹ Alongside Ireland (Ministry of Women’s Affairs, n.d.)
stock-take demonstrated that women comprised 40.5% of members on state sector boards and committees (MWA, 2013a). Furthermore, in the last general election, there were 39 female politicians elected to Parliament – comprising roughly one third of the total Parliament; this figure is below the highest number of female MPs ever elected, which was 41 in 2008 (New Zealand Parliament, 2012). Thus, while women comprise at least half of New Zealand’s population, this ratio is not reflected in the gender make up of key leadership positions, despite there being “compelling evidence that greater gender diversity in governance and leadership roles correlates with better decision making and organisational performance, providing economic and productivity gains” (Ministry of Women’s Affairs, n.d., para. 1).

Given these “empirical” indicators of gender inequality in Aotearoa/NZ, it would seem that there is an undeniable need for feminism. This need and the presence of gender inequality within Aotearoa/NZ provide a persuasive context for the current research into young women’s dis/identifications with feminism and dis/articulations of feminism. I will now review the international literature on young women’s dis/identifications with feminism.

### 1.3 Young Women’s Feminist Dis/Identification

“Regardless of the reasons that are attributed to this situation, it is commonly accepted that young women are not especially interested in feminism as a label or a movement any more” (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 195). And yet, “women constitute half of the world’s population and their subordination and experience of inequality, though changed, remains unequivocal and substantial” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 2). As demonstrated above, this gender inequality is true of Aotearoa/NZ today. How, then, are we to account for young women’s seeming disinterest in feminism, and in particular their dis-identification with feminism? There has been a range of research internationally over the last 15 years that has investigated young women’s relationship with feminism and the identity of “feminist”.

In 2001, Budgeon published an article based on her research with 33 young women aged 16-20 from varied social and cultural backgrounds in northern England. The research involved conducting a series of interviews to explore how the participants actively constructed their identities within late modernity, with a focus on how the
young women “defined and engaged with the choices they had available to them” (Budgeon, 2001, p. 9) after their compulsory education had finished. Many of the participants indicated that whilst the situation for women had changed dramatically and many young women now had opportunities available to them that were not previously available, there was still persistent gender inequality. However, when she analysed how the young women accounted for this gender inequality, it was apparent that it was seen as an individual’s responsibility. That is, the young women “invoked the right of each individual to do what they want translating into the promotion of individualized solutions” (Budgeon, 2001, p. 17). Budgeon (2001) stated that the young women in her study did not “recognize themselves as the subject of feminism and so [did] not actively incorporate the category ‘feminist’ into their identities” (p. 24). However, Budgeon (2001) argued that the participants’ awareness of gender inequality and commitment to justice and fairness, when combined with individualism, meant that while participants may not identify with the label of feminism, they still “exercised a politicized agency at the micro-level of everyday social relations” (Budgeon, 2001, p. 18); politicised in that it was informed by feminist ideals. This politicised agency exercised in everyday social relations could be seen, for example, in participants electing to challenge the everyday sexism that they experienced, whilst simultaneously disavowing the label of “feminist” (Budgeon, 2001).

Another analysis conducted in England, this time with 10 female students completing a Postgraduate Certificate of Education, specialising in Physical Education, found somewhat similar results (E. Rich, 2005). The analysis was part of a larger study on the development of gendered identities for female physical education teaching students and focused on the relationship between their gendered identities and feminism (E. Rich, 2005). All the participants were white and in their 20s but came from a range of class backgrounds. E. Rich (2005) found that participants did not identify as feminists and instead drew on neoliberal, individualised discourses which “tended to assume a separation of self from gendered contexts, and a belief that one’s individual determination to become or achieve something…is enough to over-come social constraint” (p. 501). That is, participants were aware of, and disagreed with, gender inequalities, but the main discourses they drew on to negotiate such disparities
and their own positionings in relation to them were centred on the ability – and responsibility – of the individual to overcome them.

In contrast to the preceding two pieces of research, Aronson (2003) carried out her research in the United States. She did an analysis of 42 interviews with women aged 23-24 from a variety of ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic backgrounds. The interviews focused on education, work, family, and feminism, and Aronson (2003) identified five approaches to feminist identification from them. Overall, Aronson (2003) found, similarly to Budgeon (2001), that participants were positive about the increases in opportunities for young women today – and aware that older women have fought to gain these opportunities – whilst also being aware that gender inequality remains. When asked about their attitudes towards feminism, almost half of the participants positioned themselves on a continuum ranging from identifying as a feminist, through a qualified support of feminism, to those who would not call themselves feminists but supported some feminist issues. However, over half of the participants “did not want to explicitly define themselves in relation to feminism at all” (Aronson, 2003, p. 912). The five approaches to feminist identification that Aronson (2003) identified were: firstly, the young women who identified as feminists; secondly, the young women who identified as feminists but qualified this identification in some way; thirdly, the young women who said they did not identify as feminists but qualified this dis-identification in some way; the young women who were “fence sitters” – failing to identify or dis-identify as feminists; and lastly, the young women who said they had never thought about feminism. In reviewing the young women’s identifications with feminism, Aronson (2003) found that most considered feminism to be about gender equality and were supportive of this. In reviewing participants’ qualified feminist identifications and dis-identifications, Aronson (2003) found that participants distanced themselves from negative associations with feminism (that it is a radical movement, it alienates men, that all feminists are lesbians) or that participants grew up with an assumption of equality or said they had never personally experienced gender discrimination and therefore did not see the need for identifying as feminist. Lastly, Aronson (2003) also found that axes of privilege such as class and ethnicity intersected with feminist identifications; specifically, she found that more privileged socioeconomic and sociocultural backgrounds were associated with an identification with the position of feminist.
In a different piece of research, carried out in Canada, Quinn and Radtke (2006) found that for the women participants, “a feminist subject position was both difficult to take up and difficult to reject” (p. 187). They asked nine pairs of female university students, aged between 23 and 51, to engage in a facilitated discussion with each other starting from the question “do you consider yourself to be a feminist?” (Quinn & Radtke, 2006, p. 190). They found that participants positioned themselves in relation to feminism in a variety of ways that often shifted through the course of the discussion. Their discourse analysis identified the presence of three interpretive repertoires – “relatively coherent ways of talking about objects and events in the world” (Edley, 2001a, p. 198) – which were drawn on by participants in negotiating the dilemma of whether or not to identify as a feminist. The interpretive repertoires were: firstly, a liberal feminism that emphasised equal rights; secondly, an extremist feminism, which was seen negatively; and thirdly, a “lifestyle” feminism that involved being a feminist through the way one lives, whether or not one claims the identity of “feminist”. In analysing how participants utilised these interpretive repertoires to position themselves as varied kinds of feminists, they found that participants regularly avoided both an outright identification, as well as an outright dis-identification, with a feminist identity. This finding led them to conclude that the position of feminist is both untenable and compelling: “untenable because of the common sense connection between feminism and extremism and compelling because of the common sense connection between feminism and equality” (Quinn & Radtke, 2006, p. 194).

These common sense notions of feminism being, on the one hand, extreme, and on the other, about equality, were also found in Scharff’s (2009) PhD research. Scharff (2009) interviewed 40 young women, aged between 18 and 35, in Britain and Germany over 2006 and 2007. The interviews were semi-structured and “explored how young women think, talk and feel about feminism” (Scharff, 2010, p. 830); in particular, Scharff (2009) was interested in young women’s lack of identification with feminism. The interviewees were diverse in terms of ethnicity, sexuality, and socioeconomic background; half of them lived in Germany and half in Britain. Interestingly, she found no significant differences between how feminism was talked about in Germany from how it was talked about in Britain: “feminism was unpopular
in both countries, with 30 respondents stating that they would not call themselves a feminist” (Scharff, 2009, p. 830). In addition to identifying the interpretive repertoires of feminism as extreme and radical, and feminism as about equality, she found that interviewees’ sexuality, class, and race intersected with their responses to feminism, often in quite complex ways. Utilising Butler’s (1990) theory of performativity, she theorised how repudiations of feminism by interviewees were often “performatively citations of femininity and, in some cases, heterosexuality” (Scharff, 2010, p. 830). She also found that interviewees’ accounts were mediated by postfeminist and neoliberal discourses so that, for example, gender inequality was acknowledged but seen as the individual’s responsibility to negotiate and overcome. Lastly, Scharff (2009) found that the neoliberal discourses of individualism drawn on by participants were frequently utilised together with “the trope of ‘the oppressed Muslim woman’” (Scharff, 2011a, p. 120) such that the two notions worked in concert to construct each other. Scharff’s (2009) findings were strikingly similar to the findings of the current research, despite the fact that the current research was done in Aotearoa/NZ – a country with a cultural heritage that in part is linked to Britain through colonisation but is by no means the same as the sociocultural context in Britain or Germany. This suggests that the available interpretive repertoires and sociocultural resources on feminism – as well as young women’s dis/articulations of feminism through neoliberal, postfeminist, and othering discourses – may transcend international borders, “highlighting similarities, rather than differences between the ways feminism is negotiated amongst young women living in Germany and the UK” (Scharff, 2009, p. 144) and Aotearoa/NZ. It is also worth noting that other recent research in the UK by Dahl Crossley (2010) also found that young women’s relationship with feminism was mediated by heterosexuality. She found that “heteronormativity and the assumption of heterosexuality…were employed as buffers or instruments of resistance to feminism” (Dahl Crossley, 2010, p. 349).

Much of this international research suggests that feminism is unpopular, disavowed and/or rejected by young women (see also Aapola et al., 2005; Barnard, 2009); indeed, this is one of the key features of “postfeminism”, a term used to connote a variety of things, but refers to a cultural climate in the context of the current research. Before providing an overview of postfeminism however, I will first outline another aspect of the literature that is relevant to the present research – that on constructions
of “the feminist”. There is research that focuses, either entirely or partly, on constructions of the label and identity of “the feminist” rather than on identifications with feminism. Such research has been carried out with both men and women and is significant for the present research because it provides an indication of the discursive milieu within which my findings sit.

1.4 Constructions of ‘The Feminist’

Riley (2001) interviewed 46 men in Glasgow in the UK and found that although feminism was generally constructed as positive feminists were not. Her research involved presenting vignettes as a discussion starter to the participants, who ranged from students and working men under 35 to men over 35 who had been working for at least 15 years. The vignettes covered situations related in some way to traditional notions of gender and each involved some sort of dilemma for the people described in the vignette. Riley (2001) found that while feminism is ‘OK’, feminists…[were] discredited as boring; saying something is wrong when it isn’t, ‘crying wolf’; hypocrites and extremists; ‘ramming [their opinions] down people’s throats’; distorting equal rights; having a ‘chip on their shoulder’; and being qualitatively different from ‘normal’ people (p. 66).

Other research with men has shown that the two interpretive repertoires on feminism identified by both Quinn and Radtke (2006) and Scharff (2009), that of feminism being a reasonable movement interested in equal rights for men and women and the other of feminism being an extreme, radical movement, are present in men’s constructions of feminism and feminists. Edley and Wetherall (2001), in a now well-known piece of discursive research, analysed interview transcripts from interviews with two groups of men in Britain: 17 and 18 year old school boys, and 20 – 64 year old men attending university. They focused their analysis on parts of the interviews where the interviewees had discussed what they thought feminism was, what feminists were and what they thought of feminists. What emerged were two interpretive repertoires. These repertoires were used in conjunction with each other to construct both feminism and feminists in the binary positions of either reasonable and equality-focused or extreme and radical; the researchers labelled these two positions “Jekyll and Hyde” (Edley & Wetherall, 2001, p. 439). Significantly however, when
the interviewees were drawing on the extreme, radical repertoire, “it tended to be an embodied account personifying feminism” (Edley & Wetherall, 2001, p. 444) (emphasis original). That is, the reasonable, “Jekyll”, repertoire was used when talking about feminism, but when engaging with the radical, “Hyde”, repertoire, the talk turned to feminists – even if the discussion had started with feminism. And when “feminists turned into Hyde, they became highly coloured. In line with the fictional reference, the feminist was now portrayed as something of a monstrous ogre or fiend” (Edley & Wetherall, 2001, p. 444). Lastly, they also found that the interviewees’ accounts of feminists, utilising the “Hyde” repertoire, were frequently about the sexual orientation of the feminist (lesbian), the physical appearance of the feminist (ugly), and her general attitude towards men (hates them) (Edley & Wetherall, 2001).

Scharff (2009) also found that the participants in her research constructed the figure of the feminist as unfeminine, a man-hater, and a lesbian. The femininity, or lack thereof, of the feminist was consistently expressed in terms of physical appearance, generally relating to weight/slimness, length of hair, and heterosexual attractiveness. Furthermore, many interviewees linked being unfeminine with liking women instead of men and then associated this preference for women with hating men and lesbianism (Scharff, 2009). Whilst the notion that feminists are lesbians did not appear strongly in the current research, I did find that feminists and feminism were seen as man-hating and unfeminine; and that feminism was seen as incompatible with femininity. Such negative constructions of the figure of the feminist may partially account for young women’s dis-identification with feminism, but there is more to the story than this. In particular, I argue that discourses of postfeminism, neoliberalism and heteronormativity which pervade the current cultural climate all mediated the young women’s dis/identifications with feminism in the current research. As such, I will now outline each of these of these concepts.

1.5 Postfeminism

According to Rapp (as cited in Nurka, 2002) the term postfeminism first appeared in the post-suffrage US where, after winning the vote, it was hard for many activists to conceive of another concerted movement on behalf of women. However, the term is recognised as first being used in popular discourse in a New York Times Magazine article titled “Voices from the Post-Feminist Generation” (Bolotin, 1982, October 17).
The article was prompted by a male colleague asking her rhetorically, “why would any woman today label herself a feminist?” (Bolotin, 1982, October 17, p. 29). In response, she embarked upon a series of informal interviews with young women, seeking to understand why they did not identify with the label of feminist and the political movement of feminism. Whilst the women demonstrated a range of views, there was one common thread running throughout the interviews: that of a disavowal of feminism. Feminism and feminists were described as separatist, bitter, tortured, icy monsters, and lesbians (Bolotin, 1982, October 17). The author concluded that many young women were “unwilling to act, to speak up, to fight the inequalities that affect[ed] not only them but the rest of the world’s women” (Bolotin, 1982, October 17, p. 10). Since this article was written, the use of the term has proliferated and Tasker and Negra (2007) contend that “part of the significance of postfeminist culture lies in its pervasive presence not just in film, television, and popular literature but in advertising, magazines, music and political discourse” (p. 11).

A review of the literature indicates that postfeminism is a term that is used in multiple and often contradictory ways; indeed, “definitive conceptualisations of postfeminism are as elusive as references to postfeminism are pervasive” (Tasker & Negra, 2007, p. 19). Postfeminism is used as a noun to refer to people and to a cultural product, and postfeminist is used as an adjective to describe a cultural climate. This multiplicity and contradictoriness can make a sustained and analytical engagement with the term challenging. However, I agree with Gill (2007a) that its usages can be loosely grouped into the following three definitional areas.

Firstly, there is the idea that postfeminism is a new type of feminism signalled by an epistemological break from “second wave” feminism (Brooks, 1997; Gill, 2007a). In this usage, the term is situated at an intersection with other movements such as postmodernism and postcolonialism (Brooks, 1997). Gill (2007a) argued that in this sense postfeminism represents a move toward debates about difference and diversity and away from a focus on equality. It stresses the manner in which gender is interconnected with other axes of power, so that it cannot be analysed separately from “race”, colonialism, sexuality, and class (Budgeon, 2001; Gill, 2007a). An example of this usage is Robinson’s (2011) analysis of 41 interviews that she conducted with Australian women aged between 18 and 23 that focused on how feminist and
postfeminist discourses are constructed in popular culture through two particular television shows, how the young women engaged with these television shows, and how the shows reflected some of the pressures they were facing. In her analysis, Robinson (2011) conceptualised postfeminism as “part of the continuing transformation of feminism, rather than as a backlash against it” (p. 114), where “postfeminism represents a moment in feminism that intersects with other theories that share a ‘post’ prefix” (p. 114). She concluded that the young women in her study accept both the values and the criticisms of second wave feminism and actively draw upon both when engaging with popular culture and when discussing their own lives (Robinson, 2011). In this usage of the term, the “post” in postfeminism “does not mean that patriarchy has been overcome… just as postmodernism and postcolonialism do not mark that modernism and imperialism have been replaced or superseded” (Kim, 2001, p. 321). Instead, postfeminism engages not only in challenging patriarchy but also in challenging second wave feminist assumptions that patriarchal oppression is experienced equally and ubiquitously by all women regardless of ethnicity, sexuality, disability, or class (Brooks, 1997). This usage of the term generally occurs in academic, rather than popular, discourse.

In the second definitional usage, postfeminism is after-feminism. Here, postfeminism refers to feminism of a later historical period from “second wave” feminism. As such, it suggests that the postfeminism of today is concerned with different issues and problems from the feminism of yesteryear (Gill, 2007a). In this usage, postfeminism is often used to critique a polarisation of feminism and femininity, arguing that it is possible to have both (Hollows, 2000; Showden, 2009). This definition of postfeminism has commonalities with third wave feminism, particularly in the way that it seeks to work with “a proliferation of feminine subjectivities and multiplying forms of feminist affiliation including ‘power feminism’, ‘victim feminism’, black feminism and pro-sex feminism” (Budgeon, 2011, p. 282); however, it is not the same as third wave feminism and indeed, many “third wavers” would actively dispute any claimed connection. This definition of postfeminism is the one most frequently utilised as an identity claim; that is, when people describe themselves as a “postfeminist”, it is this definition that they are most commonly referring to.
In the third definitional usage there is the idea that postfeminism is a backlash against the so-called second wave feminism of the 1960s and 70s (Kim, 2001). It is a usage that is frequently attributed to others, often the media, or a usage used to describe a cultural climate. Susan Faludi is the person most often associated with this definition, which is unsurprising given the title of her 1992 book: *Backlash: The undeclared war against women*. Faludi argued that in the 1980s American publications such as the New York Times published a range of articles indicting feminism, holding it responsible for “nearly every woe besetting women, from depression to meagre savings accounts, from teenage suicides to eating disorders to bad complexions” (Faludi, 1992, p. 3). In other words, this definition of postfeminism holds feminism responsible for all the ills that women experience because it has set up the expectation that women can “have it all”; but they cannot have it all and these ills are a demonstration of that fact (Budgeon, 2001). For example, The Atlantic magazine published a cover story article in its July/August 2012 edition titled “Why women still can’t have it all” (Slaughter, 2012). The article was written by the first female director of policy planning at the US State Department. It outlines her belief that in current US society it is not possible for women (in the article she is generally referring to white, Western, well educated, economically privileged women) to easily manage work-life balance in terms of having a successful, “top professional” career and being a mother. As a consequence of this challenge, she chose to leave her role at the State Department to return to her family and her role at Princeton University. There were a range of reactions to her article, but strikingly, a significant proportion of the responses focussed on criticising feminism and the (supposedly) feminist motto that women can “have it all”. However, this position obscures any contribution of structural inequality to women’s inability to have family and career; as Traister (2012, June 21) stated, “the ‘have it all’ formulation sets an impossible bar for female success and then ensures that when women fail to clear it, it’s feminism – as opposed to persistent gender inequity – that’s to blame” (Traister, 2012, June 21, para. 5).

However, McRobbie (2009) has suggested a complexification of this third usage of postfeminism. She has argued that rather than a simple backlash against feminism, there also exists an assumption that gender equality has been achieved and freedom for women is taken for granted (Coleman, 2009). Despite these ideas being somewhat converse to the notion that feminism is responsible for women’s woes, they exist
alongside each other within postfeminism (Gill, 2007a). The way in which this coexistence is achieved is one of the hallmarks of this usage of “postfeminism” and is what renders it more complex than a simple backlash against second wave feminism. It is not simply anti-feminist; rather, within this definition, feminism is simultaneously recuperated and rendered obsolete such that it becomes redundant (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). The logic is that feminism is common sense and therefore unnecessary. As McRobbie (2009) has stated, this definition of postfeminism positively draws on and invokes feminism as that which can be taken into account, to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of new meanings which emphasise that it is no longer needed, it is a spent force (p. 12).

It is significant that in all of the postfeminism definitional groupings above (as epistemological break, as after-feminism, as backlash, and as a complexification of the backlash thesis), there is reference to some other type of feminism; postfeminism is defined, at least partially, against feminism (Tasker & Negra, 2007). Frequently this feminism is second wave feminism which, as I indicated earlier, refers to “the resurgence of feminism as a social, cultural and political movement in the 1960s and 1970s” (Budgeon, 2001, p. 26). The critiques by non-white, non-middle class women directed at second wave feminism that identified its exclusionary tendencies and presumption to speak for all women (Budgeon, 2001) were deserved and timely. However, it is important to highlight again at this point that feminism has never been an uncontested territory or movement with a static unitary definition (Hemmings, 2005; McRobbie, 2009). As Coleman stated in 2009 “a diversity of feminisms, in tension and, at times, in contradiction with each other, is not a new phenomenon” (p. 4). Even during the 1960s and 70s, the height of “second wave” feminism, “alliances were invariably fraught and fragile, as much characterised by open conflict and argument, as by shows of unity” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 26). Yet the feminism that is most often hailed as being the “authentic feminism” that young women these days supposedly do not identify with, is presented as a homogenised and monolithic movement that assumed to speak for “all women” (Coleman, 2009). Indeed, according to Coleman (2009), the second wave feminism referred to by postfeminism has been reduced, homogenised and misinterpreted to the point of being
unrecognisable. McRobbie (2009) goes further, arguing that “a kind of hideous spectre of what feminism once was is conjured up, a monstrous ugliness which would send shudders of horror down the spines of young women today, as a kind of deterrent” (p. 1). Indeed, Tasker and Negra (2007) argue that the important questions about postfeminism concern what strategies might be deployed in relation to its “pervasive insistence on the bleakness and redundancy of feminism” (p. 19).

I argue that McRobbie’s (2009) complexified notion of postfeminism, where feminism is simultaneously recuperated and rendered obsolete, refers to a cultural climate; it describes a set of discourses that pervade contemporary culture and find particular expression through popular culture, a site where power relations play out in socioculturally and historically specific ways (Hall, as cited in Robinson, 2011). This notion fits well with Gill’s (2007a) conceptualisation of postfeminism as a sensibility which pervades contemporary popular culture and media. According to Gill (2009) a postfeminist sensibility is characterised by:

A taking for granted of feminist ideas alongside a fierce repudiation of feminism; an emphasis upon choice, freedom and individual empowerment; a pre-occupation with the body and sexuality as the locus of femininity; a reassertion of natural sexual difference grounded in heteronormative ideas about gender complementarity; the importance placed upon self-surveillance and monitoring as modes of power; and a thoroughgoing commitment to ideas of self-transformation, that is, a makeover paradigm (p. 346).

Gill and Scharff (2011) argue that these characteristics exist alongside and are structured by “stark and continuing inequalities and exclusions that relate to ‘race’ and ethnicity, class, age, sexuality and disability – as well as gender” (p. 4). It is this understanding of postfeminism as a sensibility pervading the cultural climate that I have mobilised in the current research, largely because it is a useful analytical tool. Furthermore, as I argue later in my data analysis, four of these characteristics are particularly relevant for the current research in that they were prevalent in the interviewees’ accounts. The four characteristics of particular relevance are:

1) A taking for granted of feminist ideas alongside a fierce repudiation of feminism;
2) An emphasis upon choice, freedom and individual empowerment;
3) A pre-occupation with the body and sexuality as the locus of femininity; and
4) A reassertion of natural sexual difference grounded in heteronormative ideas about gender complementarity (Gill, 2009).

This approach to postfeminism also intersects with neoliberal and heteronormative discourses that pervade contemporary Western culture, and interviewees drew on all of these discourses in their dis/identifications with feminism. I will now briefly expand upon the four postfeminist characteristics of particular relevance to the current research before moving on to explore heteronormativity and neoliberalism.

1.5.1 Characteristic One: A Taking for Granted of Feminist Ideas alongside a Fierce Repudiation of Feminism

This characteristic is what McRobbie (2009), drawing on Judith Butler, calls the “double entanglement” of postfeminism, whereby feminist ideas are assumed as common sense (taken for granted) and feminism is simultaneously repudiated. It is the entanglement of these ideas that marks contemporary culture as postfeminist rather than anti-feminist. Frequently, the type of feminist ideas that are taken into account as common sense come from a specific form of liberal feminism, the type of feminism that can be seen in the liberal, equality-focused interpretive repertoire found by Edley and Wetherell (2001) and others; it is “benign, sane and rational” (Edley & Wetherell, 2001, p. 444). In contrast, feminism and feminists are concurrently dismissed as expecting too much of women, punitive, man-hating, and “not articulating women’s true desires” (Tasker & Negra, as cited in Gill, 2007a, p. 269). For example, Grazia, a popular British women’s magazine, in a brief review of Caitlin Moran’s 2011 book How to be a woman, stated,

Moran’s managed to put feminism right back on the agenda in a totally fresh way. This is feminism where Lady Gaga’s a role model and it’s ok to paint your nails in front of Newsnight or question whether it really is the right thing for you to have kids…It’s the book every modern woman should read (“The book EVERY woman should read,” 2011, June 21)

Feminism is constructed as “on the agenda” and relevant to “every modern woman” whilst also by implication being constructed as dictating what women should or should not do (have children), unfeminine (unpainted nails), and not knowing what women really want (to be like Lady Gaga).
1.5.2 Characteristic Two: An Emphasis upon Choice, Freedom and Individual Empowerment

A key characteristic of a postfeminist sensibility are notions of freedom of choice, self-determination, and independence (Gill, 2007a). These notions rest upon a highly individualised sense of personal autonomy, whereby everything is seen to be under the power of the individual. These discourses of individual empowerment are severed from power differentials and all political or cultural influence, such that individuals become the agents of their own success or failure (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008). As examples, Gill (2007a) has cited the significant increase in women having Brazilian waxes (removing all pubic hair) and women undergoing breast augmentation surgery. These are frequently and widely talked about as examples of women choosing to please themselves; no mention is made of the commercial interests involved or the sociocultural expectations that might influence a woman to engage in either practice. As Gill (2007a) has said, this discourse of women simply pleasing themselves “cannot account for why, if women are just...following their own autonomously generated desires, the resulting valued ‘look’ is so similar – hairless body, slim waist, firm buttocks, etc” (p. 260). Within a postfeminist climate, “the element of choice becomes synonymous with a kind of feminism” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 66) and women can then use this feminist freedom to choose to take up a more traditional, heterosexual femininity (Gill, 2009). As stated in Grazia, a British women’s magazine, feminism, we are told, is about choice - and if that choice is spending your days doing Ashtanga yoga and making your own guacamole because you’ve married someone who earns so much there’s no pressure on you to do anything else, then so be it (Knight, 2012, June 21).

This characteristic of the postfeminist sensibility clearly ties into both neoliberal discourses and consumer culture, both of which I discuss further below.

1.5.3 Characteristic Three: A Pre-Occupation with the Body and Sexuality as the Locus of Femininity

As highlighted in the previous characteristic, a striking feature of a postfeminist sensibility is its preoccupation with the (female) body (Gill, 2007a, 2007b). Furthermore, the body has become the defining locus of femininity; whereas in the past the role of mother, or the emotional capacity of nurturing, might have been the defining characteristics of femininity, today it appears that it is the “possession of a
'sexy body’ that is presented as women’s key (if not sole) source of identity” (Gill, 2007a, p. 149). Significantly, this body is one that requires constant monitoring, surveillance, and work to be done on it in order to pass muster; as McRobbie (2009) has stated, “carefully staged body maintenance [is] an imperative of feminine identity” (p. 63). Within a postfeminist climate, there is a “renewed discursive emphasis on femininity…this time recast as a relentless drive for physical perfectibility” (Tincknell, 2011, p. 83). This characteristic is closely tied with the next characteristic of an importance placed upon self-surveillance and monitoring as modes of power.

Closely linked to this pre-occupation with the body is a pre-occupation with (hetero)sexuality as a key site of femininity within a postfeminist climate. Attwood (2009) and others (for example, Harvey & Gill, 2011; Levy, 2005) have talked about the pervasive sexualisation of contemporary (Western) culture; discourses related to sexuality and sex have multiplied across popular culture and media, and young women “now have to negotiate a social landscape that more specifically and expressly addresses them as sexual subjects” (Jackson & Vares, 2011, p. 135). The manner in which this address occurs is markedly different to earlier addresses of young woman as passive objects of a male gaze2. Instead, in a postfeminist climate, women are constructed as sexual subjects who are active, consumerist, always “up for it” and agentive – but frequently in ways that look strikingly similar to the notion of woman as passive sexual object of the (assumed) male subject. In other words, within a climate marked by a postfeminist sensibility, there is a sleight of hand whereby women are constituted as “active, desiring sexual subjects who choose to present themselves in a seemingly objectified manner because it suits their liberated interests to do so” (Goldman, as cited in Gill, 2007a, p. 258, emphasis added). Often cited examples of self-selected objectification include women taking burlesque and pole dancing lessons to get over a “libido lull” (Gill, 2009), women’s t-shirts declaring “porn-star” or “hot chick”, and lingerie advertising displaying explicit, sexually assertive models (Evans, Riley, & Shankar, 2010).

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2 This address of young women as sexual subjects is also different from how others, for example young non-white men, are sexualised within a postfeminist climate.
1.5.4 Characteristic Four: A Reassertion of Natural Sexual Difference Grounded in Heteronormative Ideas about Gender Complementarity

The notion of difference has a long history within feminism; the argument that men and women are different has been used to challenge the androcentric bias in medical research for example. However, the notion of equality has also frequently been positioned in opposition to the notion of difference, in a equality-versus-difference manner (Scott, 1994), such that during the 1970s and 1980s, the similarities between men and women were highlighted by feminists in order to gain support for the notion of equality (Gill, 2007a). However, Gill (2007a) has argued that by the 1990s any notion that men and women were similar “was resolutely dispensed with” (p. 265), and since then, notions of “natural” difference between the “two” sexes have flourished. For example, Przybylo (2013), in a review of scientific research on asexuality, notes that “contemporary scientific study of sex…[is] now concerned with establishing the differences between men’s and women’s sexual response” (p. 237).

The rise of popular evolutionary psychology with its central tenants of biological essentialism (Toerien & Durrheim, 2001), suggesting that differences between men and women are innate, unchanging, and directly linked to sexuality (Gupta & Cacchioni, 2013), has supported this move. Alongside this popularisation of evolutionary psychology has been the increase in self-help books about (usually heterosexual) relationships that rely on notions of natural sexual difference and gender complementarity, such as Men are from Mars, Women are from Venus (Gray, 1992) and The Rules: Time Tested Secrets for Capturing the Heart of Mr Right (Fein & Schneider, 1995). The latter, for example, presents biology as truth:

We (the authors) understand why modern, career-oriented women have sometimes scoffed at our suggestions. They’ve been MBA-trained to ‘make things happen’ and to take charge of their careers. However, a relationship with a man is different from a job. In a relationship, the man must take charge. He must propose. We are not making this up – biologically he’s the aggressor (Fein & Schneider, as cited in Boynton, 2003, p. 238).

This characteristic of the postfeminist cultural climate is particularly pertinent to discussions of young women’s identifications with feminism because of the way that feminism is frequently positioned in opposition to femininity and feminists are seen as lesbians (Dahl Crossley, 2010; Riley & Scharff, 2013; Scharff, 2010, 2011a). The
research indicates that identifications with feminism, within a postfeminist climate, are mediated by (hetero)sexuality; namely, feminist dis-identification can be read as a performance of heteronormative femininity, because performances of gender are always also a performance of heterosexuality (Cameron & Kulick, 2003). The current research also supports the notion that feminist identification is mediated by heteronormativity. I will now outline the concept of heteronormativity as part of the climate within which participants in the current research negotiated their feminist dis/identifications before moving on to discuss the neoliberal discourses which also mediated feminist identifications in the current research.

1.6 Heteronormativity
As discussed earlier, gender intersects with a range of other axes on which power relations are mobilised, including the axis of sexuality: heteronormativity is an example of power in operation upon this axis. Adrienne Rich (1980) is most commonly attributed with first arguing that “heterosexuality…needs to be recognized and studied as a political institution” (p. 637) and coining the term “compulsory heterosexuality”. Since 1980, its usage has proliferated so that it is now widely used in “contemporary political, social, and critical theory to describe socio-legal…cultural…organizational…and interpersonal…practices” (Kitzinger, 2005, p. 478).

Heteronormativity can be understood as “a practice that structures beliefs around presumed heterosexual desire…a set of rules that force us to conform to hegemonic heterosexual standards…and as a system of binary gender” (Chambers, 2007, p. 665). This idea draws heavily on Butler’s (1990) notion of the heterosexual matrix: a hegemonic grid through which binary and stable gender and heterosexuality are required for “cultural intelligibility” (p. 151). As Aapola et. al (2005) have articulated, “discourses of compulsory heterosexuality are part of a network of power relations governing women’s lives and [are]…crucial for girls and young women in positioning themselves as ‘properly’ female and mature” (p. 147). Heteronormativity is a social norm reflecting the “myriad ways in which heterosexuality is produced as a natural, unproblematic, taken-for-granted, ordinary phenomenon” (Kitzinger, 2005, p. 478).
As noted above, heteronormativity is implicated in a postfeminist sensibility through the “reassertion of natural sexual difference grounded in heteronormative ideas about gender complementarity” (Gill, 2007a, p. 346). There is a heterosexist “chain of equivalence that is sex/gender/desire” (Chambers, 2007, p. 669) within which desire is conceptualised in terms of attraction to difference and “gender is the key marker of difference” (Richardson, as cited in Scharff, 2010, p. 832). For example, within a “hetero-normative culture…women are constantly being viewed and reviewed in terms of attractiveness (to men)” (Aapola et al., 2005, p. 138).

As indicated, some of the research into young women’s negotiations of feminism has theorised the role of heteronormativity in the disavowal of feminism through the construction that heterosexuality is incompatible with feminism. Two studies in particular explore this idea: Scharff (2010) and Dahl Crossley (2010). Scharff (2010) found that “heterosexual norms figure as a structuring principle in young women’s negotiations of feminism” (p. 182). In her research, feminists were constructed in invariably negative terms as unfeminine, man-hating, or lesbians (Scharff, 2010). These ideas draw upon heteronormative logic through requiring heteronormative coherence between desire, gender, and sex. Aapola et al. (2005) support this idea, stating that researchers have found that young women separate themselves from “stereotypes of feminists as ‘man-haters’, lesbians, and masculine-looking women with hairy armpits and big boots” (p. 195). Similarly to the participants in Scharff’s (2010) study, in Dahl Crossley’s (2010) study, participants employed heteronormativity in their resistance to the label of feminist. They employed it through constructing feminists as bra burners, butches, and lesbians and frequently cited a “concern about a future without a male partner” (p. 347) if they were to identify themselves as feminists. The current research adds to these two studies in theorising how heteronormative discourses were drawn on by participants in discussing their feminist dis/identifications. In addition to heteronormativity, neoliberal notions of individual choice and responsibility were also utilised by participants in their negotiations of feminism.

1.7 Neoliberalism

Much of the research and writing around postfeminism involves discussion of how neoliberalism and postfeminism intertwine and particularly the influence of neoliberal
discourses in dissolving the appeal of joining collective political struggles such as feminism (Scharff, 2010). Neoliberalism, as the word suggests, is a political-economic ideology and practice characterized by privatization, deregulation and a rolling back and withdrawal of the state from many areas of social provision that rose to prominence in the 1980s under the Reagan administration in the US and Thatcher’s premiership in the UK. It expanded its economic reach globally through international organizations such as the IMF, the World Trade Organization and the World Bank (Gill & Scharff, 2011, p. 5).

In the UK, Margaret Thatcher first articulated neoliberalism at the beginning of her term as Prime Minister as “an antagonism between the powers of the state and the responsibilities of the individual: ‘the first principle of this government…is to revive a sense of individual responsibility’” (Rose, 1999, p. 138). That is, a key logic of neoliberalism was a move away from the “social state” and towards the responsible individual: the notion that the state should not be involved in the day to day, or lifelong, activities of the individual and instead the individual should be “released” to be responsible and enterprising (Rose, 1999). Neoliberalism continued to spread throughout the world through the 1990s and much of the 2000s, although in Aotearoa/NZ the shift towards neoliberalism began as early as 1984 (Schuster, 2013).

The effects of this spread of neoliberalism have been multiple and include a focus on individual choice as well as an ever-increasing focus on the individual as responsible for the management of her/himself as an autonomous actor (Gill & Scharff, 2011), such that “neoliberal subjectivities…derive moral self-worth from navigating challenges, and opportunities, individually, and self-responsibly” (Scharff, 2012, p. 11). Within this context, issues such as the gender salary gap or a lack of maternity leave are transformed into problems with the individual and for the individual to overcome; structural constraints become individual concerns. Indeed, as Scharff (2012) argued, within this context, collective organising, such as feminism has been perceived to be, is seen as nonsensical and unappealing.

If to be a good person involves taking good care of the self through individualist acts, critical analysis of structural constraints and forms of collective organising do not allow for the individual to prove herself as an autonomous, and therefore moral being. To attribute one’s happiness and misery to broader social and political forces is decisively not on the agenda.
because it robs the individual of the opportunity to fashion herself as a morally good person (Scharff, 2012, p. 57).

Not only do neoliberalist discourses impact upon young women’s identifications with feminism through making collective organising unattractive; they also reify individual choice: “in this view, so long as a woman’s actions or circumstances are considered a result of her own choices, no further analysis or problematization of them is welcome or warranted” (Stuart & Donaghue, 2012, p. 99).

Furthermore, according to Rose (1999), under neoliberalism the relationship between the economic and the social changed such that “all aspects of social behaviour [were] now reconceptualised along economic lines – as calculative actions undertaken through the universal human faculty of choice” (p. 141). As such, although the rhetoric surrounding them may try to disguise it, these neoliberal discourses of choice and individual empowerment are frequently constituted in the context of consumption. In other words, the freedom and choice underpinning individual empowerment is a freedom to consume; the achievement of a free, independent subjectivity is done through consumption. As McRobbie (as cited in Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008) has articulated, “a notion of female freedom is proffered in a context of wage-earning capacity and participation in consumer culture, while political subjectivity is overshadowed, marginalised or re-cast as consumer citizenship” (p. 231).

As noted, a range of research (Budgeon, 2001; Press, 2011; Scharff, 2011a) theorises the presence of neoliberal discourses in young women’s disidentification with feminism. However, no research into specifically young women’s identifications with feminism, or lack thereof, has been carried out in Aotearoa/NZ, a country where neoliberalism was adopted rapidly and its influences are fairly apparent (Schuster, 2013). The current research goes some way to addressing this gap.

1.8 Summary
This chapter has contextualized the present research by discussing the definition of feminism mobilised in the current research, providing an overview of feminism in Aotearoa/NZ today, including an outline of key “empirical” markers of gender
inequality in Aotearoa/NZ. I also reviewed the literature on young women’s feminist dis/identifications and explored the discourses of postfeminism, heteronormativity and neoliberalism as they relate to young women and feminism. As I will discuss in the data analysis, each of these discourses are implicated in the cultural climate within which the young women in the current research negotiated their relationship with feminism. Of particular relevance to the current research, I argue, is firstly, the cultural climate of postfeminism, which includes a simultaneous incorporation and disavowal of feminism; and secondly, the neoliberal cultural climate of individualism which dissolves the appeal for young women of joining collective political struggles such as feminism (Scharff, 2010). The next chapter outlines the methodology and methods utilised for the current research, including a discussion of the practices of reflexivity that I engaged in the research.
Chapter Two – Research Process

During the course of this research a good friend came back to Aotearoa/NZ to curate part of a project that aimed to generate discussion around the racism, violence and misogyny in mainstream pornography. We spent many hours discussing the project and discussing feminism and gender and misogyny. She said this was the first project in years that she had engaged with that focused directly on the misogyny and gendered ideas apparent in (more or less) everyday life. The reason that it had been so long was the vulnerability that resulted from a mixture of shame (publicly naming and revealing “our” oppression), legitimacy (the undermining of our critiques/analysis when we are “too” involved/close/personal) and simultaneously having to look gendered power relations in the face. It can be incredibly challenging to focus on aspects of contemporary culture such as these when identifying as a (politically/critically aware) woman. Much of this research process has been challenging for similar reasons. I recall a series of passionate discussions, towards the start of my research, with two male friends about feminism. Their position was that all individuals should be valued for who they are rather than as part of a broader group of “men” or “women”, characterised by the argument that “it doesn’t matter whether you’re male or female, it’s who you are as a person that should matter”. At the same time, they both drew on ideas that men and women are fundamentally different – and that this difference should be treasured and valued. My position was that we cannot escape from the effects of gender in our lives, that the notion of the individual somehow unaffected by gender is a fallacy; that gender relations are power relations; and that a significant part of what enabled them to hold their espoused position was the privilege that they both automatically received by virtue of being white, middle-class, and male. Mine was not a popular position. Both discussions ended with them raising their voices, talking in unison over me, me shouting at them, with hands raised, to “stop” and “listen”. In the end, I simply walked away. I wondered to myself, if I, a 31 year old woman studying feminism at master’s level, had such difficulty engaging two friends in discussions about feminism, how did women in positions of significantly less privilege fare? Sometime after this I came across the following quote by Melissa McEwan (August 14, 2009):
There are occasions that men—intellectual men, clever men, engaged men—
insist on playing devil’s advocate, desirous of a debate on some aspect of
feminist theory or reproductive rights or some other subject generally filed
under the heading: Women’s Issues. These intellectual, clever, engaged men
want to endlessly probe my argument for weaknesses, want to wrestle over
details, want to argue just for fun—and they wonder, these intellectual, clever,
engaged men, why my voice keeps raising and why my face is flushed and why,
after an hour of fighting my corner, hot tears burn the corners of my eyes.
Why do you have to take this stuff so personally? ask the intellectual, clever,
and engaged men, who have never considered that the content of the abstract
exercise that’s so much fun for them is the stuff of my life (para. 11)
(emphasis added).

The next day I received an email from a popular women’s website that read
“Brazilians make you go ohhhhh and him go ahhhhhhhh” (in other words, women’s
pain is justified by the supposed pleasure that men get from Brazilian waxes). And
soon afterwards I began the interviews for my research, and over the course of the
first two interviews, I heard two stories of significant gendered violence and abuse
that the interviewees had experienced. So yes, this is unapologetically the stuff of my
life. It is the deeply personal, profoundly political, incredibly painful to engage with,
immensely challenging, and rewarding stuff of my life.

2.1 Introduction
This chapter locates the research within a feminist poststructuralist, discursive
paradigm and describes the processes by which I collected and analysed the data. I
also outline how I incorporated processes of reflexivity into the research and how
these relate to the power relations inherent in research, including the representation of
participants’ words.

2.2 Methodology
This research sits within a feminist poststructuralist framework (Gavey, 1989, 2011).
Scott (1994) has argued that “poststructuralism and contemporary feminism are late-
twentieth-century movements that share a certain self-conscious critical relationship
to established philosophical and political traditions” (p. 358). In particular,
poststructuralism and feminism share an attention to the workings of power in
“everyday” life; they are both “concerned with disrupting and displacing dominant (oppressive) knowledges” (Gavey, 1989, p. 463) and, as such, form a framework appropriate for research into young women’s feminist dis/identifications.

A poststructuralist epistemology eschews essentialism, reductionism, and determinism (Williams, 2005) – features often associated with a positivist “scientific” paradigm. It is not interested in searching for “objective”, universal, meta-truths that exist “out there” in the world (G. Taylor & Ussher, 2001). Rather, a poststructuralist, discursive approach engages theories and ideas which are historically, socially, and culturally specific (Gavey, 1989). Such an approach was appropriate for the current research because I am interested in discourses and notions located within a particular historical, social, and cultural context. Furthermore, poststructuralism is a paradigm that is “concerned with…the way in which we use [language] to construct our sense of self and our sense of the world around us” (G. Taylor & Ussher, 2001, p. 295). It was therefore particularly relevant for research which investigated young women’s dis/identifications with feminism through semi-structured interviews. The research focused on the discourses drawn on by participants in dis/identifications with feminism as well as how these discourses were utilised by participants. The focus was the discourse itself: rather than seeing language as a means to “get at” a reality that exists beyond it, poststructuralism views language as productive (Gill, 2009).

It has been argued that one of the limitations of a poststructuralist methodology is that “if there is nothing outside the text, then there is no means to assert the existence of even the starkest material realities” (Wilkinson, as cited in Hepburn, 2000, p. 94). However, this criticism reflects a misunderstanding of the epistemology of poststructuralism. When used in an epistemic sense, poststructuralism rests upon the idea that “talk involves the creation or construction of particular accounts of what the world is like” (Edley, 2001b, p. 437). However, when used ontologically, poststructuralism refers to the way in which “real phenomena, our perceptions and experiences, are brought into existence and take the particular form that they do because of the language that we share” (Burr, 2003, p. 92). In other words, to draw upon Edley (2001b) again, the argument is not that Stockholm does not exist, but that it exists in a socially constructed reality. When this understanding is applied to the
current research, the focus becomes the interviewees’ talk and the ways in which gendered power relations are maintained through the use of particular discourses.

According to Hollway (as cited in Gavey, 1993), discourse refers to an interrelated “system of statements which cohere around common meanings and values…[that] are a product of social factors, of powers and practices, rather than an individual’s set of ideas” (p. 94). The positions available to people within discourses are always partial and fluid as they “are contested and interrupted by other discursive possibilities” (Gavey, 1993, p. 94). Subjectivity is multiple and fragmented in any given moment because of the multiple discourses operating simultaneously and the positions available within them. For example, in this research, Charlie is not solely a “feminist”; she is also “a mother”, “an employee”, “a daughter”, “a wife”, “a student”, “a woman”. Furthermore, any one of these subjectivities that Charlie is positioned by is likely to be contested “in other contexts through positioning in alternative discourses” (Jackson & Westrupp, 2010, p. 372).

The poststructuralist focus on language and discourse informed my decision to use discourse analysis as my method of analysing the interview texts (Potter & Wetherell, 1987); this method is almost synonymous with feminist research (Burman, cited in Stapleton, 2000) and views discourse “as central to the construction of (gendered) identities” (Speer and Potter, cited in Scharff, 2009, p. 109). Discourse analysis has been defined as “a set of methods and theories for investigating language in use and language in social contexts” (Wetherell, Taylor, & Yates, 2001, p. i); it includes a range of approaches to the analysis process itself, as well as a range of theories informing that analysis. The approach that I selected is most commonly associated with Wetherell and Potter (1987), generally called discursive psychology because of its genesis within social psychology. According to Wetherell (1998), discursive psychology “focuses on the situated flow of discourse, which looks at the formation and negotiation of psychological states, identities and interactional and intersubjective events” (p. 405). In addition to discursive psychology’s focus on discourse and language itself as the material for analysis, the approach also views language as action oriented – it achieves things and is therefore “best understood as a social practice” (Gill, 2009). Such an approach recognises research interviews as social interactions:
“the interviewer contribut[es] along with the interviewees” (Jacques, & Radtke, 2012, p. 5).

The “interpretive repertoire” is one of the key concepts used within discursive psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). In some senses similar to the notion of a discourse, an interpretive repertoire is “a recognizable routine of arguments, descriptions and evaluations distinguished by familiar clichés, common places, tropes and characterizations of actors and situations” (Edley & Wetherall, 2001, p. 443). However, in contrast to discourse, particularly the Foucauldian notion of discourse, interpretive repertoires are seen as “less monolithic…and more fragmented, offering speakers a whole range of different rhetorical opportunities” (Edley, 2001a, p. 202), including space for “processes of articulation (and dis-articulation and re-articulation)” (Gill, 2009, p. 351). They are often so familiar that only a small segment of the argument, description, or evaluation needs to be mentioned in order to infer the full strength of the whole interpretive repertoire. Interpretive repertoires are an analytic unit that enable “scholars to go beyond individual or discrete expressions to begin to identify patterns across and between texts, and to connect these to wider contexts and social formulations” (Gill, 2009, p. 351). As such, they were an appropriate methodological tool for my analysis which combined a more fine grained focus on the subject positions and orientations taken up and resisted in language by participants on a moment-by-moment basis, with a broader focus on the “collective and social patterning of background normative conceptions” (Wetherell, 1998, p. 405) that informed participants’ talk. A synthesised approach such as this has been used in a variety of discursive psychology research including that carried out by Edley and Wetherall (2001) on men’s constructions of feminism and feminists and in Scharff’s (2012) research on young women’s repudiations of feminism.

Finally, this thesis is transdisciplinary – drawing on research and theory from feminism, psychology, political studies, sociology, gender studies, sexuality studies, media studies and cultural studies. The research results thus “contribute to a shared understanding that is both broader and deeper than one likely to come from within a single discipline” (Smith, 2007, p. 161) and also have implications for a broad range of disciplines. The thesis has also been a thoroughly reflexive endeavour, in that I have attempted to maintain a self-conscious awareness of my subjectivities (Roulston,
2010) in relation to the research – topic, participants, and process – and explore how these subjectivities have impacted the construction of the research, “acknowledging and responding to the inherent subjectivity and politics of doing research” (Liebert, 2006, p. vii).

2.3 Methods of Data Collection and Analysis
I collected two types of data for my research: interview transcripts and a research journal. I also continuously consulted with a range of texts related to the study area, particularly online, popular culture texts; for example, blogs, magazine articles, web sites, and videos. I noted my reflections and responses to these, as well as others’ responses to them, when relevant, in my research journal. Overall, this process helped develop my thinking about the research topic and informed my reflexive approach to the research; “journaling [was] not only…an analytical strategy to explore data but also…a form of data itself” (Varga-Dobai, 2012, p. 13).

2.3.1. Interviews
The Unitec Research Ethics Committee granted ethics approval for me to conduct 14 in-depth, semi-structured interviews for the research; the number of interviews was set at 14 as an appropriate size for a Master’s level project, whilst also enabling me to recruit diverse participants. Interviewing was particularly appropriate to my methodology and research aims because it is a method that is “most consistent with people’s ability to make meaning through language” (Seidman, 2006, p. 14). Within a poststructuralist paradigm, identity is about meaning-making and is situated in language (Wendt & Boylan, 2008). In-depth interviews situated within a feminist poststructuralist methodology, therefore, were suited to the research focus on young women’s feminist dis/identifications and the discourses they draw upon in these processes of dis/identification. The varied backgrounds and experiences of the participants precluded the use of a structured interview schedule (Barriball & While, 1994) but having some key questions that were asked of all interviewees enabled some comparison across interviews, which precluded an unstructured interview schedule; thus I chose a semi-structured interview process.

One limitation of interviews is that we cannot know that the data produced in such a setting demonstrates how such things are done in other settings (Speer, 2005). For
example, in asking young women to talk to me about how they view feminism, I cannot know how this talk aligns with how they “do” their views of feminism in their daily lives. However, I argue that no linguistic medium, whether it is interviewees’ talk, survey respondents’ writing, or focus group members’ discussions is ever a straightforward description of reality, since the question of who uses what language, when and where, and to do what, are products of power relations in particular contexts (Mason, 2002). Furthermore, as noted, identity within a poststructuralist paradigm occurs in language so it was necessary for me to focus on the interviewees’ talk in order to discover aspects of dis/identifications with feminism.

Another limitation of interviews is the effect of the researcher and her research agenda on the data produced because “the presence of the researcher increases the likelihood of participants attending to concerns about social desirability” (Speer, 2005, p. 6). This point was particularly pertinent to my research because feminism is a contentious topic, one that can induce anxiety and hesitancy in interviewees (Barnard, 2009) and can result in participants “giving the interviewer…what they think they want to hear” (Speer, 2005, p. 168). In preparing for the interviews, I considered how best to respond if asked whether I identified as feminist. Ethically, there was no way to deny that I do identify as feminist and yet I was concerned about the impact such a declaration might have on participants’ responses. In the end, this consideration was not needed; although I felt certain that I would be asked if I was feminist, interestingly, none of the participants asked me. However, I do believe that the majority of participants assumed that I was, if not feminist, then at the very least, sympathetic towards feminism. This was seen through some participants assuming that I was familiar with different types of feminism, certain feminist authors and books, and certain feminist events. I think it was also evidenced by a level of anxiety expressed by five participants that their answers were not “good enough”, “helpful enough”, or “knowledgeable enough” in some way. For example, consider the following two interview segments, firstly from Talia’s interview:

Laura: Next question… How? [both laugh] In what ways do you feel included?

Talia: [clears throat] Hmm… I feel like I should have, like, done some reading on feminism before this! [both laugh]

Laura: That’s not the intention! [both laugh].
And secondly, from the end of Naomi’s interview:

Laura: Awesome, so in that case we’re done.
Naomi: I hope I’ve been helpful, I feel like I haven’t been really helpful, I don’t even know what I’m talking about!
Laura: What makes you think that?
Naomi: I don’t know!

Despite these limitations to interviews, they were nevertheless a data collection method consistent with my intention to analyse how young women draw upon discourses in their dis/identifications with feminism, because transcriptions of interview data can be seen as “a manifestation of available discursive resources which the [participant] is drawing upon” (Willig, 2001, p. 10) and are therefore excellent resources for discursive analysis. The other data resource that I utilised in the research was my research journal. I will briefly outline here how I utilised the journal before going on to discuss the interview recruitment process.

2.3.2 Research Journal

According to Pillow (2003), reflexivity is “often understood as involving an ongoing self-awareness during the research process which aids in making visible the practice and construction of knowledge within research” (p. 178) and is “primary to feminist research and methodology” (p. 178). I used my research journal to note my reflections and responses about my process throughout the course of the research, including the interactions I had with family, friends, and strangers; my thoughts on the popular culture texts I interacted with; my reflections on the interview process; and my reflections on more “formal” academic literature. The process of journaling has supported me to be more aware of my impact on the construction of the research and the impact of the research on me; the journal has provided a place where I can “engage with the uncomfortable realities of doing engaged qualitative research” (Pillow, 2003, p. 193), in particular the power relations in all their varied forms, including, but not limited to, those between researcher and participant. I utilised the journal to support my internal, or personal, process throughout the research and it has been central to the reflexivity threaded throughout the thesis; my journal helped me to write myself back into the research (Varga-Dobai, 2012).
One of the ways in which this reflexivity is manifest in the thesis is through my inclusion of some personal commentary from the interview process; that is, I have occasionally included in my discussion commentary on my own process during the interviews, where I believe it contributes analytic value. For example, in acknowledging the impact of the interview context, and its attendant power relations, on the statements made by participants. Another way in which the reflexive process is manifest is through the inclusion, at the start of each chapter, of a reflection prompted by my journal entries.

I also utilised my research journal to note down anything that struck me as particularly interesting through the course of the interviews. The original plan for my research was to have a broader focus than young women’s dis/identifications with feminism in Aotearoa/NZ today: as can be seen from the interview schedule (see appendix A for a copy of the interview schedule), at least half the interview focused on the life choices the participants were making, their futures, and how these compared with others of the same age. However, in the end, my analysis focused solely on those sections of the interviews that related to feminism and postfeminism. This was, I believe, a somewhat disingenuous approach; my interest was always on young women’s relationship with feminism – this was what sent me back to school to complete a master degree in the first place. And, indeed, as I went through the process of interviewing, what stood out to me as interesting and engaging were the discussions about feminism, gender, and postfeminism. I also asked about television shows and films that participants identified with, with the intention of carrying out an analysis of a piece of media. However, participants routinely said that there was no television series or character, film or film character, which they related to.

2.3.3. Interview Recruitment and Sampling
I will now outline the process that I undertook to recruit participants, followed by the sampling criteria that I utilised to select which 14 participants would be interviewed.

2.3.3.1 Interview Recruitment Process
I recruited interview participants over a six week period through a Facebook page and an e-mail. Please see appendix B for a copy of the recruitment text that was utilised in both mediums. I explicitly stated that I was looking for a range of views, not solely
people who identified as feminists. I circulated the e-mail and the link to the Facebook page throughout my contacts, both personal and professional, and asked them to circulate it on throughout their networks. From there, the text and Facebook page link were further circulated through others’ networks. In the six week recruitment period that the Facebook page was “live” (published and accessible to all Facebook users), it received 99 “likes”, with up to 114 people viewing updates on the site towards the end of the six week period. I had approximately 80 women contact me via e-mail or on the Facebook page to say that they were interested in participating, including two who lived in the US, a few who identified as outside the age range of 18 to 30 (falling both below and above this age range), and a number of people who were known to me personally. I was unable to interview anyone outside of Aotearoa/NZ or anyone outside the age range and was prohibited from interviewing anyone I knew personally by Unitec’s Ethics Committee; I explained these constraints to those people falling into these categories when I said I could not interview them. I sent the remaining people who had contacted me an information sheet (please see appendix C for a copy of the information sheet) and a set of screening questions to complete and return to me (please see appendix D for a copy of the screening questions).

2.3.3.2 Interview Sampling Criteria
The screening questions asked for the person’s age, ethnicity, and sexuality; the sexuality question was an open-ended question which invited potential participants to self-define this aspect. I chose to use this screening question method to help generate as diverse a sample as possible in terms of the factors of ethnicity and sexuality. These factors are particularly pertinent to my topic of study, in that feminism has traditionally been seen as a white movement (Hollows, 2000) and feminists are frequently depicted as lesbians (Scharff, 2010). Furthermore, “research with women from various backgrounds demonstrates that race, class and sexuality mediate negotiations of feminism” (Scharff, 2011a, p. 120). However, rather than specifically engaging questions of ethnic or sexual diversity in my research, I was interested in how such information might firstly, provide a context for the results both more broadly in terms of cross-participant data and more narrowly, in terms of contextualising individual participants; and secondly, how it might provide fissures or points of departure for discussing the data produced. As will be discussed,
interviewees’ positionings along the axes of ethnicity and socio-economic privilege mediated their identifications with feminism.

Thirty one people completed the questions and returned the answers to me; all were eligible to participate. Of the 31 people who completed the screening questions, I selected 14 to participate on the basis of generating as diverse a sample as possible in terms of age, ethnicity and sexuality; the remaining 17 were informed and asked if they would be willing to be put on a waiting list in case any of the selected participants withdrew. Three of the selected participants chose not to go ahead with the interview: one did not present to the interview and then did not respond to my attempts to make contact; one stopped replying to my e-mails; the third had two much work on by the time we tried to schedule her interview. As such, I substituted three participants from the waiting list. All bar one of the selected participants lived in the Auckland area: one lived in Christchurch. Table A provides demographic details of the selected participants. Brief descriptions of each participant are listed in appendix E.
Table A: Interview Participants
* All names are pseudonyms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Occupational Status</th>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Joni</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Japanese</td>
<td>Kinsey’s scale 1. This may also fall under the label of pansexuality</td>
<td>Fulltime student and working part-time.</td>
<td>6th form in Cambridge examinations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jay</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Pākehā/NZ European</td>
<td>Lesbian</td>
<td>Fulltime student.</td>
<td>Tertiary certificate or diploma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Pākehā/NZ European</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Fulltime student.</td>
<td>Tertiary certificate or diploma.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talia</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Pākehā/NZ European</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Fulltime work.</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Māori (Nga Puhi - Te Ati Awa), Samoan, Irish</td>
<td>Straight, but bi-curious</td>
<td>Fulltime work.</td>
<td>6th form/NCEA level 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elspeth</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Pākehā/NZ European</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Fulltime student and raising child.</td>
<td>7th form/NCEA level 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Olivia</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Pākehā/NZ European</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Fulltime student and working part-time.</td>
<td>Master degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mariana</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Pākehā/NZ European, Eastern European</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Fulltime work.</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3 This was the interviewee’s self-identified sexuality. The Kinsey scale is a heterosexual-homosexual rating scale ranging from 0 to 6, where 0 indicates an exclusively heterosexual orientation and 6, an exclusively homosexual orientation (The Kinsey Institute, n.d.).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name*</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Sexuality</th>
<th>Occupational Status</th>
<th>Highest Level of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Salma</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Fijian Indian</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Fulltime student and part-time contractor.</td>
<td>6th form/NCEA level 2.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Samoan</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Working part-time and raising child.</td>
<td>6th form/NCEA level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pania</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Māori (Ngati Porou - Hine Rupe; Ngati Koata; Tainui - Ngati Te Ikanunahi)</td>
<td>Heterosexual</td>
<td>Fulltime work.</td>
<td>Master degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Naomi</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Pākehā/NZ European</td>
<td>Straight/bi-sexual</td>
<td>Fulltime work.</td>
<td>6th form/NCEA level 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lee</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Rarotongan, English, Irish</td>
<td>Straight</td>
<td>Fulltime work.</td>
<td>Bachelor’s degree.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Charlie</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Pākehā/NZ European</td>
<td>Bisexual</td>
<td>Fulltime work.</td>
<td>7th form/NCEA level 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The interviewees’ confidentiality was assured through the use of pseudonyms. I conducted the 14 interviews over a period of approximately four months, from late June to October 2012. Interviewees had the opportunity to re-read the information sheet and ask questions before starting the interview. Following this, they read and signed the consent form (please see appendix F for a copy of the consent form) before the interview began. Please see appendix A for a copy of the interview schedule, which included two final demographic questions: one about the participant’s current occupational status and one about their highest level of education.

The interviews took place in a variety of locations including my workplace, cafes, interviewees’ homes, and tertiary institutions; the location was selected by the
interviewee. Interviewees who identified as Māori were offered the options of having a culturally appropriate opening and closing to the interview; having a support person present throughout the interview; and some food and drink for the interview. Both participants who identified as Māori declined the offer of a culturally appropriate opening and closing and the offer of a support person; one of the participants accepted the offer of food. Three participants had their children with them during the interview.

As indicated, one of the interview topics was postfeminism. I suspected it was unlikely that all interviewees would have heard of the concept before. Therefore, I took into the interviews a brief definition, so that I could read it to them and ask their thoughts on it. Generally, I gave the preamble that it is a term that is used in different ways by different people to refer to different things. I then went on to say that a common thread throughout most of these usages is the idea that the aims and goals of feminism have been achieved and therefore feminism is no longer relevant or needed. In the end, I shared this definition with all interviewees.

The first four interviews were transcribed by me and the remaining ten by two research assistants, both of whom signed confidentiality agreements (please see appendix G for a copy of the research assistant confidentiality agreement). I did not select any particular transcription conventions for the transcribing process; instead I created a set of conventions which I and the research assistants followed. These conventions included details regarding how to transcribe pauses in speech, overlapping speech, and laughter, such that representations of these aspects were consistent across interview transcripts. I had the interview recordings and was able to go back to them when it felt useful or necessary to do so during the course of the analysis process. I sent the interview transcripts to participants and invited them to review them and make any changes that they wished to. I also reminded them that should they wish to withdraw from the research, they could do so within the following 10 days. This type of reiterative process has been associated with some feminist research aiming to nurture a more egalitarian relationship between researcher and participant; however, it is not without its challenges when done in discourse analytic research (Weatherall, Gavey, & Potts, 2002). For example, participants may try to “correct” transcripts by finishing incomplete sentences. However, “the messy detail that the participants may choose to [change] can be the very stuff needed for some
forms of discursive analyses” (Weatherall et al., 2002, p. 535). Only one participant requested changes to their transcript and this was to remove any information that could identify them personally; these changes were made.

2.3.4 Interview Data Analysis

The methodological framework for the analysis was discursive psychology (Edley & Wetherell, 2001; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell, Taylor, S., & Yates, 2001), which utilises a form of discourse analysis that “recognizes individuals as both producers and products of discourse” (Jacques, & Radtke, 2012, p. 3). As such, I was interested in both the local interview context and the discourses drawn upon by the participants from the wider sociocultural contexts in which they live. This led to a combination of an analysis of the broader discourses apparent in participants’ speech and a more fine-grained analysis of the interactions within each interview. In doing so, I drew upon the concept of “positioning”, which “recognises both the power of culturally available discourses to frame our experience and constrain our behaviour while allowing room for the person to actively engage with those discourses and employ them in social situations” (Burr, 2003, p. 80).

As noted, as I went through the process of interviewing, what I found engaging were the discussions about feminism and postfeminism. These became even more interesting as I began the process of analysis. With the first four transcripts, I began noting down beginning thoughts on themes as I transcribed the interviews; these were thoughts that occurred to me as I was transcribing, sometimes based upon thoughts that I had had during the interview. With the interviews that were transcribed by others, I began by listening to each interview, reading the transcript alongside, and noting down any themes as I heard them. I then read through all of the transcripts again and coded the data. This coding was pragmatic rather than analytical, in that I was grouping together extracts of data for examination and was therefore as inclusive as possible (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

Qualitative discourse analysis is an iterative, open-ended process, where the “researcher is looking for patterns in the data but is not entirely sure what these will look like or what their significance will be” (S. Taylor, 2001, p. 38). Fundamental to this process is some form of categorising the data to enable the researcher to identify
patterns. “The term ‘coding’ has conventionally been used for the classification of research data into categories” (S. Taylor, 2001, p. 39). Once I had broadly coded all of the data, I then reviewed the coded data and identified a range of patterns – discursive resources that the participants drew on – within the data that occurred in a number of instances. I checked to see that these occurred across a range of interviews and not just in one or two of them. When they occurred across half or more of the interviews then they became themes to explore further. I later went back and explored patterns that occurred over four to six of the interviews as well. As noted, a discursive psychology approach is less interested in making broad, generalizable claims and more focused on situated and specific analyses of data; “the historically specific findings of discursive psychology…involve less deterministic interpretations [than some other forms of discourse analysis] because data analysis is always-already highly contextualised” (Scharff, 2009, p. 116).

Taking the identified possible discursive patterns as a starting point, I went back into the individual interviews to see what was occurring in the interview at that point, what happened either side of that part of the discussion, and, finally, how it related to the interview as a whole. I was particularly interested in variability and consistency both within the interviews and within the emerging discursive patterns that occurred across interviews, as it is often in the patterns of variability across discursive accounts that the operation of power in maintaining dominant discourses occurs (Edley & Wetherell, 2001). What followed was a close reading and re-reading of the interview transcripts, attending to areas of nuance, contradictions and vagueness, asking myself “why am I reading this passage in this way? What features produce this reading?” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 168), whilst also referring to relevant literature and beginning to write up my thoughts and analysis more comprehensively.

2.4 Representation, Power and Ethics

There is an unequal power relationship between researcher and participant (Allen, 2011), although it is by no means a static power relationship. In fact, power relations are inherent throughout the entire research process; Wolf (as cited in Scharff, 2009) has argued that power relations operate in three related areas in qualitative research: firstly, “power differences stemming from different positionalities of the researcher
and the researched” (p. 72); secondly, “power exerted during the research process, such as defining the research relationship” (p. 72); and thirdly, “power exerted during the post fieldwork period — writing and representing” (p. 72). The acknowledgement of the operation of power throughout the research process raises a range of ethical questions about how to ensure that research is as non-exploitative as possible, particularly when the research topic seemed to invite some participants to disclose information they might not ordinarily share with a stranger – for example, I heard more than one story of experiencing gendered violence.

One ethical question arising from the power imbalance in the researcher-participant relationship that particularly concerned me was about the representation of participants’ views and thoughts; I struggled with the question “how am I to know that the interpretation that I have made of what participants said is what they intended?” This question challenged me throughout the research, particularly when I considered whether I would be happy for the participants to read my analysis of their words; more often than not, I felt uncomfortable with the idea.

In fact, throughout the course of the research, from dreaming up an initial research topic, through debating that topic and the recruitment methods with lecturers, through the interview process, the analysis process, and the writing up of my findings and thoughts, I have struggled with a sense of dis-ease about holding a critical stance in my thinking and analysis. My research journal includes an entry from the time that I was beginning to put together my research proposal and trying to decide what methodology to use where I wrote

I am struggling with the idea of using discursive psychology when it so often seems to convey a sense of critique of the speakers…almost like “these plebeians, who are so uneducated, use these speech-strategies so unknowingly”. How to do the analysis without holding expert knowledges in my head or conveying that I am holding expert knowledges?

Soon after writing the above in my journal, I came across the following, somewhat comforting, quote:

A critical psychology should be a reflexive endeavour through and through, and it is often useful to include an account of the moral–political standpoint of the researcher in relation to what they may be observing and changing. We
need a way of situating the production of knowledge, and that often means situating it in such a way that we connect biography with history (Young, as cited in Parker, 2003, p. 3)

Despite this quote, I nonetheless continued to struggle with this concern throughout the research; I moved away from discursive psychology as a method and explored alternatives but eventually came back to it. In addition to Young’s (as cited in Parker, 2003) argument that critical psychology should be a reflexive endeavour, requiring the researcher to situate themselves, the following three key understandings were central to resolving (the majority of) my dis-ease: firstly, I became very clear that there is an unequal power relationship between the researcher and the participant, and that while I could adopt strategies designed to minimise this power differential – for example, giving the interviewee the choice of where to hold the interview – there was no way to completely equalise the power relations and no way to escape the power differential. Thus, the question became, how do I best utilise this power to promote social justice?

Secondly, I came to thoroughly understand that the focus of my critical discursive analysis was the discourses, ideas, and interpretive repertoires that the participants drew on moment by moment in the interviews, not the participants. Thirdly, and crucially, I became very aware (again) that I am no less subject to these discourses, ideas, and interpretive repertoires than the participants are; I live in this world and cannot step outside of these socially constructed ideas. Part of what informs my critique of the discourses that participants drew upon is my own lived experience of them. In fact, my analysis has been a weaving of the data from the interview transcripts, the existing literature in the area, and my own interpretative frame. Furthermore, my interpretative frame was not a neutral, objective, impartial frame; it was rooted in my social, historical, cultural position. As Varga-Dobai (2012) has argued, “[i]nstead of representing the subject, researchers must learn to represent themselves by emphasizing that the knowledge they deploy in research is not transparent and/or innocent, but rather situated” (p. 12). One of the ways in which this has been borne out in the research is through my belief that feminism is needed in Aotearoa/NZ today; this situated knowledge strongly informed my decision to include a section in this thesis on feminist praxis in participants’ lives.
In addition to the three understandings outlined above, the nature of discourse as understood within a poststructuralist framework is also relevant to how participants’ views are interpreted and represented. In any social interaction, including the research-participant interaction, any utterance that we make “calls upon a discursive background in order to make sense” (Winslade, 2005, p. 353). In other words, our speech does not occur in a vacuum; our speech draws upon and relies upon discourses circulating in the wider society at any one time. We rarely articulate a full version of a discourse, but each partial utterance carries traces of the assumptions built into the concepts and language formations that live in this discursive background and it relies on these in order to build the basis for speaking...As it does so, often outside the conscious intention of the person making the utterance, it is inserted into a social context made up of patterns of meaning (Winslade, 2005, p. 354).

This latter point is significant – this process occurs whether we mean it to or not, so that participants’ speech may have drawn on discourses non-consciously in their interviews, discourses which in fact they may strongly disagree with. However, it is also important to note that, despite my conceptualisation of the interview transcripts as representations of discourses and interpretive repertoires readily circulating “out there” in the world,

this theoretical/methodological insistence does not necessarily militate against interview participants reading their transcripts and/or [my] analyses as telling truths about their experiences or their selves. Thus transcripts and analyses may be interpreted as silencing participants’ voices and implying that the researcher’s view is somehow more authentic than or superior to that of the researched (Weatherall et al., 2002, p. 536).

This reality is part and parcel – but only one part – of the discursive field that I am endeavouring, as much as possible, to represent in tangled, generous, and complex ways.

2.5 Summary

This chapter has outlined the research methodology of feminist poststructuralism as a context for the interviews I carried out with participants on their relationship with feminism and postfeminism. I have also discussed my use of a “hybrid” discursive psychological approach to the analysis of the interview data, that recognises
“individuals as both producers and products of discourse” (Jacques & Radtke, 2012, p. 445). Lastly, this chapter has highlighted the practice of reflexivity as central to the research. The next two chapters discuss the findings of my analysis.
Chapter Three – Dis/identifications with Feminism

Whilst I was in the process of finishing the analysis of my interview data, I attended a public workshop run alongside the art exhibition that formed part of Auckland University’s “Pornography in the Public Eye” project. The discussion was focused on the potential for art to ignite different ways of seeing and doing social change ("Sexual politics now: Raising questions about pornography and beyond," 2013) and it involved a presentation by a “younger” feminist (who was 32 years old, but looks younger) and a presentation by an “older” feminist (who I guessed to be in her early 60s), facilitated by an “older” woman (who I guessed to be in her mid to late 50s). During the course of the presentations and subsequent discussion, the facilitator and other (“older”) women in the room commented repeatedly about how they look at young women today “and it’s like feminism never happened”; they bemoaned the sexualized dress and self-representations of “young” women, the choices of “young” women to get married and be stay at home mothers, the lack of interest among “young” women in feminism today. And... I had just seen a woman (an “older” woman, in her 50s) for the first time in four or five years and it was entirely apparent that she had had “cosmetic” surgery done on her face. I had also noticed more than one “older” woman in the room with heavily made-up faces, false eyelashes attached and/or hair dyed...

None of us, even the most politically and socially aware and critical of us, are not subject to the discourses about gender and feminism that pervade our world – and this research. An expression of this reality can be seen in the following statement from one of my research participants: She said she would “not say [she] wasn’t a feminist” (Elspeth). This form of expression is a litotic formulation ("Litotes,” n.d.): she employed a double negative to soften her statement. In other words, the feminist identification she was making is less emphatic than if she had used a more declarative formulation of “I’d say I was a feminist”, despite the meaning of the two formulations being similar. At the same time, although she was not directly and emphatically claiming a feminist identity, she was also not completely divorcing herself from one; she was not saying that she is not a feminist. I am a feminist – and there are multiple occasions that I can think of when I have chosen not to speak out and claim that
identity because I am not comfortable doing so. We cannot assume that the environments we – all of us – find ourselves in, or that the personal, internal worlds of each of us – all of us – are necessarily always conducive to claiming feminism. And at the same time, we – all of us – must muster our courage and claim those moments when we can.

Note on edits of interview quotes: I chose to remove from interview quotes any minimal encouragers⁴ that I used in the section quoted; I did this to improve the readability of the quotes and to reduce word length. However, whenever I made a statement or asked a question, I have left it in the quote. I have also in a few cases, for the sake of word length, removed parts of interviewees’ speech when it was not directly relevant to the analysis. When I have done this, it is indicated as follows: [text removed].

3.1 Introduction

I just haven’t really, kind-of, come across it, you know, where someone’s actively asked me, and I’ve never thought of myself as a feminist, but I suppose I am one (Naomi).

Laura: Have you called yourself a feminist before?
Mariana: No, not really. Umm, I’m, kind-of, more of a… I’m the kind of person who, say, will push for a cause, but I just think sometimes it’s smarter to pick your battles, and, kind-of, you know, just do the background work. So, I don’t think I’ve spoken up per se, but I just think, it’s more important almost to do than to just be throwing the word around, you know what I mean? Like, by being an independent woman, I think you are being, in a way, feminist.

Laura: So, are there any times when you wouldn’t call yourself a feminist?
Elspeth: Mmm… Not particularly, I don’t think.
Laura: Are there any times when you would actively call yourself a feminist?
Elspeth: Maybe… I don’t know.

⁴ Minimal encouragers are short verbal sounds and words used in conversation, such as “mmm”, “hmmmm”, “yeah”, “okay” and “mm-hmm”.
These quotes highlight the partial, momentary, and troubled nature of the research participants’ identifications with feminism. This chapter will focus on the discourses prevalent in the interviewees’ talk on feminism, as well as the discourses drawn upon by the young women in negotiating their identities in relation to feminism. In particular, I identify two interpretive repertoires on feminism that were repeatedly used by interviewees: the liberal-equality-feminism interpretive repertoire and the radical-extreme-feminism interpretive repertoire. I also outline a particular variant of the liberal-equality-feminism interpretive repertoire: that feminism is historical and somehow of the past. I then briefly discuss how participants’ engagements with feminism were mediated by their positioning along axes of privilege such as ethnicity and class. Finally, I outline the ways in which some participants were supportive of feminism, including outlining the feminist activities that some participants were engaged in, and highlight how these comments were in striking contrast to participants’ disidentifications with feminism.

3.2 Interpretive Repertoires on Feminism

Some people perceive it negatively – because they just think of these angry women, who just hate men, so definitely, it doesn’t mean that to me. I think to me, it just means, um, women being on the same level as men, being treated the same way (Mariana).

This quote from Mariana neatly illustrates the two main interpretive repertoires about feminism that emerged in the interviews. Namely, that feminism (or, more accurately, feminists) is/are extreme, man-hating, bra-burning and angry; or, that feminism is a positive force that is “just” about equality between women and men. As outlined in the first chapter, these two interpretive repertoires about feminism have been noted before by Edley and Wetherall (2001) and more recently by Scharff (2009, 2012).

3.2.1 The Radical-Extreme Feminism Interpretive Repertoire

Despite the fiction of feminists burning their bras⁵, the image persists; and alongside it persist images of feminists as bitter, angry, unfeminine women waving placards and

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⁵ According to Freeman (as cited in Dahl Crossley, 2010), protestors at the 1968 Women’s Liberation demonstration at the Miss America Pageant in New Jersey threw bras, girdles and high-heeled shoes into a trashcan to protest women’s oppression, but they were never burnt. Nevertheless, the press reported that the items had been burnt and the fiction was immortalised in print. It has persisted ever since.
protesting. This construction of feminism as a “hideous spectre” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 1) was also present in the current research; it formed one of the two interpretive repertoires that the participants drew upon in their talk. Of the 14 women I interviewed, 12 of them mentioned in some way the notion that feminism and feminists are bitter, extreme, bra-burning, angry or negative. Not all of the 12 necessarily supported such a construction, but all of them were aware of it and made reference to it in some way. For example, Joni said:

’cause I think a lot of people are, kind-of, frightened – or they get scared – of when you use the term ‘feminism’. You know, like, they immediately think of some screaming, like, raging, angry, middle aged, white woman, you know?.... You think of all the photos of, like, the first wave feminism, or second wave feminism, with all the bra burning.

This statement was made in the context of Joni arguing for a feminism that is not called feminism because of the negative reaction to the term. Interestingly, in speaking about “feminism”, Joni personifies it – she constructs an image of a feminist, not feminism – who is screaming, raging, and angry. This personification of feminism is consistent with other discourse analytic research on constructions of feminism and feminists, particularly with men (Edley & Wetherall, 2001; Riley, 2001), but also with women (Scharff, 2009). Indeed, a key discursive strategy that maintains existing gendered privilege, whilst simultaneously framing the speaker as pro-equality, is a particular distinction between feminists and feminism (Riley, 2001). Feminists are constructed as extreme and confrontational, whilst (liberal, equality) feminism is constructed as reasonable and acceptable. The effects of this construction of feminists as raging, angry, and extreme in Joni’s speech are to distance herself from this type of feminism and this type of feminist. This distancing is achieved partly through the whiteness and middle-agedness of the feminist whom she evokes; Joni is comparatively young, having turned 18 a few weeks prior to the interview, and she identifies as Japanese. Secondly, evoking such an extreme figure enables Joni to later resist taking up a politicised feminist identity. She said,

Sometimes I do feel like you get a negative backlash when you use the term “feminism” or you say that you’re a feminist. [Text omitted] They just think of – like I said before – that whole angry, you know, raging woman. [Text omitted] So, sometimes I do feel a bit hesitant to use that term, because I know people are instantly going to think of that idea and that you’re just, like, angry
at everything, but... at the same time I do think it’s important to make feminist ideas, umm, inclusive and mainstream.

Joni indicates that although she is supportive of feminist ideas and making them more widely available, she is not necessarily going to claim the identity of feminist to achieve this end. Arguably, this reluctance is due to the “angry at everything”, “raging”, and (by implication) exclusionary feminism that this radical-extreme feminism interpretive repertoire constructs.

Lee was also supportive of feminist ideas and at some points identified herself as a feminist. However, her first statement about feminism was that it meant “controversy”. By this she meant that she was aware of multiple and varied meanings of feminism, each of which produced strong affective responses from people – particularly from those who saw it negatively. The negative affective responses to the term, among them Lee being called a “femi-nazi”, being told she was “too sensitive”, or “too P.C.”, gave rise to Lee deciding that it is easier not to raise these ideas, except with particular friends whom she knows are sympathetic. Lee therefore described herself as a “covert” or “secret” feminist. Such an account is consistent with McRobbie’s (2009) analysis of postfeminist popular culture, where the concept of political correctness mobilises an unleashing of “energetic reactions against the seemingly tyrannical regime of feminist puritanism” (p. 17) and “the new female subject is, despite her freedom, called upon to be silent, to withhold critique in order to count as a modern sophisticated girl” (p. 18).

Both Mariana and Pania constructed a view of feminists as extreme and angry by implication when talking about the relevance of feminism to their heterosexual relationships. When I asked Mariana if feminism was something that she talked about with her partner, she said that she “guessed” it came up, “but not by referring to it as such, you know, not really saying ‘feminism, feminism’ like, screaming”. The type of feminism that Mariana talks about with her partner is one that is unspoken; it is a feminism that is not identified as feminism. According to Quinn and Radtke (2006) a feminism that does not need to be spoken “undermines a feminist critique of patriarchal society” (p. 196). Additionally, in invoking the opposite of an unspoken feminism, her repetition of the word “feminism” implies some force; as if it is a
feminism that would force itself down her partner’s throat. When coupled with the word “screaming”, this feminism becomes extreme.

In a similar vein, when I asked Pania if feminism was something that was relevant to her relationship, she said that it was not because her boyfriend sees her as an equal partner in the relationship. However, she then went on to say that,

if he placed me in a box of “this is your role, as a female in a relationship”
then I would probably have discussion with him – not in a feminist kind of way – but, just, as in, like ‘why is it that you think that it’s my responsibility to do these things, when… just because I’m a female?’

I asked Pania how such a conversation would be different if she did it in “a feminist kind of way”, to which she replied that it would be “confrontational from the outset”. She constructed an extreme type of feminism, not just by her use of the term “confrontational”, but also by contrasting it with a more reasonable feminism that “just” asks “why?” Salma also invoked a confrontational image of feminists in talking about them “fighting”. She talked about “the hard-core ones do it, um…. Kinda go and fight for it every day…[text omitted] Fighting for rights every day… [text omitted] picketing”. This construction of “hard-core” feminists was thrown into sharp relief when I asked Salma what the non-hard-core feminists might be doing instead of fighting and picketing; Salma could not say, and eventually she tentatively asked if they could perhaps be “doing it from a distance?”

As mentioned earlier, despite the “bra burning feminist” phenomenon being entirely fictional (Dahl Crossley, 2010), a number of participants made reference to it. However, the image was usually called upon to convey the idea of a stereotypical feminist – and it was not necessarily a feminist that the participants saw as relevant to the present. For example, Olivia, one of the participants who did frankly claim the position of feminist, said: “I think the first time I probably heard the word, it was… in connection with, like, burning bras, that type of thing, like, crazy women, who are, just, like, radicals”. She went on to say that she later found out that the bra burning was a myth and that it was not necessarily an image that she believed in herself. Nevertheless, the image that was constructed by others was of a “radical”, “crazy”, “bra burning” feminist. Similarly, when I asked Joni what came to mind when she thought of a stereotypical feminist, she replied “well, you think of all the photos of,
like, the first wave feminism, or second wave feminism, with all the bra burning”. For Joni, stereotypical feminists were bra burners and they were also located in the past. Naomi also evoked an image of a bra burning feminist that was located in the past: she said that when she thought of a feminist, she thought of “burning bras. Stuff like that. I don’t know, but that’s not really what that’s, you know, that’s not really what it is these days, I wouldn’t think”. Whilst Sarah did not evoke the bra-burning image, when speaking about how feminism might have changed over time, she constructed a feminism of the past that was less “reasonable” and more “extreme” than today’s brand of feminism:

I just think that maybe it’s becoming more reasonable now, or, um, I don’t know, I just think that, um, that maybe in the past when there was quite a change with, like, the feminist movement, or something, that it was quite extreme.

The images of extreme, angry, radical, bra-burning feminists that participants drew on enabled the interviewees to discursively position themselves in particular ways. One of the ways that the radical-extreme feminism interpretive repertoire functioned was to construct its alternative: a liberal, equality-focused feminism; as Sarah said above, a “more reasonable” version of feminism. This contrast was highlighted in the following quote from Salma: “like cause you’ve got your like hard-core feminists, that’s what I think of and then you got your… your…um… your normal ones”. However, when defined in this way, “the moderate feminist gets absorbed into the majority” (Edley & Wetherell, 2001); s/he becomes “normal”. This process works to depoliticise feminism and thereby ensure its redundancy as it simply becomes part of the status quo.

3.2.1.1 The Radical-Extreme Feminist’s Body

Another way in which the extreme-radical feminist, as identified in the extreme-radical feminism interpretive repertoire, was constructed was through reference to her body; and it was a particular type of body. When talking about what came to mind when she thought of a feminist, Pania said,

I was just thinking about a topless woman, actually. You know, like, feminist, as in, like, totally stereotypical, like, why do I have to shave my legs? Why do I have to shave my armpits? Why do I have to wear a bra? Why do I have to…?
And Mariana, when talking about why she might not claim the label feminist, said:

- It’s just, like, if you say you’re a feminist then people will just think that you’re angry and bitter, but, you know, that’s just what I expect people to see me as, if I say that. Like, you know, you weren’t popular in high-school, and you didn’t have enough boyfriends, and you’re fat and ugly.

In this interpretive repertoire, the extreme-radical feminist has a body that is ugly and fat and does not subscribe to practices typically associated with normative (heterosexual) femininity – the removal of body hair and the wearing of bras. It is also one that does not attract enough heterosexual attention (“didn’t have enough boyfriends”). Olivia also raised this idea but in relation to how the media portrayed feminists. She said, “I think also, feminists are made to look unattractive and ugly and unwomanly and things like that as well”. It is not surprising that the extreme, radical feminist figure is one that does not replicate normative (heterosexual) femininity, given the common construction of femininity and feminism as being mutually exclusive (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000). It is a construction that continues to be reproduced in popular culture, contemporary media, within the academy, and in young women’s talk (Scharff, 2012), including women who identify themselves as feminists (Riley & Scharff, 2013). Moreover, in the current research, the participants were constructing these figures in a cultural climate of postfeminism, one of the elements of which is the defining of femininity as a bodily propery, rather than a psychological or social property (Gill, 2007a). Mariana repeated this construction later on when she said “I think there’s a bit of a stereotype that says if you are a feminist, you know, you won’t be, like, going too hard on the make-up and looking all girly”; here, “looking all girly” – a physical reproduction of normative femininity – is contrasted with being a feminist. As with earlier examples of participants drawing on the radical-extreme feminism interpretive repertoire, both Mariana and Pania constructed an embodied account here – it is the “feminist” they are talking about, not “feminism” per se.

### 3.2.1.2 The Unpopular, but Absent, Radical-Extreme Feminist

Interestingly, when I enquired in more detail about who the radical-extreme feminist might be or what they might be involved in, other than burning bras, participants struggled to provide examples. With Elizabeth for example, coming back to her feelings of “oh no” when thinking about feminists, when I enquired about where this
negative feeling might come from, tellingly, Elizabeth struggled to generate examples of what, exactly, feminists might be “going on about”. She said:

You don’t want people to think “Oh, not another one of those ladies that are going on…” But, see, again, when you’re asking me specifically “What is it that they do that makes people feel like that?” It’s like “Ah, actually, I don’t know”.

This inability to find examples of specific activities attached to these negative constructions of feminists was also found by Scharff (2012) in her research. She argued that the figure of the feminist is phantasmatic: a “trope…connected to unfemininity, man-hating and lesbianism, [which] figures prominently in the research participants’ accounts but continually disappears from sight when related to actual experiences” (Scharff, 2012, p. 84). Only one participant in the current research gave an example of a “real life” feminist (and it was of a “moderate” feminist) to illustrate her discursive constructions of feminists; not one of the others did. While I did not ask all participants for examples, it is nevertheless significant that examples were not offered by the interviewees to elucidate their comments.

Similarly, when Salma was talking about “hard-core” feminists that “fight for it every day” and I asked her how it was that they were fighting, she struggled to identify anything:

You know, being able to, um, …[10 sec pause]… I don’t know, sorry I can’t think of it, um…[8 sec]…like women that are able to, um,…[4 sec]… help other women? No that’s not what I’m talking about, um…[6 sec]… I don’t actually know [laughs] …wha-… Yeah.

Salma drew on the radical-extreme feminism interpretive repertoire in constructing the figure of the “hard-core” feminist, but could not provide details of what this figure would actually do. I found it challenging to stay silent during the long pauses in her speech because in the conventions of conversation they would usually indicate that it was the other speaker’s (my) turn. But I was very curious to hear what these hard-core feminists were engaged in. The feeling in the room became more and more discomforting as time went on, and I believe Salma’s laughter indicated how

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6 Joni mentioned Tavi Gevinson, the 16 year old Editor-in-Chief of Rookie Magazine, as an example of someone who calls themselves a feminist, but talks about feminism in a “non-exclusive” manner, rather than “some screaming, like, raging, angry, middle aged, white woman”.

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uncomfortable she felt as well. Even when I stepped in and asked the follow up question, “what comes to mind when you think of hard-core feminists?”, Salma could not find an illustration of this extreme feminist figure: it was “evoked but…escapes the grasp of reality” (Scharff, 2012, p. 84).

I will now outline the other interpretive repertoire about feminism that I identified in the interviewees’ talk – a type of feminism that is liberal and focussed on gender equality.

3.2.2 The Liberal-Equality Feminism Interpretive Repertoire
When asked about what feminism is or means to them, 11 of the 14 participants drew on a liberal construction of feminism being about equality between men and women, at least once. For example, when asked what feminism means to her, Talia said “I guess it’s about, um, equity, really. Yeah, I guess it’s come out of a place of woman feeling, or being, subjugated in society and wanting to come to a place or, y’know, equal standing with men”. Charlie, who identified herself as a feminist, described feminism as “finding equality, basically, in the world and with men and patriarchy and all of that. Similarly, Olivia, who identified as feminist, said that feminism means “equality. Trying to gain, um, equality with… men”. Sarah, who did not identify herself as a feminist, said it is “having equal – equality between men and women”. When I asked Elspeth what feminism meant to her she replied that it was about “being able to be equal in where you want to be, as a woman, versus being male, I would say… being able to be equal in life really”. For Pania, feminism is “your mana as a woman, like, actually being able to, you know, have equal rights as a man”.

It is unsurprising that the majority of participants associated gender equality with feminism. Gender equality has been a long standing core of the (liberal) feminist movement and there is much research with both men and women that illustrates discursive support for gender equality (Aapola et al., 2005; Aronson, 2003; Budgeon,

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7 The power imbalance that already existed between us due to the interviewee-researcher relationship will have been increased by her positioning as not knowing the answer to my question. Therefore, it is also likely that Salma’s laughter indicated or was prompted by a discomfort at “not knowing” what to say.

8 “Mana” is a Māori concept that loosely translates to prestige, authority and status. It is a supernatural force that is inherited through the male line, but can also increase or decrease according to the events and actions in a person’s life (Moorfield, n.d.).
equality has “become a cultural truism or commonplace, an argument of principle which stands beyond question” (Billig, as cited in Edley & Wetherell, 2001, p. 447) (emphasis original). Indeed, as Mariana’s quote at the beginning of this section indicates through the use of the word “just”, gender equality is seen as a small thing, a simple thing, a reasonable thing. Lisa Duggan (as cited in McRobbie, 2009) has argued that, in the US at least, in the 1980s and 1990s, there was an increasing neoliberal endorsement of “equality feminism”. This endorsement has contributed to the “mainstreaming” of gender equality but also the dismantling of feminism through neoliberal discourses of individualist empowerment and personal responsibility (McRobbie, 2009). This notion that gender equality is mainstream or commonplace could be seen in the interviewees’ talk. For example, coming back to Mariana’s quote at the beginning of this section, she says that feminism to her, “just means, um, women being on the same level as men, being treated the same way”. When Mariana’s use of the word “just” is contrasted, as it was, with the image of “these angry women, who just hate men so definitely”, it functions to position Mariana as not extreme, not angry, not men-hating. Instead, she is positioned as relatively rational and level-headed; her argument is a commonplace, mainstream one. As Edley and Wetherell (2001) have argued, this articulation implies that the person speaking is “in all other respects…indistinguishable from ordinary (i.e. non-feminist) women” (p. 447). Given the negativity associated with the label of feminist (as also found in the present research), this identity management is not surprising. Lee also engaged in a similar explicit positioning of herself as supportive of “just” equality rather than an extreme or radical feminism. She said that feminism for her was just not being sexist. Like, just not thinking women are objects and… Yeah, that’s my main thing, when I think about it. It’s not trying to put men down or… Anything like that, it’s just trying to be more equal. Lee’s repetition of the word “just” – “just not being sexist”, “just not thinking women are objects”, “just trying to be more equal” – emphasises how small and straightforward – reasonable – these ideas are whilst also serving to amplify her affiliation with this liberal position in contrast to that of “trying to put men down”.

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Crucially, however, for roughly half of the participants, this positive, liberal, equality feminism was a feminism that was located in the past in one way or another. For example, Sarah said that “there has been a lot of, umm… Difference between how the two sexes have been treated… Yeah, so I think it’s a good thing that, um, and… Yeah, it is a positive thing, like, to bring about change”. She clearly indicated that feminism is a positive force of change, but simultaneously she located it in the past by saying that there “has been” difference in how the sexes “have been treated”. I will now outline the patterns through which feminism was constructed in participants’ talk as a commendable but historical movement before discussing the effects of this construction.

3.2.2.1 Feminism is of the Past

Feminism was constructed as a thing of the past by many of the participants when they drew on the liberal-equality feminism interpretive repertoire. One of the ways in which this occurred was through participants referencing historical events when asked what feminism meant to them. That is, at times participants did not explicitly state that feminism was in or of the past, but they implied that it was through citing the historical event of women getting the vote as illustrative of feminism. When asked what came to mind when she thought of feminism, Elizabeth said, “one really big thing is voting, like, women getting the right to vote”. Pania, in saying that she did not think feminism was very relevant to Aotearoa/NZ today, said, “We’ve, kind-of, got, pretty much, equal rights, you know, in terms of voting, and all that sort of stuff”. When talking about what feminism means to her, Salma said, “and in New Zealand especially, I mean we were the first, one of the first countries to allow women to vote”. Repeatedly, the idea and image that came up when I asked participants about what feminism meant to them was historical: it was women getting the vote.

While women gaining the right to vote is an event that is closely linked in the cultural imagination to the suffragettes, and therefore feminism, and is still a relevant issue in some countries around the world, it is striking that when asked about feminism in 2012, a range of interviewees cited an event that occurred over 100 years ago in Aotearoa/NZ; doing so effectively rendered feminism a thing of the past, obsolete, undoing its current relevance and therefore any need for feminism today. This construction has a distinctively postfeminist flavour in that rather than explicitly
arguing that feminism should be rejected, it reinforces the notion of feminism’s success and thereby its redundancy (McRobbie, 2009).

However, this construction of feminism as out of date or old fashioned through referencing the vote was not subscribed to by all participants. For instance, Olivia not only mentioned other facets of feminism, she also indicted an awareness of this process whereby feminism is relegated to the past through reference to “the vote”:

I mean, in New Zealand we’ve got – everyone talks about how New Zealand women got the vote and, umm, all these kind of things – but they seem to forget that we still, as women, are not paid the same amount and we have to do the majority of the work in the house, and we still have to do all these other things.

Olivia clearly cites instances of present day inequality for women in New Zealand as standing in stark contrast to “everyone’s” (re)iteration of having the vote as a sign of feminism’s historical redundancy. Another participant, Charlie, when asked about whether feminisms today are different from feminisms in the past, spoke of a range of changes that have occurred since women got the vote, including no longer being considered another person’s property; being able to own property; and having a credit card with one’s own name on it (not one’s husband’s or father’s). For Charlie, feminism was not relegated to the past; it is very much alive and current. In fact, in continuing to speak about the changes that have occurred since women got the vote, Charlie went on to say that “moving into a second wave and these days, you know, yeah, there’s a lot more. There’s a lot more prominence I think. It’s a lot easier to say you’re a feminist. I don’t think there’s as much stigma attached to it”. Thus for some participants, feminism was constructed as very much of the present and relevant to them. Furthermore, they were aware of the way in which feminism is relegated to the past through referencing the vote but did not subscribe to this idea themselves.

Two other participants, Joni and Jay, also spoke with dismay about how this construction of feminism as historical had been taught and represented at school or university. For example, Joni spoke of how they “talked a bit about it in high school. Not very much, and it was very brief and it only really spoke about, like, very, very early feminism”. She went on to comment that “it’s always about what happened fifty
years ago, it’s not about what’s happening today, and how it’s still relevant”. Talking about university, Jay commented that

we had a lecture on feminism and there was like, we talked about it, and then nothing, then there was nothing, it was like well what about now? You’re talking about 20 odd years ago, or 30 odd years ago. Like, what? And it just sort of stopped and she was like on to the next subject.

Joni also commented that feminism is represented in today’s media as out of date or of an earlier historical period than today, saying, “when newspapers talk about feminism, they always use, like, a photo from, like, the 1950’s or something”. Thus not all participants in all moments agreed with the notion that liberal-equality feminism is a thing of the past.

Nevertheless, although some participants cited events and issues other than women getting the vote when speaking about feminism – and in some cases even cited an awareness of how the vote becomes a trope which acts to obscure present day gender inequality – more participants did not. Furthermore, in line with Edley and Wetherell’s (2001) findings, across all of the interviews there was a consistent affirmation that, throughout history, the “relative status and position of women in society had steadily improved. To this extent, the interviewees were all conforming to one particular view or narrative of history” (p. 450) (emphasis original). Salma, for example, constructed feminism as a thing of the past through constructing gender inequality as a thing of the past. She said that feminism was about empowerment and when I asked who feminism was empowering of, she replied

Empowering because um… as I said like, back in the day, um, women weren’t allowed to do anything, well pretty much weren’t, but you know, um… it’s pretty much empowering because we as women can do the same thing as men can do whereas in the olden days it wasn’t, it was frowned upon, like you weren’t able to get a job, you weren’t allowed to get a job, you had to stay home, look after the kids, have children, cook, clean and that was about it and now it’s, I feel it’s empowering because we as women are equal to men.

For Salma, it seems clear that equality exists today (in Aotearoa/NZ at least), in contrast to the past. Even Maria, who reported that she was very unsure what feminism was about, asking me what feminism was before we started recording the interview, was able to draw on postfeminist discourses that construct feminism as
something of the past. When I asked her what she thought of the postfeminist idea that the goals of feminism have been achieved and it is therefore no longer relevant, Maria said that without feminism we would

slowly fall back into the old ways of here you are, you’re made to do this, you know, you’re built to do this, the house chores, the blah blah blah, and you’re built to blah blah blah, you know? Without that freedom to do what we feel we want to do.

Although Maria was arguing that feminism is important, by saying that without it we would fall into “old ways”, she was implicitly constructing those ways as absent from the present – and therefore supporting the notion that feminism’s goals have been achieved, because we currently have the “freedom to do what we feel we want to do”.

Similarly, by comparing expectations of women in the past with expectations today, Naomi constructed the position of women today as implicitly better than the position of women in the past. She said:

“I…am so glad that we’re in the society that we are now…[text removed] but I would have hated to be back thirty, forty, fifty years ago where women were expected to, just, stay at home with kids and… you know, just keep the house clean”.

The feminism as historical variant of the liberal-equality feminism interpretive repertoire was also present in Pania’s interview. Pania seemed very reluctant to engage in any kind of political or critical analysis of gendered power relations, instead accounting for such power relations in other ways. She had had a career in a scientific field and acknowledged that there were few women in the places she had worked, saying, “definitely in the science sector, it’s an old men’s club”. However, for Pania this was “a generational thing [that will] just…kind-of, even out through time”. This notion of history as progressive, where societies automatically move from “a state of relative ignorance, barbarism and injustice, towards increased enlightenment and civilization” (Edley & Wetherell, 2001, p. 450), is a relatively common interpretive repertoire utilised by people in talking about the past more generally and in drawing on the liberal-equality feminism interpretive repertoire more specifically. In constructing the increase of women in the workplace – in particular, the scientific workplace – as “just” a matter of time because it is generational, this argument “implies that the improvement of women’s position in Western society [will occur]
irrespective of the efforts of feminists” (Edley & Wetherell, 2001, p. 450) (emphasis original). This argument again constructs feminism as a redundancy; it is not needed to get more women into the workforce because this will happen simply as a matter of course as time progresses.

This construction of history as progressively moving from barbarism towards enlightenment was also supported by interviewees’ comments that drew upon an idea of “modernity”. For example, when Salma talked about feminism being important in India, she said, “the culture [in India] is slightly changing to be, um, to be modern. Because I’ve seen it on TV that women in India… are trying to change the system”. Salma was contrasting gendered power relations in Aotearoa/NZ with gendered power relations in India. By implication then, Aotearoa/NZ is more “modern” than India; meaning, that gendered power relations here are more advanced or developed than in India. This construction of other countries’ gender inequality being greater than gender inequality in Aotearoa/NZ enables an undoing of feminism in Aotearoa/NZ which I will elaborate further in chapter five. Naomi also drew on the concept of modernity in talking about types of feminism: in particular, the feminism that she had read about in How to be a woman (Moran, 2011), saying,

I just liked what it talked about, in terms of, like, modern feminism – I mean I hadn’t really thought about it too much, but – she had quite a different angle on it, and it was just being proud to be a woman…that’s what I, sort-of, think feminism is.

In both of these instances (Salma and Naomi), modernity seems to be representative of progress: as better than what has come before. Furthermore, not only does modernity seem to be viewed as a positive force, it also appears to be seen as a “natural” or inevitable force. Peace (2003), having found a similar notion in interviewees’ accounts of gender equality being imminent, commented that “such enormous changes in society give future change a less personally involving otherness, the societal machinery having a momentum all of its own” (p. 167). The rhetorical implication of this positioning is that gendered power relations will change for the better with or without particular work done by feminism or feminists; and that therefore feminism is not necessary.
3.3 Axes of Difference: How Ethnicity and Class Mediated Feminist Identifications

I sought to have as varied a group of participants as possible, particularly in relation to sexuality, ethnicity, and age. This desire was not so that I could draw generalisations on the basis of these factors, but rather because these factors are particularly pertinent to studying feminism; for example, feminism has often traditionally been seen as a “white” movement (Hollows, 2000) and feminists are frequently depicted as lesbians (Scharff, 2010). I was therefore interested to see if and how participants’ ethnicity and sexuality mediated their identifications with feminism. Once participants were selected, I also gathered demographic data on their current occupational status and highest level of education attained to contribute to at least a partial sense of participants’ socioeconomic status. Class is a concept more readily associated with Britain than with Aotearoa/NZ; here, we tend to think more in terms of occupational socioeconomic status (David, McLeod, Ransom, & Ongley, 1997). Nevertheless, I will use the term class to refer to the socioeconomic positioning of participants. It is important to note that I conceptualise these axes of privilege as discursive categories that take their form relationally, and I am in alignment with Weis and Fine’s (2004) statement that “while we refuse essentialism, resisting the mantra-like categories of social life – race, ethnicity, class, gender – as coherent, in the body, “real”, consistent or homogenous, we also take very seriously that these categories become real inside institutional life” (p. xv).

Due to space limitations, I am unable to cover this area in significant depth. Nevertheless, I can signal that some of my findings were consistent with other research on young women’s identifications with feminism (Aronson, 2003; E. Rich, 2005; Scharff, 2011b, 2012), including research carried out in Aotearoa/NZ (Curtin & Devere, 1993), that participants’ ethnicity and class mediated their negotiations of feminism.

A range of participants indicated that knowledge of feminism or identifying as feminist was associated with a class privilege that comes from education. For example, when I asked Lee where the stereotypes of feminists being men-haters, lesbians, and caring nothing for their appearance came from, Lee indicated that ignorance and a lack of education contributed, saying,
I think people are really ignorant and, like, just don’t care… And, Ah, I actually do think it might be a little bit of an education thing as well, like, for example: My dad, like, isn’t very educated. When him and I, sort-of, discuss these things I can see quite clearly that it’s a lack of education, where, like, if I’ve, you know, done gender studies, or whatever, and dad hasn’t, like, there’s such a gap between us, so I think… People who might have those three stereotypes in their head might not have had educational opportunities to, like, even look at it, you know? So they’re just, yeah, a little bit ignorant.

Not only did Lee identify lack of (privileged) education as the reason for stereotypical views on feminists, she also positioned herself as privileged in this way – her knowledge comes from studying gender in tertiary education. In a slightly different manner, Mariana indicated that identifying with feminism is associated with class privilege. She talked about the sexism that was inherent in a job application form and then went on to say that “some people can’t really afford to be aware, you know, and you need to have a job”. Mariana constructed feminism as a privilege or luxury that some people literally cannot afford to engage in because they need to earn money.

Indeed, across the interviews, a generally more informed and more positive construction of feminism was associated with higher educational levels of participants. One example which highlights this point came when I was talking with Maria about what feminism was; Maria, who identified as Samoan and whose highest educational level was 6th form/NCEA level two, apologised for struggling to find the words to describe feminism, saying “sorry, I know I’m like being a bit of a FOB it’s just that I don’t know how to word things and [laughter]”. “FOB” is an acronym for “fresh off the boat”; it is a pejorative term that refers to recent immigrants to Aotearoa/NZ, generally from Pacific Island nations, and usually connotes ignorance. Maria positioned herself as ignorant, and in a particularly racialised fashion, by not being able to find words to talk about feminism. In contrast, Olivia, a Pākehā with a master degree, cited studying sociology at university as key to her coming to see herself as feminist; she described a book called “Feminism 101” and rattled off a string of names of different types of feminism. However, like Scharff (2009), I do not want to imply that there was a causal relationship between participants’ positioning on the axis of socioeconomic/class privilege and their identifying as feminist. For example, Charlie, who had chosen not to do tertiary study when she finished high
school, talked about “calling myself a feminist on the playground as a little kid”. Thus, for Charlie, a less privileged educational position did not lead to feminist disidentification.

Instead I argue, again in agreement with Scharff (2009), that “socio-economic background does not mediate feminist dis-identification in entirely predictable ways [in part] because it intersects with other axes of differentiation” (p. 281). For example, Joni is a Japanese woman and both ethnicity and class mediated her identification with feminism. She said:

what I find difficult is more, like, where feminism came from, or what it came out of. So, I know that it’s very much, like, *Euro-centric and middle class*, and where it came from and what it was based out of, it was quite exclusive. So, I feel a bit – not separated – but, I do feel a bit distant from that, and I don’t know if I fully… feel like that’s something that I want to belong to.

This construction of feminism conforms to the dominant narrative that is told about “second wave” feminism, as discussed in the first chapter. This narrative has been theorized extensively as one reason for a distancing from feminism that specifically non-White women engage in; “several researchers…have shown that women who sometimes experience intersectional forms of oppression might refrain from claiming feminism” (Scharff, 2011b, p. 465). In the current research, the two participants who identified as Māori, Pania and Elizabeth, both discursively resisted the identity of feminist and both constructed an incompatibility between feminism and Māori and/or Pacific Island cultures. Elizabeth positioned Māori and Pacific Island women as not feminist, saying:

I don’t know if they’d be feminist as such, because there’s just a natural – it’s just like a natural hierarchy…. [text omitted] but I don’t think that, I don’t think that women are feminist. I think that – Pacific Island and Maori anyway – I think that we just… umm, well… It’s hard because they are very strongly opinionated, and a lot of the Maori and Pacific Islander women that I know are very strong women, and they do have a lot of opinions and they will be heard, um, and in the right forums as well, like… But, I don’t know, we just, there’s just… It’s like there’s a time and a place.
Pania, who spoke about her Māori grandmother standing and speaking on the mārae, an unusual practice for a woman in a formal meeting on many mārae, concluded that her grandmother was not feminist when she did so: she was just standing up for what she believed. This conclusion echoes the point I made in chapter two that there are “tensions between the ways in which Māori women view their realities and their struggles and the ways in which Pākehā feminists have defined feminist projects” (Tuhiwai Smith, 1993, p. 61). In other words, whilst I may construct this act as feminist from my positioning as a Pākehā, middle-class feminist, for Pania, this act was not feminist. However, coming back to my argument that socioeconomic background intersects with other axes of difference to mediate feminist identification in complex ways, it is also important to note that Pania was one of the two participants with master degrees, a privileged position, but a position that did not contribute to feminist identification for Pania.

Maria also constructed an incompatibility between feminist identification and Pacific Island culture. Maria identified as Samoan and said that it is difficult to be feminist in Samoan culture “because they still live in the old times… [text omitted] I think their values are a lot more stronger and yeah I feel that their values and their morals and everything like it’s a lot more stronger”. This construction positions Samoan culture as “behind” Aotearoa/NZ in some way, as living in the past but also having strong values. It is a construction that works to essentialise Samoan culture as immutable; this notion was also drawn on by other participants when talking about how feminism was more relevant to other countries than Aotearoa/NZ. I discuss this point in detail in the following chapter.

That participants’ ethnicity and class positionings mediated their identifications with feminism is pertinent because, as discussed earlier, gender intersects with a range of other axes on which power relations are mobilised. Therefore, any feminist analysis of gendered power relations requires a concurrent analysis of other inequalities and their intersections. Similarly, an analysis of young women’s dis/identifications with feminism must consider how these are mediated by positionings of privilege other

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9 “Māræ” is a Māori term that refers generally to an area of tribal land on which shared buildings, including a wharenui or meeting house are situated, and more specifically to “the open area in front of the wharenui, where formal greetings and discussions take place” (Moorfield, n.d., para 2).
than gender. As McRobbie (2009) has argued, the category “young women” “is itself always and invariably cut across by relations of race, ethnicity, social class and sexual identity” (p. 41). In particular, the finding that participants’ identifications with feminism were mediated by their ethnicity – in non-causal, complex ways – is relevant to my finding in the following chapter that one of the ways in which participants disarticulated a need for feminism in Aotearoa/New Zealand today was through constructing it as more relevant to women in other countries. Participants talked about how “women in different parts of the world get treated way worse than we do” (Panía) and how feminism was more relevant to “countries where culture is more…apparent” (Salma); concurrently however, for some participants, as discussed in this section, culture seemed to be a reason for a dis-identification with feminism. However, before discussing the ways in which participants disarticulated feminism, I will outline the ways in which participants identified with feminism and the feminist praxis some participants engaged in.

3.4 Identifications with and Support of Feminism

Notwithstanding the disidentifications with feminism that many interviewees engaged in, some interviewees also spoke clearly of identifying as feminist and engaging in feminist activities. I hear and read the message that “young women don’t identify with feminism anymore” repeatedly in my day to day life – in popular media online and in print, in academic articles, on social networking sites, in discussions with older women in my life, etc. The message conveyed is that “feminism” is dead and young women are somehow responsible; a very postfeminist message. However, as the call for papers for the Feminism & Psychology special feature on “Young Feminists” articulated, “these categorical…representations threaten to homogenize, bleach and deflate the presence, necessity and potential of young people doing feminisms” (R. Liebert, personal communication, October 13, 2012). I am aware that in identifying and articulating how the interviewees in the current research dis-identified and dis-articulated feminism, I run the risk of reinforcing these discourses. I hope that I have also identified and articulated the ways in which these discourses and processes are not hegemonic. Furthermore, as noted earlier, I have made the “political” decision to include a section here on the feminist praxis that interviewees engaged in.
When I asked participants what they thought about the postfeminist idea that the goals of feminism have been achieved and therefore it is no longer necessary, nine participants strongly disagreed. This response is striking when contrasted with participants’ comments, discussed earlier, about not identifying as feminist and relegating feminism to the past. There were a range of reasons cited for this disagreement, including rape culture, the gender salary gap, and sexism. Jay and Olivia, two of the participants who were most likely to call themselves feminist, were aware of a lack of interest in feminism amongst some of their peers. For example, Jay said “there’s not sort of a strong care for [feminism] within my generation I don’t think. It’s sort of like “Oh I’m too busy for that” or “Oh I’m not really worried about it, don’t want to cause a stir”. Olivia said that “the perception out there is that we are equal, but in my mind we’re not. I think it’s more hidden now… and it’s quite difficult to get, even women, to see that”. However, despite this perception, seven participants spoke of talking about feminism with people in their lives, ranging from somewhat regularly to frequently. The talking about feminism with others ranged from challenging family members on sexism (for example, the father of an interviewee), through book club discussions, to very regular discussions with partners or husbands. Three participants talked about having two different groups of friends – one group with which they discussed feminism and another with which they would not even consider raising the topic. Two participants also spoke of how learning about feminism was a “double edged sword”, in that it made previously enjoyable activities, like watching TV, no longer enjoyable. Mariana said that at times seeing the world “through feminist lenses it can get a little too much” because everything could start to bother her, particularly hearing people she respects make comments that she thought were not right.

In addition to discussing feminism with other people, participants engaged in a range of feminist activities. Olivia was active in political life on her university campus and was the women’s liaison officer for a political party; this role involved trying to get women involved in politics because there are so few – particularly in leadership positions. Charlie had volunteered for a range of feminist organisations in the past, including domestic violence and pro-choice organisations. Mariana also spoke of having contact with feminist organisations and this contact increasing her awareness of feminism. Lee spoke of avidly reading feminist texts like Ariel Levy’s (2005)
Female Chauvinist Pigs, as well as experimenting with feminist projects like stopping wearing make-up; at the same time she also acknowledged how challenging it is to be critical of practices like wearing make-up while still living in a society where these practices are highly valued and expected of women. Both Elspeth and Charlie spoke of how they endeavoured to instil feminist beliefs in their children (male and female); for example, choosing to take their children to see the movie Brave (Sarafian, 2012) because its main character is a young girl who chooses not to conform to gendered expectations of her.

In addition to the activities outlined above, seven participants spoke of their involvement in feminism online. This online involvement ranged from reading feminist magazines and blogs online to participating in feminist forums and social networking groups. Online involvement appeared to be a key manner in which interviewees engaged with feminism, which supports recent research carried out by Schuster (2013) in Aotearoa/NZ that indicates that young women’s engagement with feminism increasingly occurs in online spaces. She has hypothesised that the prevalence of online involvement in feminism by young women is part of the reason for the popularity of the notion that young women “only rarely engage with traditional political activities and…distance themselves from feminism” (Schuster, 2013, p. 8). Namely, she has argued that online feminism is less visible than activism in the “real world”, and especially so to an older generation of feminists who do not engage in online feminism (Schuster, 2013). Participants in the current research talked about the sense of community they gained from participating in feminism online. For example, Lee said:

With the internet you can find little communities of, like, you know, blogs or websites where, um, girls who – women I should say – who think like you. Like, are like ‘ah, there’s this documentary’ or ‘there’s this convention happening’ or ‘there’s this really cool advertising campaign which subverts, like, gender stereotypes’. So, I feel like the more you can connect with those like-minded people, you, like, support each other and you give each other strength to, maybe, the next day at the office say that thing that’s on your mind.

Olivia echoed this sentiment in the following comment:
It’s a really active blog, there’s about 300 members, so it’s quite active. Which is quite cool for, I think, for me living in 2012, where a lot of women don’t think feminism’s relevant anymore. It’s quite nice to know that there are other people out there who, like, think the same.

These sentiments again support the findings from Schuster’s (2013) study that young women find online engagements with feminism connect them with a community they might otherwise not have. The participants in the current research also indicated that online involvement gave them a strength to engage in feminist critiques in the “real world” that they might not otherwise engage.

3.5 Summary
This chapter has outlined the discourses prevalent in the interviewees’ talk on feminism. I identified and evidenced two interpretive repertoires on feminism that were repeatedly used by interviewees: the liberal-equality-feminism interpretive repertoire and the radical-extreme-feminism interpretive repertoire. Furthermore, I identified how the liberal-equality-feminism interpretive repertoire constructed a feminism that is historical and somehow of the past. I briefly discussed how participants’ engagements with feminism were mediated by their positioning along axes of privilege such as ethnicity and class before finally outlining the feminist activities that some participants were engaged in.
Although it is not my place to speculate about interviewees’ feelings and thoughts about their participation in the research, I have found myself musing over some of the research interactions; these musings are entirely my own and I have no intention of trying to second guess the participants’ motivations. I have wondered about the impact of the powerful negative discourses about feminism on the interviewees’ participation. One of the research participants was extremely concerned about any personally identifying information being included in the written sections of my research; this included her and her partner’s professions and the names of organisations she had mentioned during her interview, even if they had nothing to do with her work. Of course, complete participant confidentiality was paramount and I had no problem ensuring that no identifying information was included in anything I wrote. Another research participant was connected to me through an acquaintance. At the end of her interview I assured her that I had not mentioned her participation to our mutual acquaintance and would leave it up to her to do so if/when she wished – particularly as doubtless we would see each other again in future. I have subsequently seen her on four occasions and on each occasion she has acted almost as though we have never met. I am not at all critical of either of these interactions – or the interviewees’ choices – but I have wondered about what ideas might be influencing these situations that seem to relate to concerns about being identified by others as having participated in the research. And my wonderings have led me to think that perhaps it is the topic of feminism in all its contentious glory that has fuelled these concerns. Of course, I could be completely off-base; perhaps the participant with whom I share an acquaintance found me odd during the interview process and is trying to avoid further contact. However, having reached the end of this research process, I am somewhat sceptical that these – completely understandable – responses are motivated by something other than the topic of feminism itself; an understanding, perhaps, that “the perception of feminism is [that it is] weird and that weird people are feminists” (Jensen, 2007, p. 28). Of course, my very scepticism is without doubt influenced by this very powerful discourse on feminism; I have no reason to think that I am in any way outside its sphere of influence!
4.1 Introduction
In this chapter, I utilise McRobbie’s (2009) notion of a disarticulation of feminism to explore how the participants in the current research disarticulated a need for feminism in Aotearoa/NZ through the notion that feminism is anti-men, through neoliberal discourses of individualism, and through discourses that position women in other parts of the world as more in need of feminism.

4.2 Disarticulating Feminism
McRobbie (2009), drawing on Stuart Hall (as cited in McRobbie, 2009), introduced the concept of a disarticulation of feminism, and she argued that a disarticulation of feminism is occurring in the current postfeminist cultural climate. By disarticulation, she means “a force which devalues, or negates and makes unthinkable the very basis of coming-together (even if to take part in disputatious encounters), on the assumption widely promoted that there is no longer any need for such actions” (p. 26). A disarticulation of feminism in a postfeminist cultural climate is the process by which feminist action and identification is troubled and made unnecessary – undesirable – whilst feminist values and ideas are simultaneously taken into account as common sense. The effect of this process is an undoing of feminism (McRobbie, 2009). Scharff (2011a; 2012) drew on the concept of disarticulation in her research with young German and British women on their repudiation of feminism. Although my research did not focus specifically on young women’s dis-identification with feminism, processes of disarticulating feminism were apparent in the participants’ talk in three ways: firstly, through constructions of feminism as anti-men; secondly, through constructions of feminism as being more relevant to women in countries other than Aotearoa/NZ (generally, though not always, Muslim women); and thirdly, through neoliberal discourses of individualisation. I will now trace these three processes of disarticulation in the interviewees’ accounts in the present research.

4.2.1 The Disarticulation of Feminism as Anti-Men
As noted, one variant of the radical-extreme feminism interpretive repertoire was the notion that feminism and feminists are anti-men; this discourse came through strongly at varied points in 11 of the 14 interviews. For two participants, it was a construction that they were aware of but did not subscribe to. For the majority of these 11
participants, this construction was one that they were aware of and subscribed to in certain moments; its existence mediated in some way their identification with feminism.

Sarah initially spoke about how she viewed feminism as a positive thing that focused on there being equality between men and women. However, a little later she identified feminism as also about privileging women over men; she said that feminism can mean evening out the gap, kind-of, between how men and women have been treated differently. So…Umm… But then, kind-of, it also can, for me, mean that people, um, kind-of, putting guys down, and males down, yeah… And… Kind-of, wanting women to dominate.

When I later asked Sarah if she would call herself a feminist, she was certain that she would not because then I’d have to also come up with a name for, like, the [laughs] male. Kind-of, to stand up for men as well. I don’t know, to make it equal, ’cause I don’t just want to stand up for one sex, although I’m female. Yeah, so if there was, like, a word in-between to stand up for equality then… Then that would, yeah, be O.K. for me.

At this point in the interview, Sarah clearly constructed feminism as about “standing up” for women only. When I traced her construction of feminism and dis/identification with feminism over the course of the interview, I found that she moved from a position where feminism is about equality (drawing on the liberal-equality feminism interpretive repertoire) to a position where feminism is about addressing differences in how men and women have been treated (positioning feminism in the past) to finally constructing feminism as about putting men down and wanting women to dominate (drawing on the radical-extreme feminism interpretive repertoire). She then used this latter construction to justify a position of not identifying as feminist, and thereby implied that standing up for equality for women is not the same as equality for men. This construction seems to rely upon a very specific interpretation of “equality”. The way in which this rhetorical position works is if equality for men and women has already been achieved, because otherwise pursuing equality does not mean pursuing the placement of men and women on an “equal” plane; it means women being privileged over men. This former understanding is what she implies by saying that feminism can be about “evening out the gap…between how
men and women have been treated differently” (emphasis added); men and women were treated differently in the past, but now we have equality and therefore it is somehow unfair to “stand up for [only] one sex”. This construction makes the subject position of feminist an untenable one for Sarah and achieves a disarticulation of feminism. It is possible to trace how Sarah draws on both the liberal-equality feminism interpretive repertoire and the extreme-radical feminism interpretive repertoire in relation to each other to construct equality as having been achieved and therefore feminism as unnecessary; in fact, feminism is disarticulated.

A range of participants drew on this idea of feminism promoting women over men and this idea being unfair and not in line with the goal of equality. For example, after I had discussed the concept of postfeminism with her, Elizabeth said that she supported it as an idea because:

I wouldn’t want one opinion more than the other – so I wouldn’t want people to be totally pro-feminist and then forget that there are men here too, that have valid opinions, that, that don’t get all the rights as well, that you might not see. By implication here, to be pro-feminist is to value women’s opinions over men’s; this is not a position that Elizabeth wishes to support, instead agreeing with the postfeminist notion that feminism is no longer needed or relevant – thereby disarticulating feminism in Aotearoa/NZ today. Naomi drew on a similar construction of feminism as “wanting to be better than men” and positioned herself as not supportive of this type of feminism, preferring instead a feminism that is “just wanting to be equal to men”. The radical-extreme feminism interpretive repertoire (“wanting to be better than men”) works in contrast with the liberal-equality feminism interpretive repertoire (“just wanting to be equal to men”) to construct Naomi as reasonable and in favour of gender equality but not necessarily of feminism. Indeed, later on in the interview, she was not at all certain that she would call herself a feminist. As McRobbie (2009) argued disarticulation works through processes where “young women are discouraged from becoming involved politically…for fear of offending men, and being branded a feminist” (p. 26). As noted earlier, Sarah did not identify herself as a feminist, largely because of the discourses of feminism as “anti-men” and “unreasonable”. For the research participants, this notion of feminism being anti-men, and therefore unjust, certainly fits with McRobbie’s (2009) notion of the disarticulation of feminism, in that it “devalue[d], or negate[d] and [made]
unchinkable the very basis of coming-together” (p. 26) to protest current gendered power dynamics.

Some participants distanced themselves from supposedly anti-men feminism by raising the issue of the deleterious effects of patriarchy and gender roles on men. Talia talked about feminism being about men and women having equal standing, but also having an “an angriness to it” that she had picked up from her parents when she was growing up, in particular, from her mum’s lesbian partner; she said that there were times growing up when she “definitely had to stand up for men in some places because I, you know, just because of my Mum’s partner’s, kind of, yeah, irrationality around it”. Talia drew on the two interpretive repertoires on feminism here: one, an equality-focussed, liberal feminism; the other, an angry, anti-men (and lesbian) feminism. Talia distances herself from the latter form by standing up for men in the face of it. She then went on to distance herself even further from this anti-men feminism by saying that

it wasn’t until I went to university and really started learning about, um, learning about different cultures and that kind of thing that I really saw that men didn’t have a great, kind of, just because maybe they were in positions of power or whatever it was, that it wasn’t necessarily serving them either.

Joni also talked about gender roles being pernicious for men, saying:

I think [feminism is] more, just, about bringing the awareness of the gender difference that exists in society. I think, if people are aware of that then, hopefully, they will be able to see that men are discriminated against just as much as women are, but in different respects.

Other participants were aware of constructions of feminism as not simply being pro-women but as being actively hating of men and putting men down. Lee said that in her experience, when she says she is a feminist, people “think something really specific – like, they think you hate men, first of all, like, and second of all, like, you are closet lesbian, or whatever, and then third, like, you care nothing for your appearance”. This construction was a fundamental reason for Lee not publically claiming the identity of feminist and actively disavowing such an identity in certain circumstances. The disarticulation of feminism “operates through the widespread dissemination of values which typcast feminism as having been fuelled by anger and
hostility to men. This is now understood as embittered, unfeminine and repugnant” (McRobbie, 2009, p. 26). An embittered, unfeminine, repugnant feminism is not a feminism with which the young women in the current research wanted to identify.

The participants who did identify as feminist and had quite positive views of feminism were also aware of the notion that feminism and feminists are anti-male in some way. Olivia said, in relation to negative comments on electronic news sites that posted articles about feminism,

I think that a lot of men that seem to, I don’t know, even comment on these things seem to think that feminists are – want to be – more than men. Like, want to um… go beyond what men have. Which, to me, is not true – we just want the same thing.

Whilst in Olivia’s account this construction did not disarticulate feminism, it demonstrates how widespread the idea that feminists are anti-men in some way is. Joni, who also supported feminism, although was not sure about holding a feminist identity, talked about there being “a lot of people who take feminism and, kind-of, use it to explain how, umm, men are awful and how, you know, everyone… how we should hate men for what they’ve done for us, or whatever”.

Sarah supported this construction used by Joni, saying:

I think that it’s [feminism is], kind-of, a way of getting back at… the male population for how they have mistreated women and that it’s… taking it a bit too far, yeah. Umm… That it’s one thing for people to be mistreated but then to do it back it, kind-of, it’s almost worse.

This construction of feminism as anti-men frequently worked to disconnect participants from an identification with feminism or a feminist position in these moments; and in this process, feminism was disarticulated. Indeed, arguably, this construction of feminism as anti-men is a discourse of “new sexism”.”“New sexism’ discourses are defined as accounts that function to maintain male privileges but in ways that reduce the ‘hearability’ of sexism, presenting the speaker as egalitarian” (Riley, 2001, p. 55). Participants in these moments appeared to be concerned about feminism, feminists, or they themselves privileging women over men. However, in a social and cultural context of gendered power relations that frequently privilege men over women, such constructions serve to perpetuate this inequality, while also
presenting the speaker as egalitarian; rhetorically, this discourse functions to present the speaker as fair and beyond reproach.

4.2.1.1 The Disarticulation of Feminism as Anti-Men: Theorising Heteronormativity

Given the construction of feminism as embittered, unfeminine, and repugnant, it is unsurprising that another way in which feminism seemed to be portrayed as anti-men was in talk about heterosexual relationships. It was in this context that Maria indicated an awareness of the notion that feminism is somehow anti-men, although she had not mentioned or drawn on discourses that construct feminists as angry, radical, or extreme earlier. When I asked her if feminism is relevant to her (male) partner, she replied “I would say a straight no, but, I think that’s because I’m not anti-guys”. It was not clear exactly what Maria meant by this, but there does appear to be a link for her between feminism and being anti-men, despite the fact that she said she did not know what feminism was.

Jay, who identified as lesbian, talked quite extensively about power relations between men and women, particularly in the heterosexual relationships of family members – both of her grandparents and her parents. She also contrasted her experience of these heterosexual relationships with her own relationship with her (female) partner, and how her partner, whose parents Jay saw as having a quite strongly and normatively gendered relationship, struggled somewhat with their lesbian relationship at first. Jay said that her partner saw her own father being the breadwinner and her mother staying at home and “she saw that as just normality and then being with me, she’s like okay but we’re both girls, so what happens? [laughs] Like, who works? Who’s the, you know, subordinate?” I was very curious about what seemed like a possible link between Jay’s reporting of these strongly gendered roles in heterosexual relationships and feminism – and so I asked her about it:

Laura: I’m really curious about the fact that you keep-ke- like a number of times you mentioned [2 sec pause] relationships between men and women.
Jay: Mmm.
Laura: And I [1 sec pause] it kind of seems like part of what [1 sec pause] I’m picking up is that...it’s almost like feminism and heterosexual relationships aren’t necessarily that compatible?
Jay: Mmmmm! I think, I think they’re…[2 sec pause]
Laura: Is that-?
Jay: I think… yeah, to a certain extent.

I was very conscious of not wanting to put words in Jay’s mouth and so my question was quite hesitant and fairly slow, with a number of pauses in it. However, I also wrote in my journal reflection afterwards that it felt like I had established a relationship with Jay where she would not be overly hesitant in telling me if I had “got the wrong picture”. Both of the “mmm” sounds that Jay made were affirmative sounds, but particularly the second one. Nevertheless, I went on to ask her if it meant yes to ensure I had understood her correctly. Before I could ask the entire question though, she continued with the statement that she believes there might be a certain amount of incompatibility between the two constructs. Her reply was affirmative, but I could also hear a small tone of doubt. Jay then went on to relate this thought about the potential incompatibility between feminism and heterosexual relationships to her experience of her parents’ relationship, which had included her father being physically violent towards her mother – and later on towards Jay instead – and Jay’s mother staying in the relationship; for Jay, this experience had demonstrated to her the way in which gendered power relations could and did play out in heterosexual relationships and, when she considered her thoughts on feminism in that light, saw it as somewhat incompatible with heterosexuality. This position was not an untroubled one for Jay however, as she moved on to say later that it was difficult for her to comment as she had never been in a heterosexual relationship herself.

Also talking about heterosexual relationships, Mariana implied an incompatibility between her feminist views and practices and her own (heterosexual) relationship. She talked about how feminism “in terms of men in general – that…It can lead to tension”. When I asked her how feminism can lead to tension with men, she replied:

Ahh, just, like, being overly, umm…assertive, I think. And, umm, I mean, I like to think that I speak my mind – it’s something I take pride in but I do think it can cause problems, maybe. I don’t think it has caused problems but, he knows what I’m like, he’s accepted me like that. But, you know, just, down the line, having a family of our own, I don’t know how that’s going to play out.
In this moment, Mariana constructed feminism as involving “over” assertiveness and speaking her mind; this was hypothesised as problematic in relationships with men in general. However, whilst it was not constructed as necessarily problematic in her current heterosexual relationship, she did indicate a level of doubt about this in saying that she did not know how this would “play out” “down the line”. What is implicit here is a sense that Mariana’s feminism – taking pride in speaking her mind and being assertive – could sit uneasily with a future for her heterosexual relationship. Crucially, it is feminism that is the potential problem in this construction – feminism that “can cause problems”, not the construct of the heterosexual relationship, gendered roles, or power dynamics, that could cause problems.

Scharff (2012) found that sexuality, and heteronormativity in particular, played a structuring role in her research participants’ accounts of feminists as man haters, unfeminine, and lesbians. She argued that “the heteronormative requirement that women like and desire men renders feminist identification problematic as a stance that is commonly regarded as involving hostility towards men” (p. 76). I argue that Mariana’s construction of feminism being the problem in her account is an effect of such a heteronormative requirement.

This heteronormative requirement contributed to other participants’ constructions of feminism and feminists as anti-men. For example, after Lee said that if someone claims the position of feminist publically, people think you “hate men…are closet lesbian, or you care nothing for your appearance”, and, she went on to say, “so when I think feminism it’s like: secretly I’d like to say ‘yeah I’m feminist’ but publically it’s less drama… [j]ust to not even say anything”. Heteronormativity requires a “chain of equivalence that is sex/gender/desire” (Chambers, 2007, p. 669) within which desire is conceptualised in terms of attraction to difference – specifically gender difference. This idea draws on Butler’s (1990) notion of the heterosexual matrix, a hegemonic grid through which binary and stable gender and heterosexuality are required for “cultural intelligibility” (p. 151). As such, the perceived positions of being anti-men, lesbian, and unfeminine are all positions which trouble the speaker’s “cultural intelligibility” as heterosexual. Lee’s positioning of herself as feminist, but not publically, is arguably mediated by her understanding that feminists are constructed in ways that do not conform with normative heterosexuality; claiming the label of
feminist publically could trouble her cultural intelligibility as a heterosexual woman – a challenging position in a heteronormative context.

4.2.2 The Disarticulation of Feminism through Discourses of the “Other”

In addition to feminism being disarticulated through its construction as anti-men, I found that the process of disarticulating feminism also occurred through discourses which constructed women in other countries – and when specified, usually Muslim women – as more in need of feminism than women in Aotearoa/NZ. The topic did not come up spontaneously until the third interview, which was with Salma, who identified as Fijian-Indian. Early on in the interview, when she was first talking about what feminism means to her, Salma spoke very strongly about how sad and unfair it was that women in India, Africa, and the Middle East could not enjoy the freedoms that she and other women in countries like New Zealand did. Salma said that, for her, feminism meant “empowering”; when I asked her who it was empowering of, she replied

Well, because… in the olden times, women were more, um, what were the words? Oppressed and they didn’t really get to do what they wanted to do, you know, they were controlled. Um, but at the same time that’s still happening today in different parts of the world.

Salma not only implied that feminism is something located in the past through constructing the oppression of women as something that occurred in “olden times”; she also went on to construct this “old” oppression as still occurring in some parts of the world today. As noted earlier, Salma drew on the discourse of history as progressive here and thus, in contrasting gendered power relations in Aotearoa/NZ with gendered power relations elsewhere, constructs these other locations as somehow backward and therefore more in need of feminism. One effect of this construction is to render feminism in Aotearoa/NZ today a non-issue; gender oppression occurred in the past or it occurs in other countries, not here, and therefore feminism here is no longer necessary.

Soon after this comment, Salma became so distressed about the lives of women in these other countries, when compared to hers, that she began to cry. I was struck both by her level of distress and the way in which she later struggled to identify examples of gender inequality in Aotearoa/NZ. I struggled to understand how the lives of
unknown women could move Salma so profoundly and yet she could not see gender inequality here in Aotearoa/NZ. I decided that this was an area that I wanted to explore further with other interviewees and so thereafter, if an interviewee did not raise the topic, I specifically asked her about her thoughts on feminism’s relevance to countries other than Aotearoa/NZ. Of the 14 participants, 9 of them identified feminism as more relevant to countries other than Aotearoa/NZ, specifically India, “Muslim countries”, Middle Eastern, and African countries. Aside from Salma, three other participants – Naomi, Elizabeth and Mariana – raised the topic without my asking about it.

The identification of feminism as more relevant elsewhere in the world was achieved primarily through constructing Aotearoa/NZ as a Western country and therefore more “advanced”, in contrast to “less developed” locations in the world. Within this construction, gender inequalities elsewhere were foregrounded, effectively eliding in these moments any articulation of gender inequality in Aotearoa/NZ. As Naomi said, feminism has changed how women are viewed, but it “depends where you’re living though, isn’t [doesn’t] it?”, because in countries where, you know, women have to stay at home and women have to wear burkas and things like that, I don’t think women are heard there…You know, back in, like, no man’s land – where they still have, like, female mutilation, and that kind of thing – I don’t think the women are heard very much there. I don’t think women are seen as important as men in those countries, but that’s, like, a whole different, kind-of, thing really, isn’t it? I don’t really think they have feminism there. Umm… so, yeah.

Laura: Okay, so in New Zealand, a lot of that idea of women are seen as equal with men – in your world – that’s largely been achieved?

Naomi: I think so.

Naomi constructed certain countries, “no man’s lands”, as devoid of feminism, contrasting them to Aotearoa/NZ, where, by implication, feminism has achieved its aims and is no longer necessary; the relevance of feminism elsewhere is “a whole different thing” to its relevance in Aotearoa/NZ.

Overall, Pania was very reluctant to identify the existence of gender inequality in the world today, whether within Aotearoa/NZ or elsewhere. However, when I asked if
feminism was something that was relevant to other countries, she said that feminism was “absolutely” more relevant to other countries,

Because I mean, umm, you know, women in different parts of the world get treated way worse than we do. But I mean, that’s looking from our eyes at it. You know, like, umm, back when my grandma was growing up, I mean, that was the environment in which she grew up and which she knew – so she probably didn’t see herself as being treated that badly, ‘cause it’s the environment in which you’re in.

Pania’s talk first constructed an awareness of gender inequality elsewhere based upon how much worse women are treated in other parts of the world than women here in Aotearoa/NZ. However, this emerging critical articulation of gendered power relations quickly shifted as Pania went on to construct this notion as a view through foreign eyes and therefore not necessarily representing the experiences of the women in these locations. In managing her identity here, Pania discursively positioned herself as non-judgmental and non-ethnocentric; she also disarticulates any need for, or support of, feminism that might be assumed by her comment that women are treated poorly in parts of the world. Furthermore, the example she goes to provide equates the experiences of women elsewhere in the world with the experiences of her grandmother when she was growing up. In other words, Pania argued that the experiences of women in other countries today are similar to the experiences of women in Aotearoa/NZ sixty, seventy, or eighty years ago, thereby constructing Aotearoa/NZ as more advanced – and the gendered power relations here as more advanced.

Salma engaged a similar construction when talking about feminism and her brothers, both of whom have a Fijian-Indian ethnic background. She said that her brothers were completely different from men born in India or Fiji because they were born in New Zealand:

they’re pretty much like me, they’re westernised [laughs]…Um…ah, like my brother lets his wife, doesn’t control her, like, doesn’t tell her what to do, doesn’t tell her what to wear, doesn’t tell her where to go….So they’re quite, liberal.

Again, Salma’s comment recognises that gender inequality exists – there are places where men control women and tell them what to do – but not in Western, liberal
places like Aotearoa/NZ. The effect of this positioning is to render feminism in Aotearoa/NZ obsolete. Indeed, despite thinking about it for some time, the only gender inequality that Salma could recall experiencing in Aotearoa/NZ was a media outlet arguing that women tennis players should be paid less because they are women; and yet Salma articulated a strong sense of gender inequality in India, Fiji and Africa. As Khan (as cited in Scharff, 2012) has argued,

constructions of and comparisons between the west as progressive and liberated and the rest as oppressive and traditional, make it easier for women in the west to believe that they are not oppressed and make critiques of the violence and other forms of structural inequalities they face more difficult to get across (p. 61).

This notion of Aotearoa/NZ as liberal, liberated and westernised – and therefore not in need of feminism – was also supported by arguments that inequality in other parts of the world is due to a lack of education. This argument ties in to the constructions of history as progressive (Edley & Wetherell, 2001) that I outlined earlier which also function to disarticulate feminism; Westernisation is seen as equivalent to modernisation and will occur regardless of feminism.

As noted, Africa and the Middle East were most frequently cited as locations where feminism was more needed than in Aotearoa/NZ. Both of them are groupings of countries, many of which have considerable variety – ethnically, culturally, religiously, and socially – both between them and also within them. Nevertheless, participants referred to Africa, India, the Middle East, and “Muslim countries” as if they were uniform objects; and furthermore, as uniform objects that were intimately and entirely knowable by participants. Overall, these constructions also relied on and rearticulated an essentialist view of culture in these countries – as a determining factor in “these other” people’s lives. Not only were Africa, India, and the Middle East constructed as homogenous entities – any ethnic, cultural, religious, or social differences between or within them brushed over – but the people living in these locations were seen “as” culture, as explicitly illustrated in the following quote of Salma’s:

Yeah, there’s in Africa as well and um… around the Middle East. It’s really around the… countries where culture is more…apparent. More… I don’t know what’s the word. Um…where culture takes over your life. I just think
it’s completely unfair because how come I can have these things but you can’t?.

Through arguing that it is unfair, Salma aligns herself with the notion that gender equality is important, whilst also closing off possibilities for change by constructing women in Africa and the Middle East as unable to escape the bounds of their culture; in these places “culture take[s] over your life”. One of the effects of this construction is to render those of us in the “liberal West” as not determined by culture. As Wendy Brown (2006) has argued, “though ‘culture’ is what nonliberal peoples are imagined to be ruled and ordered by, liberal peoples are considered to have culture or cultures” (p. 150); in other words, “we have culture, while they are a culture” (Brown, 2006, p. 151) (emphasis original). This phenomenon is certainly not a new phenomenon, for, as Ong (1994) has argued, “since the early 1970s, when feminists turned their attention overseas, our understanding of women and men in the Third World has been framed in essentialist terms” (p. 374). However, within a climate marked by a postfeminist sensibility, when applied to questions of gender inequality and feminism, this dichotomy of liberated-West/essentialised-rest works to position women in the non-Western, non-“developed” world as victims; victims of their cultures and victims of patriarchy. This dichotomy could be seen in participants’ repeated references to non-Western women not being able to live their lives according to their own choices; being seen as property; having to obey their husbands; having their human rights violated because of their gender. My intention here is not to argue that these issues of gender inequality and gendered violence do not exist. Rather, I am interested in the way that these constructions, firstly, shut down the possibility of feminist activism that may already be happening in these locations; secondly, function to disarticulate a need for feminism in the Western world by constructing Western women as free and liberated; and thirdly, work to disconnect women in the Western world from any kind of feminist solidarity or connection with women in the non-Western world. As McRobbie (2009) has argued, within a postfeminist climate there appears to be “a process of unpicking the seams of connection, forcing apart and dispersing subordinate groups who might possibly have found some common cause” (p. 26). Furthermore, as she goes on to argue,

The appeal to young women in the West, that they are the fortunate beneficiaries of Western sexual freedoms, now actively pitches them against gender arrangements in other cultures where female sexuality is subjected to
different modes of surveillance and control. In a post-feminist frame, the only logic of affiliation with women living in other, non-Western cultures is to see them as victims (McRobbie, 2009, p. 26) (emphasis added).

Participants’ constructions of non-Western women not only positioned non-Western women as victims – of culture and of gendered power relations – but also at times positioned Western women as free from such concerns. As Elizabeth said,

I could see why there would still be feminist views in the world because there are still countries where women’s genital parts get mutilated, you know and that’s… In this day and age, it’s like, I’m about to have a daughter and I wouldn’t let anyone touch her, I would literally not let anyone touch her, so it’s not fair that we can live like this and…

Elizabeth is clear that feminism is necessary, but only elsewhere in the world because that is where women experience gendered violence; it appears unthinkable to Elizabeth that gendered violence would happen in Aotearoa/NZ – and yet, as noted in chapter one, statistics indicate that roughly 29% of New Zealand women experience sexual violence once or more in their lifetime (Ministry of Women’s Affairs, 2012). What is more, this statistic “is in line with estimates from comparable surveys conducted in Australia, Canada and Britain” (Families Commission, as cited in Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2012, p. 5), all countries that fall within the rubric of “Western” countries and therefore arguably countries in which participants would seem to consider gendered violence – comparable with female genital mutilation – unthinkable. My argument here is not that it is an individual’s responsibility to know anything in particular about the level of gendered violence in Aotearoa/NZ, but rather that in the process of foregrounding the prevalence of gendered violence elsewhere in the world, and thereby articulating a need for feminism in those places, there is a discursive elision of the existence of gendered violence in the Western world, thereby disarticulating feminism in the Western world.

Whilst the majority of participants did not question their construction of women in other countries as more in need of feminism than women in Aotearoa/NZ, there were three participants (Olivia, Mariana and Joni) who troubled this construction somewhat. Both Joni and Olivia argued that imposing one cultural standard onto another culture was problematic. Joni thought that feminism is more relevant to some other countries than it is to Aotearoa/NZ, but “not on a huge scale”, and that it is
important “to consider the overall context as well, ’cause that differs greatly”, rather than “trying to impose your feminist ideas on particular cultures”.

In a slightly different vein, Olivia cited discussions about the hijab that she had had with Saudi Arabian students. The hijab figures as a “particular marker of cultural difference” (Hirschkind & Mahmood, as cited in Scharff, 2012, p. 59) in the construction of Muslim women as oppressed and in need of (Western) feminism’s help. Whilst Olivia and the students were aware of some feminist arguments that the hijab is oppressive of women, the Saudi Arabian students argued that women in the West are also told what to wear – it’s just the “what” that is different. Olivia said that she found this interesting; she was also unwilling to position herself as “knowing better” than the students. Instead, she argued that perhaps there were different priorities for feminism in Saudi Arabia than there were in Aotearoa/NZ, saying,

I do think it’s different types of feminism are needed in different parts of the world, and…

Laura: So, it’s not so much, um, that it’s more or less relevant, it’s more that it’s a different type of feminism?  
Olivia: Yeah, I guess… just, different… different priorities, maybe. I guess…

Like, I mean, in New Zealand we’ve got – everyone talks about how New Zealand women got the vote and, umm, all these kind of things – but they seem to forget that we still, as women, are not paid the same amount and we have to do the majority of the work in the house, and we still have to do all these other things. And I guess, because they’re ingrained culturally, we don’t question them at all. And that’s the challenge maybe for the next group – next, I mean, group of feminists.

Olivia raised one of the ways in which I found that feminism was relegated to history in the current research – through the iteration of women gaining the vote in Aotearoa/NZ – and talks about how this iteration seems to mask present-day gender inequalities. This construction supports her notion that feminism is relevant in Aotearoa/NZ and elsewhere in the world; she articulates a need for feminism elsewhere without disarticulating a need for feminism in Aotearoa/NZ.

Mariana also referred to hearing positive comments about wearing headscarves from Middle Eastern women who wear them; she said: “I do know that a lot of people –
women – think that wearing your scarf is actually empowering to them, and I understand, you know? [text omitted] You get women saying this who actually do have an education and do have opinions”. However, she also said that at the same time, you do have women who never went to school and just stayed home, and just listen to what their husband is going to tell them, you know. So, it’s just hard to generalize, because even in those countries you’ve got heaps of different classes and people.

Mariana highlighted the differences within Middle Eastern countries, deconstructing the idea that there is a monolithic Middle Eastern culture and therefore troubling the notion that women are uniformly oppressed in the Middle East or that non-Middle Eastern ideas can be applied to a Middle Eastern context in a straight forward manner. Nevertheless, despite these qualifications, Mariana also stated that “obviously” feminism was more relevant in the Middle East than in New Zealand, somewhat diluting the notion that “it’s just hard to generalize” about the relevance of feminism to the Middle East.

The construction of women in other countries, for example Middle Eastern, African, and “Muslim countries”, as more in need of feminism often went hand-in-hand with a construction of women in Aotearoa/NZ and other western countries as free, independent individuals with a world of choices at their fingertips. As I have already suggested, the logic of the argument that positions women in non-western countries as in need of feminism “relies on the characterisation of western countries as liberated and free” (Scharff, 2012, p. 61) and therefore not in need of feminism. The following comment from Salma highlighted this construction particularly clearly:

I find it really sad that it’s just, it’s completely not fair how a woman my age, me, I can have freedom and stuff, but someone completely around the world, the same age as me could be, could have been forced into marriage when she was 13. And you know, she didn’t get to live what, her dreams pretty much got smashed, shattered.

This notion that, thanks to a feminism which is no longer necessary, Western women have freedom, particularly the freedom to make choices, feeds into neoliberal discourses of the importance and primacy of individual choice and autonomy. As noted, these discourses and constructions were at times used in conjunction with the othering of women elsewhere in the world who were constructed as more in need of
feminism than we are in Aotearoa/NZ. However, they were also used to disarticulate feminism without relying on a construction of other women as less empowered. I will now outline the ways in which neoliberal discourses worked to disarticulate feminism in the interviewees’ accounts.

4.2.3 The Disarticulation of Feminism through Neoliberal Discourses of Individualism

Laura: Would you call yourself a feminist?

Pania: Umm… No. I mean, I would stand up for what’s right, and what I think is right. I don’t necessarily know if that’s being a feminist or not, I just think that’s being a human being with strong… views.

In the current research, I utilise the term neoliberalism to refer to a form of governmentality (Brown, 2003) in which “power works through, and not against, subjectivity” (Scharff, 2012, p. 11), through processes which fashion us, particularly in the West, as autonomous and responsible subjects. According to Rose and Miller (1992), the political subject of neoliberalism “is less a social citizen with powers and obligations deriving from membership of a collective body, than an individual whose citizenship is active” (p. 201); and within neoliberalism the specific manner in which this citizenship is active is through the individual’s freedom to choose (Rose & Miller, 1992). Crucially, this freedom is one that is divorced from traditional social, cultural, geographic or economic ties, such that the subject is seen as entirely self-produced; purportedly freed from ties of gender, race and class, the individual is seen as “totally responsible for their own destiny, and so techniques and technologies of regulation focus on the self-management of citizens to produce themselves as having the skills and qualities necessary to succeed” (Rose, as cited in Ringrose & Walker dine, 2008, p. 228). These neoliberal discourses sit comfortably alongside postfeminist discourses, working hand-in-hand to present women as autonomous actors, no longer constrained by gender inequality because feminism has done its job – and therefore is no longer needed.

These neoliberal discourses of individualisation were prevalent throughout the participants’ talk; 10 of the 14 interviewees drew on them in at least one place during their interview, and they were particularly apparent in statements about gender,
women’s lives, and feminism, and frequently in ways that disarticulated feminism in Aotearoa/NZ today. Neoliberal discourses were used in two key ways to disarticulate feminism in contemporary Aotearoa/NZ: firstly, through individualist discourses that privileged the experience of the individual over anything else, and also constructed individual choice as paramount and uncontestable; and secondly, through processes that separated individual choices from the social, cultural, economic, political, and gendered contexts in which the choices were made, thereby depoliticising them. I will discuss each of these processes of disarticulation in turn.

Almost half of the participants drew on discourses that privileged the notion of the individual when discussing feminism and gendered power relations. Some participants emphasised the way in which they had not personally experienced gender discrimination or inequality – or did not know anyone else who had – and therefore stated that feminism was not relevant to them. Elizabeth, for example, stated that women should not be treated differently for being women, but then went on to say, “I guess maybe that’s what feminism is, but I’ve just never been treated in a way that I’ve ever had to think about it, or ever had to call on feminist movements to be heard”. Her use of the word “but” implies an incompatibility between, on the one hand, her statement in apparent support of feminism (not treating women differently because of their gender) and, on the other hand, her statement that she has never experienced this herself and therefore does not need feminism. Occasionally, individualized statements of never personally experiencing gendered inequality were combined with a statement that acknowledged that inequality had occurred in the past and therefore feminism was more relevant back then. For example, when I asked Pania if feminism was relevant to her, she replied, “maybe not so much because I haven’t really been discriminated against so much in my generation. Like, I haven’t really experienced it”. By implication, feminism was relevant to an older generation than Pania’s; she is aware of this notion but because she personally has not experienced discrimination then it is not relevant to her generation. Interestingly, later in her interview, Pania talked about the pay gap between men and women in Aotearoa/NZ, saying she had heard some debates in the media in the preceding year related to comments made by the head of the Employer’s and Manufacturer’s Association (EMA) about women taking more sick leave due to “pre-menstrual stress” and having children. When I enquired what she thought of this, Pania said it
was “kind of crazy” and did not understand how someone could justify such a statement. However, she then went on to somewhat justify the EMA head’s position by saying “obviously, umm, women do have time off for maternity leave, they do have children, but I mean, that’s part of human nature – somebody has to have children, someone has to procreate, somebody has to… you know, take time off work”. Absent from this statement is any kind of critical or political analysis of gendered power relations; Pania indicates that she knows there is a salary gap between men and women in Aotearoa/NZ, but this gap is presented as somehow inevitable due to the need for the continuation of the human species through procreation. Not only is feminism not relevant to Pania because she has not experienced gender discrimination; gender discrimination – the salary gap between men and women in work in Aotearoa/NZ – is constructed as unavoidable and somehow justifiable. Pania then went on to say that taking any kind of a break from work – whether one is male or female – is going to have a detrimental effect on someone’s career: “I think that’s just the nature of the beast, whether you’re male or female. I, just, think if you take that break, that it’s not necessarily going to be the same when you go back”. This individualist response to the gender salary gap removes gender from the equation – if it occurs whether one is male or female, then gender ceases to matter. As Scharff (2012) argued, this kind of stance renders a feminist viewpoint meaningless:

If gender ceases to be a category that significantly shapes one’s experiences, a critical stance which would involve some recognition of gender – and its intersections with class, race, and sexuality – as a structuring principle becomes difficult to think and articulate (p. 51).

In addition to individualist accounts predicated on the absence of the experience of gender inequality, feminism was disarticulated in today’s Aotearoa/NZ through the presence of discourses which held individual choice to be utterly uncontestable, thereby rendering meaningless any kind of political or feminist critique. For some participants, this construction was used when speaking about ideas and practices that feminism has critiqued at one point or another. For example, three participants talked about a woman being a housewife or stay-at-home mother as being okay, as long as it was the woman’s choice. As Maria said, “and if [being] a housewife, if that’s generally what they want to do, then that’s fine, at least that’s come from within and
not, you know, what people have made them to think what they should do”. In a similar vein, Mariana talked about her personal choice in relation to wearing make-up, when (as noted earlier) she was aware of the stereotype that feminists do not wear make-up. She said, “but, you know, you don’t have to be that way – maybe sometimes I like to look good for myself, you know?” Mariana positions the choice to wear make-up as an individual one and a knowing one – she is aware of feminist critiques of the practice, but avoids a similar critique by positioning herself as doing it for herself, not others; this is a particularly postfeminist formulation. She constructs herself as an autonomous individual, able to make choices that are free from the constraints of society’s and others’ expectations, in particular gendered expectations, and as such, invokes the perfect neoliberal postfeminist subject. This notion of an individual’s right to choose was invoked to justify or account for positions which these participants were aware that feminism may critique and, in doing so, feminism was disarticulated.

The neoliberal notion of an individual’s right to choose was also used at times when participants might otherwise have been engaging with a feminist critique of others’ practices and ideas as a way to manage their own positioning as autonomous, free individuals. For example, Elspeth talked about how she felt that it was not as obvious today what women were fighting for as it had been in the past; she felt that “we’ve, sort-of, gone back a little bit in… How do I, sort-of, explain that? I don’t know, it…it’s not as, sort-of, obvious and feminist”. When I asked what made it seem that way, she talked about her “mummy friends” who wanted to stay at home, have children, and not work; Elspeth said that this was “fine” but something that she struggled with because they lived in a world where being a housewife was no longer the main option available to women as it was in the 1950s. When I asked her what made it “fine”, she replied, “Well, because they’re allowed to live their lives at they see fit. Um…and they have that choice, which is fine”. Elspeth started off with a critique of today’s gendered power relations (“we’ve sort of gone back a little bit”), and illustrated this critique by referencing her “mummy friends”, who, despite in Elspeth’s view having many more alternatives open to them, choose to be stay-at-home mothers. However, this emerging, possibly feminist, critique is undermined by the strength of the neoliberal discourse of individual choice. It is difficult, if not impossible, for Elspeth to critique her friends’ decisions about their lives because the
notion of individual choice is seemingly so impartial; it is so seemingly neutral as to be unquestionable. As Jacques and Radtke (2012) argued, “by reducing everything to an individual choice, it is impossible to criticize others or make social change, as every woman has a right to choose for herself” (p. 14). This process of privileging individual choice also contributes to young women distancing themselves from feminism because feminism is seen as a collective movement; feminism requires at the least some type of acknowledgement that structural inequality exists on the basis of gender. However, the requirement of neoliberal individualist discourses that young women see themselves, and others, first and foremost as individuals, works entirely against this acknowledgement; such that, in moments where participants might have begun to connect parts of their own – or their friends’ – lives to broader social concerns and axes upon which power is mobilized, the possibility of this feminist critique was eclipsed by an individual’s right to choose how to live their life. In other words,

The distinctive feature of the stories told in our times is that they articulate individual lives in a way that excludes or suppresses (prevents from articulation) the possibility of tracking down the links connecting individual fate to the ways and means by which society as a whole operates; more to the point, it precludes the questioning of such ways and means by relegating them to the unexamined background of individual life pursuits (Bauman, 2001, p. 9).

In so doing, these stories disarticulate feminism.

Such a disarticulation of feminism in Aotearoa/NZ today was particularly noticeable in Elizabeth’s interview when discussing gender inequality in the workplace. As with all the interviewees, I had asked her whether postfeminism was something that she had heard of, and when she said that she had not, I gave her the brief overview that I gave all interviewees: postfeminism is used in a range of different ways to mean a range of different things; however, threaded through most of these different definitions, there is a common theme that the aims and goals of feminism have been achieved and therefore feminism is no longer relevant or needed. When I asked Elizabeth what she thought of this idea, she replied “Yeah, that’s probably right. Not so much right, but I think that… yeah. It would – that to me makes sense”, and then proceeded to talk about her workplace. Elizabeth described her work for a multi-
national company that has been noted for its internal investment in increasing women in leadership positions, finishing with the statement, “so, for me, I’m surrounded by a lot of strong women and I think, yeah, the job is done”. At this point, I asked her whether she was aware of the gender pay gap in Aotearoa/NZ; when Elizabeth said no, I talked about how research indicates that female graduates going into the same role as their male counterparts will begin on a lower salary and that the gap increases as time goes on. Elizabeth was shocked. She asked why the salary gap was there, to which I responded “that’s a really good question!” because I wanted to see what she would make of the information and did not want to influence that by presenting my explanation. Elizabeth then engaged in a lot of discursive work to argue that a woman earning less than a man in the same role was because women are either not aggressive enough to ask for more money, or find asking for more money too uncomfortable. Elizabeth started out by responding,

I actually didn’t know that… and, I mean, for me personally, it’s never been… I mean, of course money is an issue because you need money to live – but for me, I,… Like, it’s not – that’s not good for the women that are working hard out there, but I think that, overall, if you’re where you should be, you won’t be one of those statistics.

She then went on to explain that being “where you should be” is a product of being comfortable with “putting [yourself] out there” and some women are not comfortable with this. She ended her response by saying that she was “stunned” that women can earn up to 17% less than men, but

I, umm, but I do think that, yeah, I think that women should be more… aggressive with what they are getting out of, like… Because you only live once, and if you’re not happy there – but I mean, that shouldn’t say if they’re happy or not – but if you’re not happy, yeah… If you’re not happy where you are or you feel like you’re not getting what you should be entitled to then I wouldn’t stay.

Ultimately, Elizabeth’s argument was that any difference in salaries received by men and women was due to an individual woman’s inability to be sufficiently aggressive – either in asking for more pay or in leaving and finding another job. She drew on neoliberal notions that privilege the individual and hold the individual responsible for their fate; in so doing, structural inequality became an individual issue, and the
responsibility for overcoming the issue also became the individual’s. As Budgeon (2011) has stated,

Maintaining a coherent empowerment narrative consisting of autonomy, individuality and personal choice requires a denial of the effects that external influences have on the realization of individual success…This leads to a fundamental misrecognition of the causes of social disadvantage as explanations for inequality are seen to reside in the ability or motivation of individuals to make “good” choices (p. 285).

It is not surprising that participants disarticulated feminism by drawing on these individualist discourses, given how normative and common place the discourses are. Indeed, arguably these neoliberal discourses that constitute “the ideal self as an autonomous citizen who makes free and rational choices in order to survey and improve herself/himself” (Riley & Scharff, 2013, p. 208) required participants to deny the effects that external influences have on their lives. So that Pania, for example, noted the absence of women in the science sector but claimed that this did not have an impact on her because she, as an individual, worked hard – “but I don’t think that I ever got treated any differently, or got any less opportunities and… you know, I just put that down to, kind-of, work-ethic and actually… you know, and actually trying hard at what I was doing”. I agree with Scharff’s (2011a) suggestion that research participants’ reluctance to engage in a critical analysis of unequal gender relations can be understood as a reluctance to engage in “something that threatens their positioning as self-determined, empowered and free subjects” (p. 126).

I also argue that another way in which participants worked to position themselves as empowered and free subjects was through a rejection of the identity of feminist on the basis that they did not like “labelling” themselves. Four participants explicitly stated that they did not like labelling themselves; usually in response to my asking them whether they would call themselves a feminist and usually as a reason for not calling themselves a feminist. I argue that, as well as the generally negative associations that there are with the label feminist, this reluctance was in part a result of individualist discourses; the labelling that the participants did not want to engage in was specifically a labelling that would connect them to collective forms of organizing,
protest or critique. For example, when Naomi conveyed some reluctance to call herself a feminist and I asked her why she might or might not do so, she replied,

    Umm, I suppose I am. Like, I’m a woman and I’m proud to be a woman, and I think that women, you know… I like to surround myself with strong women, so I suppose, yeah I am. I just don’t like labelling myself as things.

Naomi seemed to have no reluctance to label herself, or another, “a woman”. But then the label of woman, although used in some very negative ways throughout history, does not carry with it any connotations of collective struggle or organizing. Pania, on the other hand, said,

    I stick up for things that I think are important, like, say in a Māori context, but I wouldn’t call myself an activist. Or, you know, I think it’s, you know, like, I’m passionate about the environment but I wouldn’t call myself a greenie. You know, I don’t really label myself, I, kind-of, just am what I am, and don’t feel the need to label the ways that I am.

Pania was clear that she would not claim the labels of activist, feminist or greenie, despite acting in ways that might be consistent with such labels. Instead, what was important to her was the ways that she, as an individual, chose to act and be. Within a social context where individualism is privileged, feminism may be associated with a recognition of female disadvantage (Budgeon, 2011) and therefore poses a challenge to the power of the individual to determine the course of their life. Arguably, a similar discourse exists with regards to the label of “Māori activist” that Pania invokes; it may be associated with recognition of Māori disadvantage and the effects of colonisation. However, in an environment saturated with neoliberal notions of the ability and responsibility of an individual to determine the course of their life, any positioning of the self as connected to a collective identity associated with ethnicity or race is to be downplayed or disowned. Thus, once again, feminism and feminist identification was disarticulated through neoliberal discourses of individualisation; “collective struggle becomes almost meaningless in [a] context where structural constraints are undone through individualisation and responsibilisation” (Scharff, 2012).

Unfortunately, my response to Pania was to say that “it sounds like it’s more about the action of – the doing of – it, rather than the labelling yourself as… whatever it might be [that’s important to you]”. In saying this, I separated out an individual’s actions
from the collective identity with which one might be connecting in “labelling” oneself and thus colluded with the individualized, depoliticized neoliberal discourses circulating in the room. However, this collusion is not surprising; it is not as though, because I am aware of these discourses and may critique them, I am not also subject to them. Nevertheless, it is disappointing that I supported them in this moment as I would have preferred to have asked Pania some more about the meaning of not labelling herself instead.

However, not all participants, in every moment, subscribed to these neoliberal discourses of unconstrained freedom, individualism, and personal choice. Some participants were aware of these ideas and explicitly named them as neoliberal; some participants emphasised personal choice as incredibly important but also acknowledged that these choices take place within a context – a context that is currently still rife with gendered power relations. Olivia, for example, spoke about how structural inequality is obscured by neoliberal discourses of individual choice. She noted in particular that the lack of pay equity between men and women in the workplace gets constructed as simply a result of an individual woman’s choice to have children and therefore need to take time off work, saying,

I guess ’cause women – if they have children – tend to take time out of the work-place, and get paid less as well…[text omitted]… it’s seen as common sense. And, umm, and also the way it’s also framed in the media is that we’re just selfish. And it’s in a whole, kind-of – I guess it’s neoliberalism. You know, choice, and things like that have become quite prominent, so… It’s, it’s a woman’s choice.

Joni also spoke in complex ways about the notion of individual choice, stating very strongly that feminism for her is “having choices in life. So, I think, when I think of feminism I would think of… someone who is in that position. So, ideally, you know, a woman who has the choices – who has the luxury of making choices”. However, as we can see in this comment, Joni was aware that having and making choices is a privileged position; it is a “luxury”. Furthermore, despite this strong focus on individual choice, Joni was aware that such choices are not unconstrained. As she said, “I think increasingly women are able to make more choices about different things, aspects of their lives, but we’re still limited when you look at structural ideas
of what it means to be a woman”. Joni articulated an understanding that any choices made by women are made within a context that shapes these choices; and this, for her, was a reason that feminism is relevant to young women in Aotearoa/NZ today. As she said later on,

as a… young woman… I think it’s [feminism is] relevant to me because I’m in the position where – either employment-wise or what I’m going to do in my life personally – umm, and although you want to make – although you think that – um, you’re able to make free choices, there are still, I guess, structural boundaries that are limiting you.

Although on the whole, Joni is still arguing in support of the notion of individual choice and freedom, she does recognise that these choices are constrained, despite the fact that we may think they are free choices. Thus, Joni articulated in these moments a clear need and support for feminism in Aotearoa/NZ. It is important to recognise that there were moments for some participants where they drew on alternative discourses to the normative discourse of individual freedom to choose, which offered them alternative positions in relation to feminism.

4.3 Summary
This chapter has outlined the concept of a disarticulation of feminism and then discussed the discourses implicated in the research participants’ disarticulations of feminism; these discourses include postfeminism, the notion that women in “other” countries are more in need of feminism than women in Aotearoa/NZ, neoliberal discourses of individualism and the notion that feminism is anti-men. In addition, I located the disarticulation of feminism through the notion that it is anti-men within a climate marked by heteronormativity. However, by highlighting the places where participants resisted these discourses in articulations and re-articulations of feminism, I also demonstrated how these several processes of disarticulation were not uniformly subscribed to by all participants in all moments.
Chapter Five – Conclusion

My definition of what a feminist is has changed over the course of this research. At the start, I thought that to be a feminist, the person had to engage in feminist activities; I wasn't necessarily always clear exactly what those activities were, but generally imagined them to be something more than what one did living life on a day to day basis, and frequently they involved protests and activism of some sort. Interestingly, by that definition, there were long periods of my life in which I was not a feminist. However, through the process of doing this research, my view has changed so that being a feminist is now, to me, not limited to activities or activism, but includes a feminist mind-set, philosophy or viewpoint. Because the way we go about our lives and the way we speak and relate with others is all influenced by our mind-set, point of view and philosophy on life; we live in a discursive world and “feminism is a socially constructed category” (Quinn & Radtke, 2006, p. 188). I now hold that a brief conversation with another about how the salary gap between men and women in Aotearoa/NZ is not right is as feminist as picketing in front of parliament demanding equal pay for equal work. However, I also firmly believe that the claiming of “feminist” as an identity is crucial; “being a feminist by virtue of the way one lives while resisting pro-claimed feminism (i.e. identifying oneself as a feminist) undermines a feminist critique of patriarchal society” (Quinn & Radtke, 2006, p. 196).

5.1 Introduction
In this chapter, I provide an overview of the key findings from my research into young women’s dis/identifications with feminism and dis/articulations of feminism. I then situate these findings in relation to two other pieces of research carried out in Britain and Germany. Following this, I highlight how seemingly contradictory processes of dis/identifications with feminism, and seemingly contradictory dis/articulations of feminism, in the participants’ talk work in concert to maintain gendered power relations. Finally, I discuss some implications of the disarticulations of feminism that occurred in the present research, identifying how we might critically engage with the discourses prevalent in the disarticulations.
5.2 Review

I began this thesis by situating my research within the broader landscape of the current literature on young women’s feminist dis/identifications and contextualising the research within the current postfeminist, neoliberal, largely heteronormative climate. In chapter three I explored how the young women in my research drew on two interpretive repertoires to construct feminists as both radical extremists and also liberals who “just” want equality between men and women; these interpretive repertoires mediated the research participants’ identifications with the label of feminist. I outlined how axes of difference and privilege in terms of class and ethnicity mediated the participants’ identifications with feminism, but not necessarily in a causal fashion. I also noted that some participants did identify as feminists and did engage in feminist activities – frequently online – which supports Schuster’s (2013) findings. In chapter four I outlined McRobbie’s (2009) concept of a disarticulation of feminism and explored how participants dis/articulated feminism through the notion that it is anti-men, through neoliberal discourses of individualism and through discourses of the “other”. However, by highlighting the places where participants resisted these discourses in articulations and re-articulations of feminism, I also demonstrated how these processes of disarticulation were not uniformly subscribed to by all participants in all moments. Coming back to the landscape of literature outlined in chapter one that my research is situated within, I wish to highlight in particular the similarities in findings between my research and that done by Edley and Wetherell (2001) as well as Scharff (2012).

Edley and Wetherell’s (2001) research was done with two groups of men in Britain – 17 and 18 year old, white, middle-class school boys, and 20 – 64 year old men from more diverse sociocultural backgrounds, who were all in their first year at The Open University. They interviewed the boys and men on multiple occasions as part of a larger research project on masculinity, which covered a range of topics. One of these topics was a discussion of feminism and social change, in which the researchers began with one of the following questions: “What is a feminist (or feminism)? What do you think of feminism? What do feminists want?” (Edley & Wetherell, 2001, p. 199). Scharff’s (2009, 2012) research was quite different from Edley and Wetherell’s
She interviewed 40 women from a variety of sociocultural and economic backgrounds, aged between 18 and 35, in Germany and Britain, about young women’s relationship to the women’s movement in Germany and Britain, and in particular about their dis-identification with feminism (Scharff, 2009).

In contrast, the current research recruited women aged between 18 and 30, with varied ethnicities, sexual orientations, and educational backgrounds to talk about their lives, feminism and postfeminism; the research also took place in Aotearoa/NZ. As stated earlier, when recruiting participants, I explicitly stated that I was looking for a range of views, not solely people who identified as feminists; however, judging by the comments that were included in the email enquiries I received in response to the recruitment text, the majority of people wishing to participate either identified with feminism in some way or had a strong interest in talking about it. Thus the participants in the current research were, at the outset, positioned differently in relation to feminism to the participants in Scharff’s (2009) research and Edley and Wetherell’s (2001) research. It seems significant then that the same interpretive repertoires about feminism have been identified in these three pieces of research spanning countries, genders, ethnicities, ages, positionings in relation to feminism, and years; Edley and Wetherell’s (2001) research was conducted in 1992 and 1993, Scharff’s (2009) in 2006 and early 2007, and my own research in 2012. Arguably these interpretive repertoires are very powerful; if interpretive repertoires are “books on the shelves of a public library, permanently available for borrowing” (Edley & Wetherell, 2001, p. 198), holding entire stories, then the books about feminism at the moment appear to be similar, if not the same, across continents and through decades. Furthermore, similar to the findings in the current research, Scharff (2009) also found in her research that young women in Britain and Germany disarticulated feminism through neoliberal discourses of individualisation and the othering of “Muslim women” and that her participants’ constructions of “the feminist” were mediated by heteronormativity.

Understanding the cultural climate of postfeminism and neoliberalism, within which young women are negotiating identifications with and articulations of feminism, helps us to understand what enables young women to resist or take up a feminist identity in any given moment. There has been no discourse analytic research carried out in
Aotearoa/NZ that specifically focuses on young women’s identifications with feminism; this research addresses this gap and clearly links young women’s identifications with feminism, as well as the cultural climate within which these identifications take place, with research on constructions and negotiations of feminism in Britain and Germany (Edley & Wetherell, 2001; Scharff, 2012).

5.3 Contradictory Dis/identifications and Dis/articulations: The Maintenance of Gendered Power Relations

The two interpretive repertoires on feminism – one, the radical-extreme feminism repertoire, and the other, liberal-equality, but located in the past, repertoire – were not mutually exclusive for participants in the current research. That is, rather than simply subscribing to one construction or the other, most participants engaged momentarily with both repertoires at different points over the course of their interview. And, at some points, certain participants engaged with neither. Participants’ identifications with feminism were rarely straight-forward and, in fact, could often be thought of as contradictory. For example, whilst about half of the participants drew upon the liberal-equality interpretive repertoire of feminism as “of the past” at one point in their interview, at other points in the same interviews, they constructed feminism as relevant to their lives today. These partial, shifting, possibly contradictory identifications fit with a discursive psychology understanding of identities as “more fleeting, incoherent and fragmented than many of us would have believed” (Edley & Wetherell, 2001, p. 195). Furthermore, however, “varying accounts can be thought of as the residue of the social practices through which people organize their lives” (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p. 122). In other words, analysing the varying and seemingly contradictory accounts that participants engaged in sheds light on the way in which power is mobilised around feminism in the social practices of participants’ daily lives. In particular, I argue that the ways in which the participants drew upon these seemingly contradictory repertoires makes sense within a postfeminist, neoliberal cultural climate.

As outlined in the literature review in chapter one, the definition of postfeminism that I have mobilised in this research refers to a cultural climate characterised by a “double entanglement” (Butler, as cited in McRobbie, 2009, p. 12) wherein feminism has achieved a “common sense” status, whilst being simultaneously fiercely repudiated.
There is a dual process by which feminism is both taken into account and at the same time undone, and it is the entanglement of these ideas that marks contemporary culture as postfeminist rather than anti-feminist. Rather than viewing the two interpretive repertoires on feminism identified in the participants’ talk as simply independent of, and/or oppositional to, each other, the ways in which they work together contributes to producing a postfeminist cultural climate. “It is not simply a matter of…different discourses that ‘happen’ to be in conflict, but of the contradictions doing ideological work” (Gill, 2009, p. 362). One theme that appeared across the interviews that highlights this notion was the way that the majority of the participants argued that men can be feminists. I directly asked nine of the participants if they thought that men could be feminists; the other five participants I did not ask either because I felt they had already implied or stated their thoughts on the subject, or because the question did not fit into the flow of that particular interview. Of the nine I asked, all of them said yes, emphatically. Of the five that I did not ask, three of them implied that they believed it was possible for men to be feminists; for example, by talking about their feminist male friends or about how feminism was relevant to their boyfriend. Despite the obvious support for this idea, the statement that men can be feminists seems to be completely at odds with the notion that feminism is anti-men; for if feminism is anti-men, then why would men be feminists? But, as Edley and Wetherell (2001) have argued, “the ideological thrust of discourse (in maintaining oppressive power relations) depends precisely on contradiction, dilemma and complex multi-faceted positionings of self and other which can be mobilized in multiple rhetorical directions with varying consequences for social relations” (p. 441). So, although there were times when the majority of interviewees drew on a construction of feminism as anti-men (positioned within the radical-extreme feminism interpretive repertoire), at other times those same interviewees constructed some men as feminists (generally, but not always, positioned within the liberal-equality feminism interpretive repertoire); I argue that it is through precisely this type of contradiction and the multi-faceted positionings of themselves and others that these discourses on feminism work to maintain existing gendered power relations. As Hall (2011) has argued, “ideology works best by suturing together contradictory lines of argument and emotional investments – finding what Laclau called ‘systems of equivalence’ between them. Contradiction is its metier” (p. 713).
Somewhat similar contradictory processes can also be seen when we consider the dis/articulations that participants engaged in. That is, for example, at some points participants constructed women elsewhere in the world as more in need of feminism, thereby disarticulating a need for feminism in Aotearoa/NZ, but at other points, participants articulated a clear need for feminism in Aotearoa/NZ. The participants’ disarticulations of feminism are particularly notable in light of participants’ seemingly positive views on feminism in choosing to participate in the research. Participants’ positions in relation to feminism shifted through a range of different positions over the course of their interviews, highlighting how feminism is a “culturally available discourse upon which people draw strategically on specific occasions and feminist identity [is a] subject position that is necessarily contingent and unstable” (Quinn & Radtke, 2006, p. 188). It is significant that participants did not completely disavow or repudiate feminism; each participant at one point or more articulated support of feminism, a need for feminism, and/or an identification with feminism, however fleeting. It is significant because it provides points at which these disarticulations can be critically engaged with and challenged.

5.4 Critical Engagements with Disarticulations of Feminism

What I offer here are some opening thoughts on potential critical engagements with the disarticulations of feminism that I identified in the interviewees’ accounts, in the hopes that such engagements might open up fissures for articulating and re-articulating feminisms.

5.4.1 The Disarticulation of Feminism as Anti-Men

One of the notions that this disarticulation obscures is the understanding that patriarchy, with its associated misogyny and sexism, is problematic for everyone; as noted by one of the research participants, Talia, patriarchy hurts women and men (and others who identify as neither “woman” nor “man”). It is patriarchy that constructs and perpetuates dominant ideas of masculinity and manhood such as “men don’t cry”, “men are the breadwinners”, “men are not vulnerable or fearful”, “men don’t refuse sex”, “men don’t seek help” (Botha, 2011). Furthermore, men also do not benefit from dominant patriarchal ideas about women such as “women do not make good leaders” or “women’s sexuality is passive”. Whilst patriarchal social structures and relationships favour men (Gough & McFadden, 2001) – and the burden of patriarchy
is certainly carried differently by women – men still do not reap solely benefits from patriarchy.

One of the implications of this understanding is that it is patriarchy as a social system, not “men” (or “women”), that needs to be targeted as the object of our analyses, outrage and refusals. I see this distinction as critical to deconstructing the notion that feminism is anti-men. This distinction and understanding should also help to dismantle the insidious individualism of neoliberalism that so easily and rampantly side-tracks us into “technologies of self-regulation in which subjects come to understand themselves as responsible for their own regulation [and subjugation], as ‘free’ and individual agents in the management of themselves as autonomous beings” (Ringrose & Walkerdine, 2008, p. 229). A second implication is the need to (continue to) critically review and destabilise heteronormativity; specifically, the common sense links between notions of the “two sexes”, and gender and sexuality, because heteronormativity and patriarchy are both complicit in constructing and maintaining traditional gender relations: “regulation of gender has always been part of the work of heterosexist normativity” (Butler, as cited in Jackson, 2006, p. 107).

5.4.2 The Disarticulation of Feminism through Discourses of the “Other”

I find this form of disarticulation the most concerning, mainly because it seems to be to enable a “double” disarticulation of feminism. That is, it disarticulates feminism here and now in Aotearoa/NZ, by constructing it as more relevant elsewhere in the world, whilst simultaneously disarticulating any sense of community, connectedness or commonality between women “here” and women “there” – a connectedness that might constitute feminisms of transnational solidarity. In contrast to the two interpretive repertoires on feminism, and the disarticulation of feminism as somehow anti-men, this disarticulation of feminism through discourses which construct “other” women as more in need of feminism appears to be relatively new, or to have a new intensity; it is critical to understand this disarticulation as a possibility and a product of contemporary transnational conditions (Grewal, 2003), post-9/11 in the US and the initiation of the (continuing) Western “war(s) on terror”. In particular, the “Bush Administration’s identification of the ‘liberation’ of Afghan women as a key objective in its invasion and occupation of Afghanistan [which] brought gender to the forefront of global politics” (Thobani, 2007, p. 170) and simultaneously positioned Islam as
opposite to the West, and fundamentalism as opposite to feminism (Abu-Lughod, 2002). There are a multitude of gendered, racialised, classed, economic, political and transnational power relations at play here.

As I noted earlier, this process of disarticulation relies upon a dichotomy of liberated-West/essentialised-rest that works to position women in the non-Western, non-“developed” world as victims – both of their cultures and of patriarchy. This dichotomy positions those of us in the Western world as somehow capable of, and responsible for, “saving” them. This is an incredibly problematic construction which relies on a notion of Western superiority. This presumed superiority can be seen more clearly if we use the same rhetoric with women of cultures other than the dominant Western (European/Pākehā) culture in Aotearoa/NZ. To speak of needing to save Samoan women or Māori women from their culture is abhorrent. This construction throws into sharp relief the relations of power being mobilised in these constructions and disarticulations; they are exceptionally arrogant.

How do we critically engage with this disarticulation? It raises the question of how we deal with difference – with “the other”. According to Abu-Lughod (2002), traditionally, in the Western (frequently, though not always, academic) world, the response to difference has frequently, but not always, been one of two positions: either racist ethnocentrism or a laissez-faire cultural relativism which argues that our role is not to interfere in another’s culture. However, “the problem is that it is too late not to interfere. The forms of lives we find around the world are already products of long histories of interactions [with the Imperial West]” (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 786). As such, Abu-Lughod (2002) advocates an approach that is grounded in a fundamental respect for difference as well as a responsibility towards making the world a more just place. Such an approach recognises a goal of justice for women whilst also challenging us to recognise “that there might be different ideas about justice and that different women might want or choose different futures from what we envision as best…we must consider that they might be called to personhood, so to speak, in a different language” (Abu-Lughod, 2002, p. 787). That is,

the liberatory goals of feminism should be rethought in light of the fact that the desire for freedom and liberation is a historically situated desire whose motivational force cannot be assumed a priori, but needs to be reconsidered in
light of other desires, aspirations and capacities that inhere in a culturally and historically located subject (Mahmood, 2001, p. 223).

5.4.3 The Disarticulation of Feminism through Neoliberal Discourses of Individualism

The disarticulation of feminism through discourses of the “other” is closely related to the disarticulation that occurs through the process of othering, for, if neoliberal governmentality emerges in sites where freedom marks the modern individual whose practices of making choices constitute modes of regulation, such an individual can only emerge in dynamic relation to a site of unfreedom in which the loss of ‘choice’ and the loss of ‘freedom’ is always a threat and thus acts as another mode of regulation (Grewal, 2003, p. 536).

Butler (1995, as cited in Liebert, Leve, & Hui, 2011) has argued that this reified modern individual, with its associated “freedom”, is “simply” an instrument of Western imperialist hegemony; one that fetishizes a radical disconnection between one’s self and one’s context” (p. 699). Indeed, one of the most damaging and insidious effects of this reification of the freedom of the individual is the way that it obscures the interconnectedness of life; we all exist in relationship – relationship with other humans, with the planet, with animals, etc. Furthermore, “agency is only possible in relation with others…agency [is] something that exists between people rather than within the individual” (Burr, 2003, p. 134). We are all, always already, located and constituted within a context of relationships and power relations. Importantly, for Butler (as cited in Liebert et al., 2011), recognising this relational constitution is a “precondition of politically engaged critique’...As such, we should be asking not so much how to be ‘free’ from any oppressive relations and structures, but how to mobilize this position of “being within” (Liebert et al., 2011, p. 699) to engage in critique, subversion, activism and re-visioning. I argue that a key manner in which such subversion and activism could occur is through articulations of interconnectedness with others, from others in our daily lives through to others half a world away that we may never meet face to face. One of the ways in which these articulations could be mobilised is through seeking guidance from “others”; from non-imperial, decolonising feminisms that come from a non-individualist worldview.
It is also very important to highlight that a range of the young women who participated in the current research did engage with feminism and feminist activities in their daily lives. One implication of this finding, which is also relevant to troubling neoliberal notions of individualism, is that connecting with others, in both online and “real life” situations, discussions, and engagements around feminism, is vitally important.

Lastly, the very act of claiming the word and the identity of feminist works to destabilise individualist discourses by positioning oneself in relationship to a “collective” movement of others. It is critical that, rather than becoming complicit with the discourses that disarticulate feminism by trying to use another term (such as “humanist”), we claim, and support others to claim, the label “feminist”. “Language is a place where identities are built, maintained or challenged; it is a space for transformation” (Varga-Dobai, 2012, p. 6).

5.5 Summary
This research is the first piece of discourse analytic research to explore young women’s relationship and identifications with feminism in Aotearoa/NZ. The two interpretive repertoires on feminism that were drawn upon by participants work in conjunction with each other to maintain unequal gendered relations of power, but also these repertoires did not stop all participants from identifying with feminism at one point or another. Furthermore, whilst many participants engaged in processes of disarticulating feminism at points, they also articulated feminism and a need for feminism at other points. This contradiction indicates that there are possibilities and fissures that we can utilise to critically engage with notions that feminism is anti-men, more relevant to “other” women, or not relevant to the individual under neoliberalism.
References


Traister, R. (2012, June 21). Can modern women "have it all"? SALON. Retrieved from http://www.salon.com/2012/06/21/can_modern_women_have_it_all/


Appendices

Appendix A – Interview Schedule

1) So tell me what you’re doing in your life right now?
   - What’s important in your life right now?
   - What are you focussing on in your life right now?
   - What are the ‘life’ decisions you are making at the moment?
   - Are these similar or different to the choices and decisions young men your age are making?

2) And where are you headed in your life; what does the future hold for you?
   - What are the choices you are facing in terms of your future and where you are headed?
   - What are the decisions you expect to be making about your life – study/work/relationships/whanau/living situation/etc – in the next 5 years?
   - Comparisons with friends (male and female)?

3) What does the word ‘feminism’ mean to you?
   - When you hear the word ‘feminism’ what comes to mind?
   - What do you see, think or feel when you hear the word feminism?
   - Where do these ideas come from (books, TV, film, friends, family, studies, etc)?
   - Are feminisms of today different from feminisms of the past?
   - Is feminism more relevant to countries other than NZ?

4) Is feminism relevant to you?
   - How come it is/is it not?
     - In what ways is it/ isn’t it?
   - Do you feel included in feminism?
     - How come you do/don’t?
   - Are you a feminist/do you call yourself a feminist?
   - Is feminism something you talk about with others?
- Friends?
- Partners/girlfriends/boyfriends/?
- Family members?
- Other students?
  - Is feminism compatible with your relationships with friends, boyfriends, girlfriends, partners?

5) Have you heard of postfeminism?
   - Where?
   - What do you make of that?

6) Is this idea of postfeminism relevant to you?
   - How?
   - Relevant in your relationships?

7) Lastly, I’m trying to create a list of TV shows, movies and characters that young women relate to so I’m asking everyone to tell me a couple of shows or characters.
   - And briefly, how come?

Demographic Questions:
In addition to the details gathered earlier on ethnicity, age and sexuality, the responses to these questions will help to provide some context for your answers to the interview questions.

What is your current occupational status?

What is your highest qualification?

*(In at least 1 subject)*

5th form/NCEA level 1* □
6th form/NCEA level 2* □
7th form/NCEA level 3* □
Tertiary Certificate or Diploma □
Bachelor’s Degree □
Postgraduate Certificate or
Diploma
Master’s Degree
Doctorate
Other

If other, please detail here: ..............................................
Appendix B - Facebook and Email Recruitment Text

Research Project: Young women’s talk about their lives, feminism and postfeminism

What's it like to be a young woman today?

Are you between 18 and 30 and willing to talk to me about your experiences?

Kia ora, mālō e lelei, talofa, namastē, nǐ hǎo and hello,

I am interested in interviewing 14 young women about their lives – their experiences in today’s world and the choices available to them. I am also interested in the TV shows and characters that they relate to. I am looking for a broad range of views from a broad range of women, not specifically women who identify as ‘feminist’.

I am especially looking for participants of diverse backgrounds in terms of ethnicity and sexuality.

My name is Laura Ashton and I'm carrying out this research as part of my Masters in Social Practice through Unitec, New Zealand.

If you'd like some more information, e-mail me at lj.ashton.research@gmail.com. I'll send you an information sheet and a list of the screening questions I'm using to help me select participants.
You will need to be comfortable speaking in English to take part in the research.

And even if you don't want to participate, please forward this on to anyone you think may be interested. Thanks!

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 27th of February 2012 to the 27th of February 2013. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome. Ethics Committee Registration Number: 2012 – 1005
Appendix C – Participant Information Sheet

Research Project: Young women’s talk about their lives, feminism and postfeminism

Information for participants

Kia ora, mālō e lelei, talofa, namastē, nǐ hǎo and hello,

My name is Laura Ashton. I am currently enrolled in the Masters of Social Practice programme at Unitec, New Zealand. I am inviting you to be a participant in my thesis project.

The project

I am interested in interviewing 14 young women about their lives – their experiences in today’s world and the choices available to them. I am also interested in the TV shows and characters that they relate to. I am looking for a broad range of views from a broad range of women, not specifically women who identify as ‘feminist’.

I particularly want to have participants of diverse backgrounds in terms of ethnicity and sexuality.

I anticipate the interviews running for between one and a half and two hours each. I will be recording the interviews and will then analyse the written transcriptions of the interviews. I also want to analyse a TV show as part of the research, hopefully one that is mentioned by the research participants.

If I want to, can I definitely take part in an interview?

I am seeking to have diversity, in terms of ethnicity and sexuality, in the group of young women I interview. I am recruiting a group of potential participants between the 1st of April and the 16th of May. I will be asking these potential participants to identify their ethnicity, sexuality and age. Following the 16th of May, I will then decide who to interview based upon having as diverse a group of participants as possible. This means that I may not be able to interview everyone who wants to participate. However, if you are not selected in the first instance, you will be placed on a waiting list in the event that another participant cancels.

Participants will need to be comfortable speaking in English to answer the interview questions. As I am also based in Auckland, participants will need to be within comfortable travelling distance of Auckland. Interviews will be at a time and place that is convenient to you, for example, at your home, your workplace, Unitec or my workplace. Interviews will need to be held in a place with a reasonable level of quiet for my recording device.
Taking part in the research

Taking part in this study is completely your choice, and there are no adverse consequences if you choose not to take part. If you agree to participate and are selected to participate, you will be asked to sign a consent form. This does not stop you from changing your mind if you wish to withdraw from the project. However, because of my schedule, any withdrawals must be done within 10 days after I have sent you the transcript from your interview. You may also decline to answer any interview question that you are asked.

Your name and any information that may identify you will be kept completely confidential. The consent form and your demographic details will be stored separately from any other information. All information collected from you will be stored in a password protected file or a locked filing cabinet, and only you, I and my two supervisors will have access to this information. All information will be destroyed after six years.

If time restrictions require it, I may need to have a research assistant transcribe the audiotapes of the interviews into written form. If this happens, the research assistant will sign a confidentiality agreement.

What will happen to the research?

This research will be published as my Master’s thesis, and I anticipate writing journal articles and conference papers as a result of the research. I will also offer you a copy of the thesis. All articles, reports, books or talks that arise from the research are likely to use quotes from some of the people who have been interviewed. I will use pseudonyms for all participants and any details that may potentially identify you would be altered to protect your anonymity. Short anonymous extracts may also been seen by others in my tutorial group when I present on my research. At all times your anonymity will be preserved.

I think I would like to participate: what do I do now?

The next step is to read the ‘information on the screening questions’ document and then complete the screening questions and send them to me. However, I am also happy to answer any questions you may have about the project before you decide whether you want to participate. You can reach me via e-mail at lj.ashton.research@gmail.com. If you would prefer to talk over the phone, that’s completely fine; please send me an e-mail to arrange a time to do so.
Concerns
At any time if you have any concerns about the research project you can contact my supervisor: My supervisor is Dr Helen Gremillion, phone 09 815 4321 ext. 5137 or email hgremillion@unitec.ac.nz

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Appendix D – Screening Questions

Research Project: Young women’s talk about their lives, feminism and postfeminism

Information on screening questions for possible participants
As noted in the information sheet, I am seeking to have some diversity, in terms of ethnicity and sexuality, in the group of people I interview. Therefore, I need to gather some demographic information from potential participants prior to the 16th of May 2012. The screening questions on the attached page cover the information I need to gather. Following the 16th of May, I will then decide who to interview based upon having as diverse a group of participants as possible. This means that although you may really want to participate, and you complete these screening questions, I may not be able to interview you. However, if you are not selected in the first instance, you will be placed on a waiting list in the event that another participant cancels.
It is important that you understand that you are not consenting to participate in the research by completing these questions. There is a separate consent form that I will send to selected participants after the 16th of May.

All completed screening forms will be kept completely confidential in a password protected file. All completed screening forms for potential participants who are not selected for interviews will be kept until the 14 interviews have been conducted. Screening forms for potential participants who are not interviewed will then be destroyed. Screening forms for research participants who are interviewed will be kept with consent forms in a password protected file or a locked filing cabinet. Only you, I and my two supervisors will have access to this information. All information will be destroyed after six years.

Concerns At any time if you have any concerns about the research project you can contact my supervisor:
My supervisor is Dr Helen Gremillion, phone 09 815 4321 ext. 5137 or email hgremillion@unitec.ac.nz
UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2012 - 1005

This study has been approved by the UNITEC Research Ethics Committee from 27th of February 2012 to the 27th of February 2013. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Please see the attached document for screening questions.

Screening questions for possible participants

Name:
E-mail address:
Preferred pseudonym if selected to participate:

Screening Questions

1. What is your age?

...........................................................

2. Which ethnic group(s) do you identify with? (tick as many as apply)

Pākehā/NZ European ☐
Māori ☐
Tongan ☐
Samoan ☐
Chinese ☐
Indian ☐
Korean ☐
Other ☐

If other, please provide details here:
3. How do you identify your sexuality or sexual orientation?

Thank you for completing these screening questions. Please e-mail the completed questions to me at lj.ashton.research@gmail.com

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Appendix E – Participant Descriptions

Age and sexuality as at time of responding to the recruitment call; other details as at time of interview:

**Elspeth**
Elspeth was a 24 year old Pākehā/NZ European and was the only participant who lived outside of Auckland; she lived in another New Zealand city. Elspeth identified her sexuality as heterosexual; she was not currently in a relationship. She was studying full-time in her first year of university, working part-time and caring for her five year old daughter as a single parent. After finishing her degree, she hoped to move to Melbourne with her daughter for a few years before moving to Europe or the U.K. to live.

**Charlie**
Charlie was 30 and identified as Pākehā/NZ European and bisexual. She lived with her husband and their two sons, one of whom was five weeks old at the time of the interview. Charlie left New Zealand at the end of high school and travelled fairly extensively. She identified herself as a feminist and is active in online feminist communities. She was in the first few weeks of parental leave from her fulltime events role at the time of the interview and anticipated returning to her job within four months. She was also studying part-time in an area related to her work, but had put that on hold temporarily to have her second son.

**Elizabeth**
Elizabeth identified as Samoan, Māori and Irish and was pregnant with her second child at the time of the interview. She was working almost fulltime at a bank and enjoyed her work. She was 24 and living with her long-term male partner and their four year old son at the time of the interview. Elizabeth identified her sexuality as straight, but bi-curious. She left high school at the end of her second to last year to begin working. Elizabeth had hopes of going into tertiary study in the future because she wanted to become a teacher. She thought that she and her partner would get married at some point, but were in no rush to do so.
Jay
Jay was a 22 year old Pākehā/NZ European who was in her first year of a degree in the “helping professions”. She left high school in her second to last year, completed some tertiary level training and worked in a variety of roles, before deciding to go back to study. Jay identified as lesbian and was in a long-term, committed relationship with her partner, who was supporting her to study fulltime. Jay saw both of her grandmothers as strong, independent women, and they came to mind when discussing feminism in the interview.

Joni
Joni was an 18 year old Japanese woman, studying in her first year at University after leaving school at the end of year 12 with a Cambridge qualification. She was studying a conjoint Arts and Commerce degree full-time, whilst also working part-time and volunteering as an intern in the media industry. She lived at home with her mother and sisters, but hoped to move out in her final year of study. After that, she hoped to work full-time to save so that she could move to Melbourne. She identified her sexuality as “one on the Kinsey scale” or as having “pansexuality”. She did not want to get married and did not really want to have children, although said “it may happen”.

Lee
Lee was a 29 year old who identified as straight. She had a conjoint Bachelor’s degree and worked fulltime in a field related to her study. She was in a long-term, committed relationship and could see herself getting married in the foreseeable future, if at all. She identified as Rarotongan, English and Irish and hoped to eventually live in New York. Lee vehemently does not want to have children. She identified as a feminist to herself, but rarely if ever identified as such openly.

Maria
Maria was a 25 year old Samoan woman who identified her sexuality as straight. She left high school in her second to last year and became pregnant not too long thereafter. Her daughter was 5 years old at the time of the interview. Maria had worked in a variety of corporate roles since leaving high school, but eventually left each one because she became bored. At the time of the interview, however, she was working in a part-time role in a non-government organisation (NGO) for the first time. The NGO provided social services and she
found the work very engaging. Maria lived in a rented house with her male partner and wanted to have another child soon, so that her daughter would have a sibling.

Marina
Marina was a 25 year old woman who immigrated to New Zealand with her parents from an Eastern European country when she was a child. She was an only child. She had completed a conjoint degree and was working in a field related to her studies. She planned to find a position in a professional services firm within the next 6 to 12 months. She was in a committed long-term heterosexual relationship and planned to move out of her parents’ home and into a shared home with her partner shortly.

Naomi
Naomi was a 30 year old Pākehā/NZ European who worked fulltime in a specialist Human Resources area. She completed her second to last year at high school before leaving and going into fulltime work. She identified her sexuality as straight/bi-sexual and was newly single at the time of the interview. She planned to move into more generalist Human Resources roles in the future and, while she would like to get married and have children, said she was also content with the way her life was at the time of the interview.

Pania
Pania is a 27 year old Māori woman who identified as heterosexual. She was working full-time in a media role, but has previously completed a Bachelor of Science at University and worked in the field for some years after finishing her degree. She was in a committed, stable heterosexual relationship and wanted to get married, have children and move out of Auckland to a smaller town closer to her extended family in the not too distant future.

Olivia
Olivia was a 24 year old Pākehā/NZ European woman with a Master’s degree, in the process of completing a Graduate Diploma in Teaching and working part-time teaching English. She identified as heterosexual and was in a long term relationship; they were both currently living with Olivia’s parents as flatting was too expensive. Whilst Olivia definitely did not want to get married, she and partner could see themselves having a civil union. She hoped to teach in a secondary school before leaving Aotearoa to live in another country for a few years and travel Europe and Asia.
Sarah
Sarah was a softly spoken 23 year old who identified as heterosexual. She grew up in a large family of 14 and moved to Auckland at the beginning of 2012 to begin a degree at a local Polytechnic. In the future, she hoped to work helping people in one way or another, perhaps working with young women. She was studying fulltime and flatting in Auckland; she spent her free time attending church or socialising with her friends. Sarah identified as Pākehā/NZ European.

Salma
Salma was a 25 year old Fijian-Indian, who was studying whilst also working in a hair and make-up professional role. She identified as straight and, whilst she wanted to get married at some point in the future, wanted to focus on her career for the foreseeable future. She hoped to move to New York not long after finishing her studies, which would be a significant change because she had not lived outside of her family home before. Salma and her father share a concern for the rights of women in India.

Talia
Talia was a 23 year old who identified as bisexual. She worked fulltime in an environmental education role after completing her Bachelor’s degree in Development Studies and Education. She was considering going back to do further tertiary study, possibly in a creative field, but also wanted to continue her work in sustainable living. She lived in a large flat with her male partner, with whom she could see herself having children in the not too distant future. Talia identified as Pākehā/NZ European.
Appendix F – Participant Consent Form

Participant Consent Form

Research Project Title: Young women’s talk about their lives, feminism and postfeminism.

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understand the information sheet given to me. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and had them answered.

I understand that I don’t have to be part of this if I don’t want to and I may withdraw at any time prior to 10 days after I have received a copy of the transcription of my interview. I am between the ages of 18 and 30.

I understand that everything I say is confidential and none of the information I give will identify me. I understand that the only persons who will know what I have said will be the researcher and her supervisors, and, if one is required, the research assistant. I also understand that all the information that I give will be stored securely on a password protected file or locked filing cabinet for a period of 6 years.

I understand that my discussion with the researcher will be taped and transcribed.

I understand that I can see the finished research document.

If I have any concerns I can contact the researcher on lj.ashton.research@gmail.com or 0274884849, or her principal supervisor Dr Helen Gremillion (Unitec New Zealand) on 09 815 4321 ext. 5137 or email hgremillion@unitec.ac.nz

I have had time to consider everything and I give my consent to be a part of this project.

Participant Signature: ........................................ Date: ........................................

Participant Name: ........................................

Researcher Signature: ........................................ Date: ........................................
UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2012 - 1005

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UREC Secretary (ph: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in
confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.
Appendix G – Research Assistant Confidentiality Form

Research Title: Young women’s talk about their lives, feminism and postfeminism.

Researcher/s Name:

Address:

Phone number:

Email:

I _______________________________ (full name - please print) agree to treat in absolute confidence all information that I become aware of in the course of transcribing the interviews or other material connected with the above researcher topic. I agree to respect the privacy of the individuals mentioned in the interviews that I am transcribing. I will not pass on in any form information regarding those interviews to any person or institution. On completion of transcription I will not retain or copy any information involving the above project.

I am aware that I can be held legally liable for any breach of this confidentiality agreement, and for any harm incurred by individuals if we disclose identifiable information contained in the audiotapes and/or files to which we will have access.

Signature: ….................................................................

Date: .........................................................

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2012 - 1005

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